The Centenary on Screen:
Representations of the Great War on
the BBC

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Contents

Abbreviations

AHRC – Arts and Humanities Research Council

BARB – Broadcasters' Audience Research Board

BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation

CWGC – Commonwealth War Graves Commission

DCM – Distinguished Conduct Medal

DCMS – Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

EU – European Union

FWWCBTP – First World War Centenary Battlefield Tours Programme

Introduction

Over the course of the last few decades, historians have become increasingly concerned with the concept of the 'memory' of the Great War. Indeed, as observed by Dan Todman, 'it can seem that historians of war are now more likely to write about how conflicts were remembered than how they were decided'.[1] These studies have primarily considered contemporary manifestations of remembrance, such as war memorials, sculpture and cemeteries. There is a clear need for further examination of more recent manifestations, including electronic media such as television programmes, as they contribute to the building blocks with which cultural memory is constructed.[2] This dissertation seeks to partially redress the lacuna of modern commemoration, by analysing the televisual commemoration of the Great War on the BBC during the centenary. In addition to considering modern representations of cultural memory, this will also involve the fusion of the (usually) isolated academic fields of media history, cultural history and memory studies. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) is the oldest broadcaster in the United Kingdom. As the sole national broadcaster and 'voice of the nation',[3] it has consistently upheld the observance of anniversaries of the war, through a variety of media. Television itself has been recognised as 'an ideal facilitator of cultural memory'.[4] The use of this mass media, and the 'memory' that was conveyed through it, is the focal point for this dissertation.

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[1] Dan Todman, 'The Ninetieth Anniversary of the Battle of the Somme', in Michael Keren and Holger H. Herwig (eds.), *War Memory and Popular Culture* (London, 2009), p. 24.

[2] Dan Todman, 'The Reception of *The Great War* in the 1960s', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 22, 1 (2002), p. 35.

[3] Maggie Andrews, 'Commemorating the First World War in Britain: A Cultural Legacy of Media Remembrance', *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 12, 3 (2019), p. 304.

[4] Steve Anderson, 'History TV and Popular Memory', in Gary R. Edgerton and Peter C. Rollins (eds.), *Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age* (Kentucky, 2001), p. 21.

The examination is broken down across thematic chapters, which echo predominant themes in historiography on cultural memory. The first considers the emotional impetus behind cultural memory, and how it played a leading role in multiple theatres of remembrance, from well-rehearsed narratives of suffering to the emotionally-charged soil of the Western Front itself. The second reveals that political interpretations of the war itself were largely avoided, yet political tensions around the European Referendum occasionally injected a jarring incongruity into reconciliatory efforts. The last addresses the underlying narratives, which effectively utilised modern technology and production techniques, but ultimately gave the impression of a familiar story told in a different way. This is reflective of the BBC's centenary – whilst it arguably had an impact on the public, new narratives were disappointingly absent (with some noted exceptions). The conclusion reflects on this, and offers some cautious speculation into the repercussions and considerations for its successor – the centenary of the Second World War. Overall, it will show that whilst efforts were made to broaden the scope of commemoration, and to offer new representations, familiar tropes and themes were preserved. The remainder of this introduction will place the BBC's centenary in its contemporary context, outline its historical development in regards to war and commemoration, and consider the theoretical implications of memory alongside a review of the extant relevant literature.

The Centenary in Context

On 11 October 2012, the then Prime Minister David Cameron announced the government's plans for the Great War centenary: a £50 million financial commitment to 'build an enduring cultural

and educational legacy'.[5] It is of note that Cameron extolled the need to produce a legacy, rather than to expand on the one which had been in place for the preceding century. The cultural legacy of the conflict has been consistently reaffirmed during the intervening years;[6] from the reverent symbolism of the poppy and its annual appearance around Remembrance Sunday, through various representations in products, plays and television programmes up to the present day. Furthermore, Cameron's emphasis was also on remembrance, which immediately put him at odds with some historians, who saw the centenary as an opportunity to challenge notions and myths which have become entrenched in cultural memory.[7]

A year after Cameron's speech, the BBC announced their own commemorative intentions with an emphasis on education and new perspectives. It was presented by Director-General Tony Hall 'as a chance for us all to learn something new about a war we think we know so well'.[8] The BBC, as with broadcasting in general, had the significant opportunity to place the work of historians in the public eye to a greater extent than might otherwise have been achieved. Indeed, it has a history of doing so, such as with *The Great War* (1964) aired during the fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of the war, a legacy which (as noted later) played its own part in the production of the BBC's schedule.

Other initiatives within the centenary also had a focus on public engagement. Much of

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[5] *Speech at Imperial War Museum on First World War Centenary Plans*, Gov.uk, https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/speech-at-imperial-war-museum-on-first-world-war-centenary-plans [accessed 16 July 2019].

[6] 'Cultural legacy' here is intended to include cultural memory.

[7] See Sheffield, 'A Once in a Century Opportunity?', pp. 2–5; Stephen Badsey, 'A Muddy Vision of the Great War', *History Today*, 65, 5 (2015), p. 46; Heather Jones, 'Goodbye to All That? Memory and Meaning in the Commemoration of the First World War', *Juncture*, 20, 4 (2014), p. 288.

[8] Tony Hall at the BBC World War One Comms Launch on 16 October 2013. The script for this event was kindly provided to the author by Robert Seatter at the BBC.

this was the result of organisations and groups which, in contrast to extant organisations with their own commemoration plans (such as the BBC and Imperial War Museum), emerged specifically for the centenary. Some were explicitly produced to connect academic and public history, such as the five Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Engagement Centres.[9] Some had a focus on artistic representations of the war, such as 14–18 NOW, which was involved with prominent projects such as 'Pages Of The Sea', and 'We're Here Because We're Here'.[10] These events specifically engaged with the public, directly so in the case of the latter; on 1 July 2016, approximately 1,400 men in contemporary uniform were placed in various locations around the UK. They remained silent, handing out cards with the details of a soldier who had died on the first day of the Battle of the Somme to passers-by. The significance of this particular act of public engagement was that it required no will of participation from the public – they simply had to encounter one of the volunteers to engage with the experience. The BBC's centenary schedule can thus be viewed as an amalgamation of these various initiatives; by incorporating artistic elements (such as poetry) and producing new documentaries about the war, it connected these areas with the public through the media of television. To this extent, whilst it was not representative of the centenary as a whole, it presented a sectional example of the areas covered by other organisations.

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[9] See Arts and Humanities Research Council, 'World War One Engagement Centres' https://ahrc.ukri.org/research/fundedthemesandprogrammes/worldwaroneanditslegacy/worldwaroneengagementcentres [accessed 26 August 2019].

[10] For further details about these projects, see 'Pages of the Sea' https://www.pagesofthesea.org.uk/ [accessed 31 August 2019]; 'We're Here Because We're Here' https://becausewearehere.co.uk/ [accessed 31 August 2019].

The BBC and the Great War

This section provides a brief overview of the BBC from its genesis to the modern day, to situate the centenary in the broader context of the corporation's history and involvement with warfare. By considering the impact of the Great War on the corporation's beginnings, the development of the television service, and the production of programmes for the fiftieth and ninetieth anniversaries of the war, it will demonstrate that the centenary was the latest iteration of an extended history of commemoration. It should also be noted that the term 'corporation' is often used throughout this dissertation to refer to the BBC; the term is occasionally also intended to refer to the BBC's existence as a company before 1927.

On 18 October 1922, the BBC was founded in a form far simpler to the corporation of today. Its emergence four years after the Great War naturally suggests the conflict impacted its foundations. Media historian David Hendy highlights 'the Great War and its aftermath as an influential factor [...] in helping to create a specific emotional climate [...] that surely later informed attitudes to the new phenomenon of broadcasting'.[11] The people involved in its development would have experienced the conflict either first hand, or the ripples of it at home. This connection is usefully evinced by the fact that Savoy Hill, the company's original headquarters, was the building where Lance Sieveking (a BBC radio producer) had been demobbed several years before.[12] Aside from this more literal example, Hendy also argues that when, in 1924, John Reith outlined one of the main goals of broadcasting as the ability for the

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[11] David Hendy, 'The Great War and British Broadcasting: Emotional Life in the Creation of the BBC, *New Formations*, 82 (2014), p. 85.
[12] Ibid., p. 96.

public to 'enjoy an evening at home', that 'he was arguably speaking to a wider, deeper, desire to repair and reinforce domestic life'.[13] This demonstrates the desire of the corporation to heal the wounds the war had wrought on the nation, by operating within the familiar safety of the domestic sphere.

One of the key factors in the BBC's development was the evolution of wireless technology during the war.[14] Having maintained a vital means of wartime communication, wireless engineers found post-war work with technology companies such as Marconi.[15] This use of the technology, however, for what were viewed as 'frivolous' purposes, was met with some dissatisfaction by the military.[16] Criticism notwithstanding, the BBC began experimenting with additional technologies, resulting in a corporate battle to produce the first television, and resultingly to broadcast the first television channel. Marconi emerged victorious, and BBC One was launched in 1936. Given that television was a new technology (and a superfluous expense) it was adopted on a much smaller scale than present-day ownership figures – only 400 sets were sold prior to the service's launch.[17] The initial debut of the technology was short-lived; it was taken off-air from the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 until 7 June 1946, just in time for the Victory Parade the following day.

During the Second World War, the BBC continued to broadcast via wireless, and served

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[13] Ibid., p.95.

[14] Asa Briggs, *The BBC: The First Fifty Years* (Oxford, 1985), p. 12.

[15] On the particular role of the Marconi in the development of wireless broadcasting, see Gabriele Balbi, 'Wireless's "Critical Flaw": The Marconi Company, Corporation Mentalities, and the Broadcasting Option', *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 94, 4 (2017), pp. 1239–1260; David Prosser, 'Marconi Proposes: Why it's Time to Rethink the Birth of the BBC', *Media History*, 25, 3 (2019), pp. 271–274.

[16] Higgins, *This New Noise*, pp. 12–13.

[17] Jamie Medhurst, 'What a Hullabaloo! Launching BBC Television in 1936 and BBC2 in 1964', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 14, 3 (2017), p. 269.

an important role in the early years of the conflict in maintaining public morale and fostering

national unity.[18] The conflict also inspired war-related programmes, including comedic

productions such as *It's That Man Again* (1939–1949), in which 'subversive, goonish humour

turned it into a very British wartime institution'.[19] The wireless also proved fruitful for the

dissemination of wartime propaganda, although the BBC found this difficult to manage on a

European scale.[20] The lines between propaganda and efforts to improve morale were also often

blurred.[21] War-related programmes were not their sole mandate, however; the corporation also

dedicated a considerable amount of airtime to promoting the Empire.[22]

When the television service returned after the war, it began to increase in popularity, and

in the late 1950s and early 1960s television 'was becoming ubiquitous, with increasing numbers

of households watching both BBC and ITV on a regular basis'.[23] Television ownership reached 90

per cent in 1964, in time for the fiftieth anniversary of the war. For this, the BBC launched one of

its most renowned series on the titular conflict, *The Great War* (1964). The content of the 26-

part series stretched from the July Crisis to the Armistice celebrations. As 'the first small-screen

memorial to the British sacrifices of 1914–18',[24] it was a key development in the corporation's

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[18] Alex Goody, 'BBC Features, Radio Voices and the Propaganda of War 1939–1941', *Media History*, 24, 2 (2018), p. 194; Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, vol. III*: The War of Words* (London, 1970), pp. 94–95.

[19] Edward Stourton, *Auntie's War: The BBC During the Second World War* (London, 2017), p. 233.

[20] Briggs, *War of Words*, pp. 477–481.

[21] Siân Nicholas, *The Echo of War: Home Front Propaganda and the Wartime BBC, 1939–45* (Manchester, 1996), p. 5.

[22] For detailed exploration of this, see Thomas Hajkowski, *The BBC and National Identity in Britain, 1922–53* (Manchester, 2010), pp. 51–78.

[23] Medhurst, 'What a Hullabaloo!', p. 271.

[24] Emma Hanna, 'A Small Screen Alternative to Stone and Bronze: *The Great War* Series and British Television', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10, 1 (2007), p. 91.

role in commemorating war. The series also helped reinforce the primacy of the Somme in Great War narratives; the iconic photograph of Private Bailey staring out at the viewer in the opening titles of each episode was from that battle.[25] It would ultimately serve to inspire and inform the production of war documentaries in the following decades.[26] This was also when television began developing its own visual style, in contrast to the pre-war years when it had been viewed as an extension of the wireless.[27] Notably, it also indicated the emergence of a trend in the production of documentaries for anniversaries; the anniversary of the Battle of the Somme would be marked by a documentary in the following three decades, a trend which was picked up again for the centenary.

The centenary, therefore, was the latest (and largest) chapter in a long history of the BBC's relationship with war and commemoration. It was intended from the outset to 'reach and engage as many people as possible, remembering those who died, broadening understanding of the war, offering fresh perspectives and original stories and supporting artistic and cultural responses'.[28] This highlights the particular role of television in centenary commemorations – it brought events from across the UK and Europe into the homes of the British public, thus presenting them with events which they might otherwise have been unaware of.

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[25] M. L. Connelly, '*The Great War*, Part 13: The Devil is Coming', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 22, 1 (2002), p. 27.
[26] See Stephen Badsey, 'The Great War since *The Great War*', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 22, 1 (2002), pp. 37–45.
[27] Medhurst, 'What a Hullabaloo!', p. 279.
[28] Ellison, 'World War One on the BBC', p. 125.

Methodology

Memory

It would be remiss to discuss cultural memory without some acknowledgement of the various definitions of the term as presented by historians, sociologists and psychologists. This is particularly important in regard to Durkheimian theories which see memory and society as inseparable — where society ultimately forms the framework with which we develop and interpret memory.[29] The crux of this dissertation is the representation of memory to society through a cultural medium, so the relationship between memory and society also bears relevance. In adopting the term 'memory', historians have also produced their own definitions for it, alongside variations in the nomenclature such as 'collective memory', 'social memory' and 'cultural memory'. They share some similarities, but are separated by key etymological nuances which delineate their usage.

In *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan offer a deeper examination of the frameworks used when discussing memory of the war, through the inclusion of psychological interpretations of memory as a cultural phenomenon. By evaluating terms such as 'collective memory' and 'collective remembrance' in this manner, they broaden understanding and awareness of the complications of borrowing language from other fields, whilst simultaneously demonstrating the value of interdisciplinary study. They also argue that whilst cognitive psychology theories are useful, such approaches lack an appreciation of the

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[29] See Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. by Lewis Coser (London, 1992), p. 43; Barbara A. Misztal, 'Durkheim on Collective Memory', *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 3, 2 (2003), pp. 123–143.

impact of sociological factors on remembrance processes.[30] This highlights the need to ensure

that the use of psychological theories maintains a connection with the relevant cultural or social

matter at hand.

Some historians have adopted the term 'collective memory'. Nigel Hunt has argued that

the shelf-life of collective memory is limited to a tri-generational model; once the grandchildren

of the veterans pass, the war will eventually become irrelevant.[31] The term is not without debate,

though. It has been argued that 'collective memory' does not exist as memories are individual –

'memory' here refers to a stipulation of what is widely deemed to be important.[32] This argument

is understandable on literal grounds – there are very few people alive today who have an actual,

personal memory of the Great War, and various reflections (as outlined later) have been offered

as to why the memory has endured beyond the lifespans of those who experienced it. It is more

pertinent to consider 'memory' in this sense as a social and cultural phenomenon, moulded by

the cultural and social norms of the period. Sociologists, such as Maurice Halbwachs, have

claimed that memory cannot exist separately from society, as it is society itself which provides

the very framework with which we shape and understand our own memories.[33] This reflects the

history of memory of the Great War; it has not been consistent, and is remoulded and expressed

through contemporary cultural norms and mediums. Pertinently, collective memory has also

been identified as 'the site of mediation where professional history must ultimately share space

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[30] Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, 'Setting the Framework', in Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (eds.), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 2000), p.29
[31] Nigel C. Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 180. See also Winter and Sivan, 'Setting the Framework', p. 16.
[32] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London, 2004)*, p. 76.
[33] Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, p. 43.

with popular history'.[34] This definition bears particular relevance to interactions between historians and the BBC, as discussed in the third chapter.

'Collective' memory thus evokes the phenomenon's social character. It applies to public gatherings, and implies an element of collective intentionality.[35] This aspect presents two incompatibilities with the nature of this research. First, it is debatable whether a dispersed television audience can be viewed as a collective. Their attention may be directed at the same programme, but their experience of it is ultimately individual, and largely devoid of social influence. Second, the level of intentionality involved in watching a television programme is also dubious. Intentionality implies purpose or deliberation, yet television programmes can be viewed by random chance, or passively if the audience member is engaged with other tasks. The notion of collective memory may thus apply more readily to the crowds gathered at events being broadcasted, but not to the broadcasts or viewers themselves. Of note, however, is the identification of collective memory as a 'matrix of socially positioned individual memories'.[36] This attributes an element of social influence, reminiscent of social-psychological interpretations of memory.

'Social memory' may appear a more relevant term, though it has been suggested that this too applies more specifically to a 'generational memory' which changes every thirty years.[37] In

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[34] Gary R. Edgerton, 'Television as Historian: A Different Kind of History Altogether', in Gary R. Edgerton and Peter C. Rollins (eds.), *Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age* (Kentucky, 2001), p. 5.
[35] Stefan Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remembrance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914–1940* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 17.
[36] Winter and Sivan, 'Setting the Framework', p. 24.
[37] Aleida Assmann, 'Re-framing Memory: Between Individual and Collective Forms of Constructing the Past', in Karin Tilmans, Frank Van Vree and Jay Winter (eds.), *Performing the Past: Memory, History and Identity in Modern Europe* (Amsterdam, 2010), pp. 41–42.

this manner, it is barely distinguishable from collective memory, offering a slight variation in the nature of the collective involved. The term could be seen to connote the passing down of memory from one generation to the next, on a more direct path than via broader collectives. In this regard, it is evocative of the ongoing importance of family in public perception of the war, which was also a prominent feature of the BBC's centenary coverage (as outlined in the first chapter). It is a useful term, although its focus on people constrains it somewhat from the more varied and ephemeral features of 'memory' in the sense intended here.

There is thus the less restrictive term of 'cultural memory'. Again, it is ultimately derived from collective memory, and is also prone to criticism. The concept of 'culture' is privy to uncertainty regarding its definition,[38] yet its ambiguity allows it to include an undiscriminating variety of forms, including media and public institutions. It is also apposite due to its relation to a more modern timeframe; if we consider the history of memory as a temporal binary, then communicative memory applies to contemporaries, and cultural memory applies to descendants.[39] It thus effectively describes 'the record of that confrontation between past and present, that profound dialectic between emotion and creativity'.[40] As the term allows the inclusion of cultural mediums through which memory is represented, alongside the impact of contemporary culture on individual understanding, it is this term which will be used within this dissertation.

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[38] For an expansion on these issues see Peter Burke, *History & Social Theory* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 118–119.
[39] In accordance with the evolution of memory as outlined in Jan Assmann, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', trans. by John Czaplicka, *New German Critique*, 65 (1995), pp. 128–129.
[40] Winter and Sivan, 'Setting the Framework', p. 22.

Sources

As this dissertation is primarily concerned with the representation of the Great War on the BBC, more modern primary sources (namely television programmes) are prioritised over more traditional historical sources such as archival documents.[41] Due to the large volume of programming in the BBC's centenary schedule, programmes broadcasted for the anniversaries of the Battle of the Somme, the Battle of Passchendaele, and the Armistice are the main referential focus, as an increased level of attention was given to these events. Radio broadcasts are excluded from this scope, as television programmes were the key receptor for public awareness of the centenary.[42] Due to the primacy of government commemorative events within the broadcasting schedule, more consideration is given to content and commentary rather than visuals, with the exception of instances where the BBC appeared to make conscious choices about videography.

In order to evaluate the 'reception' of these programmes, several key sources are recurrent throughout this dissertation. The Broadcasters' Audience Research Board (BARB) website provides viewing figures for programmes, provided they ranked within the top thirty programmes per week for the relevant channel. This restricts results to programmes where a significant audience had been achieved; many of the programmes in the BBC's centenary output did not rank in the top 30, so few specific figures are provided. Reviews in newspapers provide

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[41] Written documentation was sought from the BBC's Written Archives Centre, but documents are not available for archive access until seven years after their authorship. A request for material were also made under the Freedom of Information Act, which was refused as it related to the excluded areas of journalism, art and literature.

[42] Lucy Buckerfield and Steve Ballinger, *The People's Centenary: Tracking Public Attitudes to the First World War Centenary 2013–2018* (London, 2019), p. 30.

more critical appraisals, complemented by comments made under relevant hashtags on Twitter, which proved useful for gaining the views of historians (albeit a restrictive group of those who use the social media platform). This approach is somewhat problematic when applied to the general public, as many programmes did not lend themselves towards convenient hashtags, making it very difficult to gauge general public opinion. To accommodate for this setback, surveys published by British Futures provide impressions of the centenary, its content and tone, as well as public engagement with it. It should be affirmed, of course, that there is no way to literally determine the 'reception' of a programme by the public – all that can be accurately assessed here is the tone the BBC attempted to convey.

Literature Review

Despite the presence of established bodies of work in both cultural history and media studies, there is a large interdisciplinary lacuna between them. All of the literature here is considered in terms of thematic connections: historiography which promotes emotion as the basis of modern memory of the war; the relationship between politics, memory and commemoration; the mythification of the war narrative, alongside challenges of them by revisionist historians; previous studies of televisual representations of the war, and wider histories of the BBC; and current historiography on the centenary. The literature demonstrates that there is a valuable background of work for this research, yet further work is required to bring the field of memory studies up to date.

As the Great War is undeniably one of the most emotive events in modern British history, emotional incentive has been an unsurprisingly prominent factor in cultural memory discourse.

This particular theme has most often been discussed in relation to the interwar period, when a significant proportion of the population mourned the losses wrought by war. The nature of this mourning process is a matter of debate; did the conflict inspire an attachment to traditionalism, or did it serve as the chrysalis of modernism? Some scholars argue that Victorianism or medievalism provided a familiar framework to mourn the lost soldiers.[43] Jay Winter has been a key advocate for this argument, through his studies of artistic representations of war in *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* and more recently in *War Beyond Words.* Within this more recent study, as per titular indication, he focuses on visual art forms rather than literary ones. Ironically, Winter dedicates a considerable proportion of his introduction to outlining and defining the lexicon of memory. This is unavoidable, though, and symptomatic of the problematic nature of adopting language from other disciplines. Crucially, the premise for his focus on visual representations is that they serve as 'lenses' through which we can filter the 'blinding, terrifying light' of war.[44] By recognising that the form these 'lenses' take has changed over time, television can be viewed as a modern version. One further claim to note, is that despite the unavoidable emotions experienced when researching the war, historians should ensure that 'reason and intelligence' triumph over them.[45] This is particularly relevant to later discussions about the impact of emotive power on representations of the war.

The counterargument to the endurance of traditionalism is that the war was too great an

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[43] See Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 76; Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory*, *passim*.

[44] Jay Winter, *War Beyond Words: Languages of Remembrance from the Great War to the Present* (Cambridge, 2017), p. 1.

[45] Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 212.

upheaval for pre-existing ideals to continue. Paul Fussell's literary study in *The Great War and Modern Memory* demonstrates both the idea of a cultural rupture, and the value of creative reflections on war. Through a thematic approach to various aspects of wartime experience, including life in the trenches, battles, and depictions of the enemy, Fussell presents an image of war familiar to modern popular conceptions – that of a futile waste of life in a conflict that went on for far too long. His main attestation is that war is ironic; literary representations often present a stark juxtaposition to the harsh reality of conflict, and its brutality is always at odds with anything it can hope to achieve.[46] Frequent references to contemporary writings imbues Fussell's work with a solid foundation for understanding how some soldiers interpreted their experiences; by complementing this with considerations of later works, he offers a broader overview of the general literature. Yet the primacy of poetry also exposes a flaw in Fussell's work. He presents a rather restrictive literary canon of largely anti-war rhetoric, thereby obscuring the complexity and variety of wartime experiences. Despite this, his work provides a useful background for this dissertation for two key reasons. Firstly, the canon of work he refers to often overlaps with literature referred to during commemorative events, thus his reflections are useful for comparative purposes. Secondly, the centenary may have appeared ironic to those who conflate commemoration with celebration, and thus would wonder what there was to celebrate about such a widescale loss of life. In this manner, the emotional aspects of memory could be connected to the emotional aspects of the centenary, thus providing a viewpoint for consideration within this dissertation.

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[46] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford, 2013).

The counterpoint to these emotional dimensions of memory are the political dimensions. One of the paradigms of this school of thought is George Mosse's 'Myth of the War Experience' – the equation of death in war with quasi-religious sacrifice.[47] In *Fallen Soldiers*, he traces the Myth from its origins in the Napoleonic wars, through its development in the Great War, to its present state. He argues that it has been perpetuated by political (nationalist) ideologies. The Myth has endured because it serves a political purpose towards notions of patriotism and sacrifice. If Mosse's interpretation is correct, the Myth might resurge in the near future, as increasing globalisation could increase cultural nationalism.[48] His work is a useful foundation for considering the political implications of the centenary, particularly in relation to concerns over the conflation of observing remembrance of the Great War with present-day support for the armed forces.[49] However, whilst the works discussed hitherto provide varied and critical insights of interwar memory, they are not always readily transferable to the more modern era of this dissertation. Modern memory of the Great War was irrevocably altered by the Second World War; thus, whilst these works provide valuable grounds for the origins of memory, historiography relating to modern memory and the centenary are more pertinent.

Alongside the means of *how* we remember the war, much has also been written on *what* it is that we actually 'remember', and the relationship of this understanding with Great War 'mythology'. The collocation of 'mud, blood and poetry' is frequently espoused to refer to

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[47] George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford, 1991), p. 8.
[48] Joan Beaumont, 'The Politics of Memory: Commemorating the Centenary of the First World War', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 50, 3 (2015), p. 530.
[49] Keith Jeffery, 'Commemoration in the United Kingdom: A Multitude of Memories', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 50, 3 (2015), p. 564.

popular conceptions about the war, specifically in regard to the futility and suffering evinced by the dominant literary canon. Revisionist historians have argued that many of these popular conceptions are often *mis*conceptions – such as the relative lack of mud and blood in certain battles.[50] Some revisionists were particularly vocal about the centenary's intended coverage and tone. In Gary Sheffield's work *Forgotten Victory*, he counters the futility narrative of the war by demonstrating the ways the military adapted to the challenges of the war, through the now widely known (and occasionally criticised) 'learning curve'. In the latest edition, he criticises the centenary for failing to convey that the war effort was supported by the 'vast majority of the population'.[51] Identifying discrepancies between centenary coverage and recent revisionist works helped discern whether the coverage reflected current historiography, or simply rehashed old ideas. As the two focal battles in this dissertation are keystones in popular memory, it is pertinent to consider the extent to which myths about them permeated centenary coverage. This is particularly relevant in relation to the Somme, which is often presented as the benchmark of inept generalship – a view which was not shared as widely by the public in the war's immediate aftermath. Conversely, myths can also be interpreted as 'a necessary part of human society' rather than the obverse of 'truth'.[52] Dan Todman offers a consideration of these myths and their development in *The Great War: Myth and Memory*. Fundamentally, he outlines changes in cultural memory, most notably that overt criticism of the generals was less prevalent in the war's immediate aftermath. The Somme is deemed a touchstone of flawed generalship, thus the

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[50] Gordan Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycock: Britain and the First World War* (London, 2004), pp. 298–299, 354–355.
[51] Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory: The First World War: Myths and Realities* (London, 2018), p. 343.
[52] Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London, 2007), p, xiii.

temporality of myths is relevant to this dissertation. Whether we deem myths to be helpful or hurtful, an understanding and awareness of them is crucial, as they were ubqiquitous throughout the centenary.

The study of televisual representations of the war is a comparatively small field, yet it forms the bedrock for this dissertation. Emma Hanna's *The Great War on the Small Screen* appears as the natural predecessor to this research. She encapsulates the development of remembrance over the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, from contemporary war memorials and remembrance services through to a range of television series, beginning with *The Great War* in 1964 and culminating with *The Somme* in 2005. She also outlines various cultural factors which impact modern understanding of the war, such as the poetry syllabus in compulsory education, and the dissonance between veteran memory and public memory. In summarising existing approaches to the study of the conflict, she notes the lack of television amongst them, and in doing so warns against historians ignoring the 'dominant cultural form' of television.[53] Alongside an extensive filmography, Hanna also includes more traditional, archival primary sources such as documents from the BBC's Written Archives Centre, combined with data from BARB to establish audience size. Hanna's work therefore provides an exemplary framework for analysing televisual representations of the war. There are some limitations for this dissertation, though. Much of the material within Hanna's monograph covers fictitious drama, whereas the programming for the anniversaries of the Somme, Passchendaele and Armistice was mostly factual. Several articles have also been published which specifically examine

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[53] Emma Hanna, *The Great War on the Small Screen: Representing the First World War in Contemporary Britain* (Edinburgh, 2009), p. 4.

representations of the Somme on television,[54] which are useful for comparative purposes.

Specific histories of the BBC are rare – it is usually included in general histories of broadcasting, such as the multi-volume series by Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*. Briggs did provide a more specific history in *The BBC: The First Fifty Years* (1985), which offers a useful overview of the corporation from its birth to the emergence of competing broadcasters in the 1970s. The downfall to these works is that whilst they are helpful for histories of the BBC, they are becoming increasingly outdated, as technological advancements continue to shape and evolve broadcasting. *This New Noise* by Charlotte Higgins, whilst being a popular work rather than a strictly academic one, does at least provide a more updated history of the BBC, extending from the Reithian era to its struggles in the modern age. It was commissioned by *The Guardian*, and occasionally espouses cloying descriptions of the BBC – Higgins describes the increasing ubiquity of the BBC as follows: 'Once a kindly auntie's voice in the corner of the room, it is now the demonic voice in our ear, a loving companion from which we need never be parted.'[55] This interpretation is offered without any awareness of its Orwellian undertones, although the ubiquity of the BBC has secured its relevance in modern culture. Observations of the importance of the BBC to modern society are vital to this dissertation – if the BBC is *not* considered a cultural nexus, then the validity of its output as a benchmark for the centenary is brought in to question.

Broadcasting itself serves a unique cultural purpose. The presence of television in the

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[54] See M. L. Connelly, '*The Great War,* Part 13', pp. 22–28; Emma Hanna, 'British Televisual Representations of the Battle of the Somme', in Erin Bell and Ann Gray (eds.), *Televising History: Mediating the Past in Postwar Europe* (New York, 2010), pp. 107–21; Todman, 'The Ninetieth Anniversary of the Battle of the Somme', pp. 23–40.
[55] Charlotte Higgins, *This New Noise: The Extraordinary Birth and Troubled Life of the BBC* (London, 2015), p. 7.

home brings the outside world in to the personal space. The ability of media to provide an interface between these spheres, to fluidify the boundaries between public and private remembrance, is another factor in discussions of its role within commemoration.[56] There are also more specific examples of the BBC's involvement with remembrance across its history to be considered. Most noteworthy for this dissertation were their efforts to secure the ability to broadcast the ceremony at the Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday. As the anniversary of the Armistice fell on Remembrance Sunday in 2018, considerations of its history were apposite, particularly as Adrian Gregory has suggested that the first concurrence of the two events in 1923 increased the religiosity of the event.[57] His further considerations of the BBC's involvement with broadcasting the Silence in *The Silence of Memory* are also useful when considering the history of the event for the purposes of this thesis.

Pivotal to all of this is historiography on the centenary itself. Naturally, given the recency of the event this consists of a small yet growing collection of journal articles. One of the most enlightening of these is an article written by Jane Ellison, Head of Creative Partnerships at the BBC. Within the article she reflects on the BBC's ambitions for their World War One schedule, the scope of coverage and responses from the public. Markedly, she notes that 'live broadcasts of national moments of remembrance and commemoration have been significant milestones of the Centenary'.[58] As ceremonies formed the nucleus of commemoration around the anniversaries of the Somme, Passchendaele and the Armistice, their centrality within this dissertation is justified

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[56] Maggie Andrews, 'Mediating Remembrance: Personalization and Celebrity in Television's Domestic Remembrance', *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, 4, 3 (2011), p. 358.

[57] Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day 1919–1946* (Oxford, 1994), p. 188.

[58] Jane Ellison, 'World War One on the BBC', *Cultural Trends*, 27, 2 (2018), p. 127.

by such recognition. She argues that the power of such broadcasts is that 'they fuse the emotional power of the event with historical context for a general audience.'[59] Whether the coverage achieved this, or if it negated the latter in favour of the former, is considered in the first chapter of this dissertation.

There are also correlations between the historiography on the centenary and other themes previously discussed – most significantly the political facets of commemoration. The interrelation between politics and memory also bears relevance for the second chapter. The scope for both national and transnational commemoration projects has been viewed by some as opportunities which could be politically exploited.[60] The very concept of a 'British' centenary is also viewed as problematic, due to the concentration of government centenary funding in England; Britain once again becomes a synecdoche for England.[61] This is significant because the centenary did not exist outside of its political context – the anniversary of the outbreak of the war coincided with the Scottish independence referendum, a time when national identity was a central talking point. However, it has also been noted that 'national identity' is a complex notion, and the increasingly multicultural nature of Britain lends itself towards increasingly varied and contrasting war narratives.[62] This aids in exploring the political landscape in which the centenary unfolded, and helps situate it alongside contemporary issues with the potential to impact modern memory of the war. Similarly, the centenary was a unique event in the history of memory, as the

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[59] Ibid.
[60] See Jeffery, 'Commemoration in the United Kingdom', p. 565; Andrew Mycock, 'The First World War Centenary in the UK: "A Truly National Commemoration"?', *Round Table*, 103, 2 (2014), p. 154.
[61] Ibid., p. 158.
[62] Maggie Andrews, 'Poppies, Tommies and Remembrance', *Soundings*, 58 (2014), p. 105.

veterans of the war had all passed away. Little consideration has been given to the impact of this on enduring memory, though some questioned what the media would use as a focal point without them.[63] All of this ultimately demonstrates the importance of an up-to-date study of the centenary in the context of its cultural and political landscape.

Thus, a seemingly patchwork collection of fields have interrelated threads woven through them. There are emotional and political arguments surrounding the memory of the war, and also more generally its commemoration and mediatisation. The centenary was the latest event in a century of cultural memory development, in an age far more technologically advanced (and dependent) than its foundations. The history of memory is a well-documented subject, yet as with many modern cultural aspects, it does not exist exclusive of technology (particularly television). The utilisation and importance of broadcasting has been similarly broadly discussed, yet its impact on memory has received less attention. The existing historiography therefore shows that whilst there has been much discussion of modern memory and modern media, they are approached as largely separate vectors; this dissertation thus places itself as an intersection between them.

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[63] Nick Webber and Paul Long, 'The Last Post: British Press Representations of Veterans of the Great War', *Media, War & Conflict*, 7, 3 (2014), p. 286.

'A Deep and Lasting Wound'[1]: Emotional Representations of the Great War

As emotion has been a primary factor in the proliferation of cultural memory of the war, this chapter will consider how the BBC represented and portrayed the war in emotional terms during the centenary. This was largely achieved through the propagation of familiar tropes and references. The primacy of the dead in remembrance was reaffirmed in these terms, particularly in regards to family, and reinforced by the underlying tones of 'mud, blood and poetry'. The hallowed ground of the Western Front remained an emotional locus for remembrance, with remnants of war scattered above and below the landscape. Together, these aspects demonstrate that the BBC preserved emotional understandings of the war.

It is important to consider the suppositional implications of the term 'emotion'. The field of the history of emotions contests that emotion is not a temporal constant.[2] Whilst this relates to a different field, it offers a compatible observation – just as memory is moulded by contemporary cultural frameworks, so too are emotions.[3] The relevance for a study of the centenary in emotional terms is clear – it is an assessment of modern emotional responses to an historical event. Moreover, the absence of living veterans meant there were no available witnesses to the emotional experience of the conflict. Some of them produced recorded recollections, yet it has also been argued that there is a significant difference between the experience of an emotion, and the recollection of it.[4] Ultimately, the emotional representations

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[1] Kirsty Young on 'For the Fallen', *World War One Remembered: Passchendaele* (BBC2 England, 2017).
[2] Susan Matt and Peter Stearns, 'Introduction', in Peter Stearns and Susan Matt (eds.), *Doing Emotions History* (Urbana, 2014), p. 2; Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, 'Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards', *American Historical Review*, 90, 4 (1985), p. 814.
[3] Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction*, trans. by Keith Tribe (Oxford, 2015), p. 32.
[4] Ibid., p. 290.

considered within this chapter involve a different set of emotional standards to those of the period commemorated. The analysis of media raises further complexities to this end. The impact of media on an individual's emotional state is a broad area in psychology, yet there is no consensus on the interplay between them. Whilst the directional relationship between the two is debated, emotion is widely regarded as a physiological construct best understood through emotion-measuring equipment.[5] This chapter does not approach emotion on such rigorous biological terms, but rather as a shared cultural phenomenon. It primarily considers the use and exploitation of emotion by the BBC, rather than the emotional experiences of the viewer.

Mud, Blood and Poetry

The often evoked triptych of 'mud, blood and poetry' outlines popular understanding of the war — one of a conflict marred by the needless sacrifice of men living in appalling conditions, the experiences of which can best be understood through poetry from popular names such as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. These themes have been commonly expressed through the quintessential battles associated with Britain's war effort, namely the Somme and Passchendaele, with the former often presented as a synecdoche for the futility of the whole conflict. The Somme is the aphotic depth of the war – whilst some areas may be approached informally, even occasionally with comedy, the Somme has been deemed too dark and sombre

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[5] Brenton Malin, 'Media, Messages and Emotions', in Peter Stearns and Susan Matt (eds.), *Doing Emotions History* (Urbana, 2014), pp. 197–198.

for such light to reach it. This is understandable – general wartime life has been the subject of comedy programmes in the past, yet battles have not. In the series finale of *Blackadder Goes Forth* (1989), despite having parodied much of wartime experience up to that point, as the men went over the top at the end of the episode, the scene faded out to a field of poppies and birdsong, separating its implied conclusion from the humour that came before. For the variety of ways we have developed to discuss various aspects of the war, the way we approach death and suffering has remained much the same. In this regard, cultural memory of the war has not been merely eulogistic, but elegiac. There has been an ongoing reverential lament for the dead, which lends itself to a nostalgic view of the pre-war era, when global conflict had not yet taken away the 'lost generation'. It is thus understandable that death is the area to which emotive responses to war are most frequently expressed.

Despite the reasoning behind this, emotive responses to the conflict have not always been welcomed by historians. Ahead of the centenary, Gary Sheffield criticised the tendency of people to respond to the war with 'views based on emotion, limited knowledge and flawed understanding'.[6] It seems somewhat unreasonable to expect anyone to understand the war without a view at least partly based in emotion, and it is potentially counterproductive to criticise the public for not sharing the same knowledge as professional historians. The public has developed an emotional understanding of the war over the course of the past century, supported by recurrent themes in popular history, and broadcasting tropes adopted by the BBC during the centenary which this chapter will now address.

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[6] Gary Sheffield, 'A Once in a Century Opportunity? Some Personal Reflections on the Centenary of the First World War', *British Journal for Military History*, 1, 1 (2014), p. 5.

Mud

There are numerous photographs and sections of film footage from the Great War showing the muddy conditions of the battlefield, as well as diary entries referring to the state of the trenches. The weather was often portrayed as the enemy of both sides, slowing the progress of the men, as well as their supplies and artillery. For the Somme vigil service, a diary entry from Private Albert Atkins invited the reader to 'imagine yourself standing in a trench with water well over your knees, crouching against the side of a muddy trench'.[7] A difficult endeavour for generations with no direct experience of trench warfare, yet it lent itself toward the pitying image of a soldier who spent his time in a flooded trench.

This primacy of mud in the cultural image of the war also appeared to cause a subtle inaccuracy. The opening reel of the broadcast for the vigil on the BBC featured a montage of four photographs from the battle.[8] The final photo displayed a soldier on a muddy battlefield surrounded by flooded shell holes. An evocative photo for the mud theme indeed, though the public were less likely to realise that this photo was not actually taken during the battle of the Somme, but at the battle of Passchendaele.[9] The inclusion of this photo in the Somme montage was not surprising, as the Battle of Passchendaele is renowned for muddy conditions and the stories of men drowning, and is thus a paradigm of the interrelationship between nature and

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[7] *The Centenary of the Battle of the Somme: The Vigil* (BBC2 England, 2016).

[8] The first three are: Imperial War Museum, Q1142, Men of the Wiltshire Regiment advancing to the attack through the wire, Thiepval, 7 August 1916; Imperial War Museum, Q729, British sentry going up to his post; near Beaumont Hamel, July 1916; Imperial War Museum, Q1332, Battle of Thiepval, 25–28 September 1916, stretcher bearers carrying a wounded man over the top of a trench in the village of Thiepval, 1916.

[9] The photo referred to here is from Library and Archives Canada, MIKAN no. 3194807 http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&rec_nbr=3194807&lang=eng [accessed 7 June 2019].

war. As outlined by David Olusoga for the BBC's commemoration of Passchendaele, the ancient drainage ditches in the fields were destroyed by prolonged artillery fire; thus the rain had nowhere to go and flooded the battlefield. The impact of this was later noted in a recording of John Willis Palmer DCM, who recalled that 'the sight of seeing men sucked down in this mud, dying in this mud, absolutely finished me off'.[10] Later in the programme, the light show on the side of the Cloth Hall in Ypres depicted rain falling, whilst men recounted their experiences of battling with the mud. This highlighted the mud as a defining feature of the battle and reinforced its place in cultural memory.[11]

The battlefield was not a quagmire for the entirety of the war, however. Indeed, in winter it often froze, which presented further complications, yet there were also times when the weather was deemed to provide a striking contrast to the battlefield itself. At the ceremony broadcast by the BBC which marked zero hour of the Battle of the Somme, a diary entry from Bombardier R.H. Locke noted:

it was really a pity to have a war on July 1st. For all in my time it was the most beautiful

day we had. The sky was cloudless, and the sun shone. The sky larks were singing as they

flew heavenwards, and unknown to them, thousands of our soldiers were on their way

too.[12]

Locke's words presented not only a softer image of the battlefield that day, but also of the soldiers who died, by incorporating them into this peaceful depiction of nature. The image was

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[10] 'For the Fallen'
[11] See also Dan Todman, *The Great War*, pp. 1–3.
[12] *The Centenary of the Battle of the Somme: Zero Hour* (BBC1 London, 2016).

evocative of the closing section of the light show on the Cloth Hall during the Passchendaele commemoration, when thousands of individual lights rose up the side of the building. This contrast between the beauty of nature and carnage of war was a common evocation during the BBC's centenary coverage — in a special memorial episode of *Songs of Praise*, the tranquillity of the French countryside was contrasted by the presence of numerous memorials and cemeteries which recall a darker history to the landscape.[13]

This disparity between nature and war is, however, neither unique to the BBC nor a recent development. Paul Fussell has previously identified the 'pattern of irony' in recollections such as Locke's.[14] He further argues that ironic representations of the war are often produced through a process of 'gross dichotomizing', whereby two contrasting elements (such as nature and war) are clearly juxtaposed.[15] Thus we see that the BBC continued to portray the major battles in the popular image of a dangerous quagmire, yet this image was mediated by some suggestion that this was not always the case. The primary impact of mud presented by the BBC was its impact on soldiers, and as will be noted later in this paper, there was little reference to the weather's impact on logistics.

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[13] *Songs of Praise* (BBC1 London, 26 June 2016).
[14] Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, pp. 33–34.
[15] Ibid., p. 82.

Blood

Perhaps the most epitomising phrase within cultural memory of the Great War, which signifies general understanding of the scale of death, is the concept of the 'lost generation'.[16] It outlines the wide-scale losses experienced around the country, exacerbated in some local areas as a result of the formation (and subsequent loss) of 'Pals' Battalions. Where these battalions consisted of men from small communities, the loss of all or most of them could indeed be seen to decimate the local population. Therein lies the issue — the phrase has been utilised broadly and treated as unproblematic, yet it was not representative of the population as a whole. In the opening moments of the BBC's coverage for the commemoration of the Somme, Baroness Shirley Williams noted of the war that 'this was when Europe destroyed its younger generation [...] A whole generation of young men wiped out'.[17] This suggested death on a wider scale than was actually experienced, and demonstrated that despite around 88% of soldiers surviving the war, the 12% who did not weigh very heavily on national consciousness. It is entirely possible of course, that Baroness Williams was echoing the sentiments of her mother Vera Brittain, as expressed in *Testament of Youth* (1933), alongside the awareness that Brittain had lost her brother and fiancé during the war. Edward Spiers argues that Brittain's work 'helped establish the first day of the battle of the Somme (1 July 1916) as a symbol of national tragedy'.[18]

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[16] For a more detailed consideration of the demographic losses of the conflict, see Jay Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, 2nd edn. (London, 2003), pp. 65–100; Adrian Gregory, 'Lost Generations: The Impact of Military Casualties on Paris, London and Berlin' in Jay Winter and Robert Jean-Louis (eds.), *Capital Cities at War: Paris London, Berlin, 1914–1919* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 57–103.

[17] *Battle of the Somme: The Vigil.*

[18] Edward Spiers, 'The British Centennial Commemoration', *Comillas Journal of International Relations,* 2 (2015), p. 74.

It is apt that this observation was made at the start of a commemoration to mark the beginning of the Somme offensive, for which the first day is broadly referred to as the worst day in British military history, owing to the failure of numerous objectives at a cost of nearly 60,000 casualties (including nearly 20,000 dead). These figures often stand as a byword for the futility of not just the battle, but the war itself.[19] The majority of the BBC's commemorations of the Somme were focused on 1 July 1916, though this was partially dictated by their coverage of the ceremonies organised by the DCMS. This was reflective of commemorations beyond the scope of the BBC — the evening concert held at Heaton Park allocated 19,000 tickets; Shrouds of the Somme featured 19,240 shrouds and the soldiers' names distributed in We're Here Because We're Here all died on the first day.[20] Popular focus on the first day over the rest of the battle potentially connects to the emotional power associated with the scale of loss. Winter has previously examined the ways in which 'Europeans imagined the post-war world as composed of survivors perched on a mountain of corpses'.[21] This view has been habitually reinforced by frequent shots of graves and memorials in programmes, thus it is inevitable that the dead have remained the focal point of commemoration. In this manner some aspects of commemoration, even on television, have remained the same. As acknowledged by Helen McCartney, certain motifs such as those associated with death and loss were preserved during the centenary.[22] Therefore, the narrative emphasis on death remained established in the BBC's centenary

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[19] Helen McCartney, 'Commemorating the Centenary of the Battle of the Somme in Britain', *War & Society*, 36, 4 (2017), p. 291.
[20] Ibid., p. 294.
[21] Winter, *Sites of Memory*, p. 17.
[22] McCartney, 'Commemorating the Centenary', p. 302.

coverage by referring to familiar notions of futility, and the focus on the first day of the Somme offensive.

Yet some efforts were made to demonstrate that not all who died did so unwillingly, and that when we commemorate those who died we should do so in a manner which does not reduce them to a statistic. During the Somme commemorations, one of the diary entries read out was written on the eve of the battle by 2nd Lieutenant Eric Rupert Heaton, quoting:

> If I fall in battle, then I have no regrets, save for my loved ones I leave behind. It is a
>
> great cause, and I came out willingly to serve my King and country. My greatest concern
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> is that I may have the courage and determination necessary to lead my platoon well.[23]

This quotation had considerable emotional power in generating tension, and added poignancy when it was later revealed that Heaton died on the first day of the battle. Whilst it was encouraging to see an attempt to present a balance in wartime experiences, this was still often drowned out by overarching references to the futile waste of life. There was also a skewed representation of the numbers who lived and died. Heaton's entry above was read alongside the entries of five others — only two of them survived the war, providing a representational casualty level of 60%. The casualty level for the Somme can be estimated at circa 30%, demonstrating the severe distortion in this proportion. Viewing the dead as a waste has ultimately become an extension of viewing the war as futile. This is generally the inverse of the immediate post-war mood in Britain, when the public favoured veneration of the dead over criticism of the validity of

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[23] *Battle of the Somme: The Vigil.*

death, for fear of offending bereaved parents.[24] Therefore, the primacy of death and futility in cultural memory is reflective of changes in cultural memory, driven by changes in the public which 'share' it.

This imbalance was not complete however, as the BBC's centenary coverage made regular use of recordings of veterans taken in earlier decades. Indeed, they were the backbone for the (subtly misquoted) *They Shall Not Grow Old* (2018), as it was their testimony alone which drove the narrative. Nevertheless, the film itself was dedicated to the memory of those who died, the numbers of which were one of the final scenes in the film. The film's colourisation was also arguably an attempt to forge an emotive connection between the men on screen, and an audience which is increasingly unfamiliar with black-and-white footage.[25] It is noteworthy though, that whilst most of the film is colourised, the opening and closing scenes are not. This had the effect of lifting the men out of the monochrome of history, but only temporarily – as the scenes fade from colour at the end, the men are returned to the annals of the past.

Whilst there were clear efforts to give a voice to soldiers through their diary entries, they were still often massed together as a casualty figure. This tendency was particularly prolific around battles such as the Somme, where the figures appeared at times to be little more than a chastisement for the failure of generals. This is not a recent development in cultural memory, as

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[24] See Todman, *The Great War*, p. 18; Alex King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain: The Symbolism of Politics and Remembrance* (Oxford, 1998), p. 217; Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 249–257; Jonathan F. Vance, *Death so Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver, 1997), pp.74–75.
[25] On this and broader use of modern filmography techniques to this end, see Brian Taves, 'The History Channel and the Challenge of Historical Programming', in Gary R. Edgerton and Peter C. Rollins (eds.), *Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age* (Kentucky, 2001), pp. 273–275.

unfavourable representations of the generals emerged both in 1930s memoirs and 1960s historiography. Presenting the Somme purely on the basis of numbers is a flawed means for improving knowledge about the battle, and is potentially detrimental. Peter Barton rebuked statistical approaches in the tripartite BBC documentary *The Somme 1916: From Both Sides of the Wire* (2016), stating: 'reducing the Somme to a battle of numbers, with each digit representing a life, a death, a maiming, and haunting memories that would never fade — this I think is a detestable exercise'.[26] This highlighted that parroting statistics is arguably not the best way to improve understanding of the war. Despite being pushed relatively far down the schedule, the episode in which Barton made his closing remark was still seen by 1.7 million people – only a slight decrease on the 1.8 million who watched the first episode.[27]

If the public is to understand the conflict on a broader level, it would be prudent to adopt a more in-depth approach which considers the lives soldiers had before they became a statistic. As summed up by Ian Hislop during the BBC coverage of the anniversary for Passchendaele, 'these aren't just men who died — they lived first'.[28] Hislop could have expanded this point by noting that there were also men who lived afterwards. Also absent from the narrative was the reality of the mundanity of a soldier's life in the rear trenches, as reflected on by H.G. Wells, for whom 'the real horror of modern war, when all is said and done, is the boredom'.[29] The need for an exploration of the lives of the men and the world they lived in raises in an imperative inclusion

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[26] 'End Game - End Spiel', *The Battle of the Somme 1916: From Both Sides of the Wire* (BBC2 England, 2016).
[27] Broadcasters' Audience Research Board, Weekly Viewing Data https://www.barb.co.uk/viewing-data/weekly-top-30/
[28] 'In Flanders Fields', *World War One Remembered: Passchendaele* (BBC1 London, 2017).
[29] H.G. Wells, *War and the Future: Italy, France and Britain at War* (London, 1917), p. 191.

for cultural history, alongside a range of representations of wartime experiences which would locate the war within its wider historical context. Whilst there was some evidence that the BBC encouraged an awareness of the war in terms beyond statistics, futility and death remained the dominant narrative.

Poetry

One of the most popular means for understanding how soldiers interpreted the world around them in recent decades has been poetry, often viewed as a counterpoint to history. As noted by Emma Hanna at the beginning of the centenary, 'television is still the site where the two Western Fronts — one of literature and popular culture, and the other of history — continue to clash'.[30] Whereas the study of history may seek to found itself in objective detail, poetry is subjective and holds more emotional power. Poems served as a common reference point in the BBC's coverage, both by recital in their entirety and by casual references. Baroness Williams quoted from Rupert Brooke during coverage of the Somme commemorations, in reference to the numbers who died on the first day: 'Pour out the red sweet wine of youth, gave up the years to be, work and joy'.[31] This was taken from *The Dead*, and her use of this particular line was curious given the romanticised approach to death expressed in the rest of the sonnet. His poetry was typical in tone to that of the early war years — poetry from later years reflected the changes in the conflict.

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[30] Emma Hanna, 'Contemporary Britain and the Memory of the First World War', *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps*, 113 (2014), p. 113.
[31] *Battle of the Somme: The Vigil.*

This conflation of the post-1916 war with the years before was a recurrent feature in the centenary as a whole. An article in *The Guardian* about the Sainsbury's Christmas truce advert aired in 2014 lamented that the image of the battlefield it presented was not the one portrayed in the works of Owen and Sassoon.[32] This is true, as neither Sassoon nor Owen were on the Western Front in 1914, when the war had a different character to the conflict in later years. The trenches featured in the advert were also more representative of those from the later years of the war, further confusing the matter of continuity. A failure to convey the differences in the war from year to year will not help challenge public knowledge on the matter, nor to alter cultural memory, and this stagnation in turn contributes to the continuation of the established modern memory of the conflict.

The BBC also gave attention to the examination of specific war poets. In a programme making its opinion on the subject matter clear from the start, the BBC broadcasted *The Greatest Poem of World War One: David Jones's In Parenthesis* (2016) on BBC Four. This documentary was an explication of Jones's titular work in the context of the experiences that led him to write it. Presented by author and poet Owen Sheers, the programme featured poets and their impressions of the work throughout. It was illustrative of the BBC's efforts to produce programmes suitable to the different remits of each channel, as the niche nature of this poem suited the cultural and intellectual focus of the channel's content. It was also more likely to appeal to the target demographic of BBC Four (adults over 35), than it would have on BBC Three

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[32] 'Sainsbury's Christmas Ad is a Dangerous and Disrespectful Masterpiece', *The Guardian*, 13 November 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/nov/13/sainsburys-christmas-ad-first-world-war [accessed 16 April 2019].

(ages 16–34) or the more mainstream BBC One. The programme offered elucidation on the relevance of the poem in general to war. Isabel Dixon noted that *In Parenthesis* reflects the slowness, inevitability, and impact of war.[33] This interpretation suggests that it is not just the words within poems that affect the way we perceive the war, but also the way the poem itself is written. The sheer length of Jones's work was an example for this. The programme relayed various aspects of his life in a non-chronological order, shifting back and forth on the timeline to discuss each section of the poem. It made the particularly stimulating argument that Jones achieved a detail of trench life unmet by the officer class poets, also noting that he served on the Western Front for longer than any other British writer. Despite raising this point though, no consideration was offered as to why *In Parenthesis* did not share the same prominence in cultural memory as the works of the officer poets.[34]

The latter half of the programme revealed that Jones's experience in Mametz Wood during the Somme, particularly of seeing his friends lying dead among the foliage, had a significant impact on him, and accordingly to the later stages of the poem. The impact itself was outlined in the fact it took Jones 12 years after the events in the wood to write *In Parenthesis*, and that he suffered a mental breakdown after completing it. The programme further noted that he suffered another breakdown following the Second World War, which led him to become ever more reclusive, eventually passing away in Calmary Nursing Home in 1974 at the age of 78. This was a revealing insight to the experiences of a survivor of the war, so it might be deemed unfortunate that this aspect of Jones's life received little attention. The programme also

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[33] *The Greatest Poem of World War One: David Jones's In Parenthesis* (BBC4, 2016).
[34] In reference to cultural memory in Britain. Jones gains more recognition in Wales than other parts of the UK.

demonstrated how subjects covered on the BBC could directly impact the likelihood of the public to seek out more information about them. A trend graph for search terms on Google shows that 'In Parenthesis' peaked around the time the programme was aired (See Appendix B).[35] This was a useful exploration from the BBC of a lesser known poem, though it is noteworthy that it was presented in strong association with its relationship to the Somme, rather than purely on its merits as a literary work, an element which juxtaposed awkwardly with the prominence of living poets on the programme.

Preceding this more specific documentary, and outlining one of the keystone battles from the very start of the centenary, *War of Words: Soldier-Poets of the Somme* (2014)[36] explored the lives of poets and writers including Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, David Jones, Isaac Rosenberg and J.R.R. Tolkien, and the impact the conflict had on their work. The opening moments of the programme explicitly outlined the impact of the war poets on cultural memory – 'together they changed how the First World War as a whole would be remembered'.[37] In contrast to the conflation of the war years noted earlier, the first part of the programme noted that the Somme region in the earlier part of the war was relatively quiet, and that even Sassoon's earlier work mirrored the patriotic tones of Rupert Brooke. It went on to cite the first shooting of a Royal Welch officer in the Bois Français lines in February 1916 as the event which impacted Graves's and Sassoon's later work. It even addressed the 'lions led by donkeys' idea, suggesting

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[35] No information on critical responses is available, as the programme was not reviewed by any media outlets. In terms of audience reception, the viewing figures for that week from BARB indicate an audience of less than 0.59 million people.

[36] Whilst the programme was not originally aired during the Somme anniversary period, it is considered here for its specific relationship to the event, and because it was repeated in 2016.

[37] *War of Words: Soldier-Poets of the Somme* (BBC2 England, 2014).

it was fuelled by the refusal of generals to reveal their plans to soldiers interpreted as a lack of any planning on their part. Nigel Steel, Principal Historian at the IWM, acknowledged that the Somme brought about a change in understanding of the war — if this is the case, we might be left wondering why earlier works have been sepulchred beneath the now iconic examples from later years. Bringing lesser known works to the foreground of commemoration would improve awareness of the different and changing attitudes towards the war throughout its progression, and could also transform cultural memory by broadening the restrictive scope of poetry which has dominated the narrative and perpetuated modern memory of the conflict.

The reason for this omission undoubtedly lies in the particular emotive power of poetry from this period. Literary scholar Jon Stallworthy argued that poetry's 'intensity and power has ensured that these specific experiences of the Somme have survived in our culture, while other periods of the war fade from memory'.[38] This specifically suggests that it is the emotion bound up in the works surrounding the battle which have led to its prominence in cultural memory. As one of the closing remarks of the programme, it was lent considerable weight, as was Stallworthy's further point that whilst historians argue the war wasn't 'like that', the Somme was, and poets 'tell it better' than historians.[39] Here he echoed a common acknowledgement in historiography, of the greater significance applied to literary works than historical ones.[40] He did not mention the practicality that, with the exception of epics such as *In Parenthesis*, poems are generally shorter than historical works, and thus more easily digested by the general public. If

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[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] See Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (London, 1989), p. 291.

the emotional power of poetry, and indeed of the Somme, is the driving factor behind its prominence and dominance in cultural memory, then we must question what impact historians can ultimately have on it. Perhaps this is unavoidable, as 'poetry as memory distilled is deep in the English romantic tradition' and thus the poets have a strong impact on memory.[41] Yet it arguably appears as an unusual cultural anachronism, given the relatively diminished popularity of poetry alongside other genres of literature. Despite the perceived emotive handicap, though, historians have increasingly sought to present their work in new and varied ways. The trend of 'talking head' programmes is gradually fading, with programmes making more use of not only the spaces of the former battlefields to connect the audience to the past, but also their own family history.

Familial Connections

For most of the twentieth century, many people had a direct connection with the Great War through living family members, who either directly conveyed their experiences to them or, by withholding them, suggested experiences too painful for others to bear.[42] Since the veterans all passed away, and with dwindling numbers who have childhood memories of the war, it is quickly passing from living memory. For the public to feel a connection to the war, they must now delve into their family histories. This personal connection is also more likely to engage the public than

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[41] Winter and Prost, *The Great War in History*, p. 178.
[42] For an extensive consideration of families and remembrance in the post-war period, see Jay Winter, 'Forms of Kinship and Remembrance in the Aftermath of the Great War', in Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (eds.), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 40–60.

anniversaries themselves.[43] Usefully, the BBC did not have to encourage a desire to do this for

the centenary – their series *Who Do You Think You Are?* (2004) had already been fostering a

public interest in genealogy for a decade. By encouraging the public to discover their own

connections with the war, they could help form personal bonds with the conflict which might

otherwise be lost. To this end, the BBC presented much of the centenary as an extended episode

of 'Who Do We Think We Are?' This familial connection was occasionally facilitated through

family artefacts. In this manner, objects from the past serve as 'mediators in emotional

transactions'.[44] This section will address the ways the BBC focused on fostering familial

connections through the exploration of personal artefacts and family stories.

Remembrance through Personal Artefacts

Interest in family history can often be ignited by the possession or discovery of family heirlooms.

They are helpful in this regard as they are often connected to specific stories – many objects are

often imbued in some way with a memory.[45] They also serve as vital connectors for increasingly

separated generations, by which 'a process of personification through artefact can join

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[43] Michael Roper and Rachel Duffett, 'Family Legacies in the Centenary: Motives for First World War Commemoration among British and German Descendants', *History & Memory*, 30, 1 (2018), p. 77.

[44] Stephanie Downes, Sally Holloway, and Sarah Randles, 'A Feeling for Things, Past and Present', in Stephanie Downes, Sally Holloway and Sarah Randles (eds.), *Feeling Things: Objects and Emotions Through History* (Oxford, 2018), p. 9.

[45] Alan Radley, 'Artefacts, Memory and a Sense of the Past', in David Middleton and Derek Edwards (eds.), *Collective Remembering* (London, 1990), p. 47. See also Winter and Sivan, 'Setting the Framework', p. 37; Dominiek Dendooven, 'The Journey Back: On the Nature of Donations to the "In Flanders Fields Museum"', in Nicholas J. Saunders and Paul Cornish (eds.), *Contested Objects: Material Memories of the Great War* (London, 2009), pp. 63–65.

personification through image and document as a source of inspiration for study and remembrance, evoking identification and emotion in ways a monument cannot'.[46] This process is particularly useful for presentation through the visual medium of television, and is a form the BBC frequently utilised. One of the earliest examples came from the start of the BBC's centenary season. *Antiques Roadshow* aired a special episode in 2014 in which they invited members of the public to the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing to discuss mementos and artefacts from their ancestors in the Great War. The call for participants received a large response from the public, as the show noted that 30,000 people had contacted them to take part. The series also had the benefit of being an established brand, thereby guaranteeing a larger viewing audience than might otherwise have been achieved — 5.98 million people watched the programme.[47] Whilst the choice of location and *Battle of the Somme* (1916) footage (somewhat jarringly combined with the jaunty theme tune) suggested a focus on the battle, the stories themselves presented a broader picture of the war. They also covered a range of interests in the war, from collectors to rare family pieces.

The first was a gentleman who had collected approximately 750 bronze death plaques to date. Aside from simply collecting them though, he also researched the people named on them. This presented an important aspect of commemoration – giving life to the names encountered on memorials and gravestones. An ancestor of a survivor from the sinking of the Lusitania presented an 'Enlist' poster; the antiques expert stated the ship was carrying three million rounds

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[46] Martin Brown, '"Slowly Our Ghosts Drag Home": Human Remains from the Heidenkopf, Serre, Somme, France', in Nicholas J. Saunders and Paul Cornish (eds.), *Contested Objects: Material Memories of the Great War* (London, 2009), p. 277.
[47] BARB, Weekly Top 30 https://www.barb.co.uk/viewing-data/weekly-top-30/

of ammunition in her hold, essentially vindicating the decision by the Germans to attack it (though did not note this is a matter of dispute).[48] There were also more personal items: a whistle from a soldier who survived after the whistle caught a bullet; the sword of an officer who went to fight after the men he had trained died at the Somme; and the braid from the sleeve of the uniform of an injured Royal Navy officer aboard Vindictive, which was taken by the gun crew member who helped him. These personal connections and more individual stories undeniably build powerful emotive bonds with the conflict, stimulated by the possession of these mementos. They can also help encourage the public to find related stories in their own family histories. Notably, these were all stories from soldiers who survived — the only story in the programme from a soldier who died was told by the grandson of Gottfried Sandrock, a German soldier who died on the Western Front with one of his son's baby shoes on his person. This is a further indicator of the power of family, not simply from a remembrance perspective but during the war itself. It also arguably served as a humanising reminder that the enemy shared the same attachment to family.

There were also descendants of more famous figures. The grandson of Alexander Carrick, a Scottish sculptor who made models from trench clay and produced war memorial miniatures, presented some of his grandfather's work. The grandson of Reverend George Kendall, the Senior Chaplain in the Royal Navy who was behind the selection for the Unknown Warrior, retold his grandfather's involvement in the process. The programme also managed to demonstrate a connection with the war in younger generations, as one of the guests was a 14-year-old boy who

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[48] 'World War 1 Special', *Antiques Roadshow* (BBC1 London, 2014).

collected medals from the conflict.[49] More unexpectedly, it also provided an opportunity for one member of the public to identify a connection without having come forth to do so. A gentleman had brought along a Canadian regiment banjo signed by its members, along with a photo of them. After he had played *It's a Long, Long Way to Tipperary* with the photo on display, a woman in the audience stated she recognised one of the men in the photo as one of her own ancestors. As his name was also signed on the banjo, she was able to form a previously unknown connection. It is entirely possible, of course, that the audience member was 'planted' for effect. Nevertheless, it demonstrated the power of sharing stories about the war, and the significant role of the BBC in bringing people together to do so.

Remembrance through Personal Stories

Family stories can endure without physical aids, and potentially also lead to a desire to better understand the events surrounding them. *The People Remember* (2016) covered several stories to this effect. Sir Matthew Pincent had tracked down many of his own descendants to the Great War, citing his appearance on *Who Do You Think You Are?* as the motivation to follow up on the details uncovered therein with further research. This again highlighted the part the BBC plays in promoting genealogy, and in providing people with the foundation to research family history on their own. Much of the programme was given to Anthony Battersby, whose father St John

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[49] On the significance of medals and memory, see Matthew Richardson, 'Medals, Memory and Meaning: Symbolism and Cultural Significance of Great War Medals', in Nicholas J. Saunders and Paul Cornish (eds.), *Contested Objects: Material Memories of the Great War* (London, 2009), pp. 104–118.

Battersby was the youngest known Commissioned Officer and an Accrington Pal. Anthony learned that St John was temporarily invalided after being hit by machine gun fire, yet was determined to return to the front where, two months later, he was hit by a shell and lost a leg. Anthony took his grandson Luca to the Somme to pass the story down — they visited the Thiepval memorial, then a recreated trench where they listened to a recording of a Chorley Pal and Luca tried on a Great War uniform, before they finally laid a wreath at the Accrington Pals memorial. Luca summed this experience up by reflecting, 'I never had to know that [world], and I hope I never have to know it', a sentiment shared by his grandfather.[50] The immersive aspects (particularly wearing the uniform) seemed reminiscent of *The Trench* (BBC2, 2002).[51] Moreover, the focus on Luca's perception of events is also denotative of 'the role of youth as vessels of memory'.[52] Winter has previously argued that 'the war was remembered initially and overwhelmingly as an event in family history'.[53] The proximity of the generations may be decreasing, yet we can see that this connection still has a place, and a particularly central one, in the BBC's commemoration of the war. Their role as a bridge between family history and national history has also been significant.

Where programmes were not explicitly related to family history, personal stories were often included to add a more intimate touch to formal proceedings. Whilst at the Thiepval

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[50] 'The Battle of the Somme', *The People Remember* (BBC1 London, 2016).
[51] For an in-depth consideration of this series, see Emma Hanna, 'Reality-Experiential History Documentaries: *The Trench* (BBC, 2002) and Britain's Modern Memory of the First World War', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 27, 4 (2007), pp. 531–548.
[52] Catriona Pennell, 'Learning Lessons from War? Inclusions and Exclusions in Teaching First World War History in English Secondary Schools', *History & Memory*, 28, 1 (2016), p. 38.
[53] Winter, 'Forms of Kinship and Remembrance', p. 42.

memorial for the Somme ceremony, broadcaster-historian Dan Snow noted: 'I have to live with the fact when I come here that there are names of people on that memorial there who are there because of decisions made by my great-grandfather'.[54] His great-grandfather was Lieutenant-General Sir Thomas D'Oyly Snow, who led the unsuccessful offensive at Gommecourt on the first day of the battle. Remarkably, Snow only made a connection to his great-grandfather, and not his great-great-grandfather David Lloyd George. One might argue that this more emotive connection triggered by being present at the memorial, weighs more heavily on his own 'memory' than that of the political side associated with Lloyd George. The following day, he spoke to Rifleman Harvey Gibbs about his experience of taking part in the ceremony, who related that 'it was really good [...] I just thought about family that were here, [...] it's hard to like take in what happened, [...] it's a good experience'.[55] Family connections therefore also provide a grounding for remembrance, and provide something specific to think about during the silence. Gibbs also acknowledged that some soldiers were excited to be at the Somme, noting that he himself was eager to be assigned to a conflict zone. We can thus see a mirroring of the variety of wartime experience extant in the Great War still present in modern warfare. Later in the day, Snow talked to attendees of the ceremony at the Thiepval memorial, who shared stories of their ancestors (sometimes aided by diary entries), and noted the impact of having these items and of travelling to the battlefields to trace their footsteps.[56] This demonstrated how possession of family stories can also fuel a desire to visit the battlefields.

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[54] *Battle of the Somme*: *The Vigil.*
[55] *Battle of the Somme: Zero Hour*.
[56] *The Centenary of the Battle of the Somme: Thiepval* (BBC1 London, 2016).

Of course, some family stories were darker than others, which also demonstrated how the trauma of war experience can be passed down through generations. Sunali Sharp spoke to Roy Millington at Thiepval, who was the son of Edgar, a stretcher bearer. His father was buried under earth for two days following a shell explosion and suffered shell shock as a result. He recalled being in an Anderson shelter aged twelve, watching as his father struggled to cope with the noise of the explosions above them; this had a lasting impact on his memory.[57] In this regard, the BBC demonstrated how our understanding of war can be greatly affected by those who survived it, not just those who died. Another attendee, Jack Wardle, a descendant of a Barnsley Pal, was inspired by his connection to the Pals to become involved in the production of a memorial stone.[58] Here we see that individual memory can become physically manifested, thereby opening itself to involvement in broader cultural memory. This is also indicative of the way in which objects can be not only sources of emotion, but expressions of them as well.[59]

There were further familial connections dotted throughout the BBC's centenary coverage. A cyclist on a charity bike ride (Ride to the Somme) featured on *Countryfile* noted that their motivation for taking part was the knowledge that three of their relatives died at the Somme, and later in the programme television presenter Helen Skelton learned about the experiences of her ancestors during the Great War.[60] At a ceremony for the centenary of Passchendaele, Dan Snow interviewed a woman whose grandfather and great-grandfather died on the same day of

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[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Downes, Holloway and Randles, 'A Feeling for Things', p. 11.
[60] 'A Remembrance Sunday Special', *Countryfile* (BBC2 England, 2016).

the battle.[61] Ahead of the ceremony for the anniversary of the Armistice, Baroness Williams spoke of her mother's experience of losing everyone she cared about in the war, highlighting a 'commonality of suffering, commonality of death, [and] commonality of wounds'.[62]

Scattered apart, these stories appear disjointed and too personal to be of relevance to broader cultural memory. Yet they do indicate a pattern, particularly within BBC broadcasting, to demonstrate that family provides a consistent connection to the past, even when those family members have passed away. The consistent drip-feeding of such stories also arguably served to support the omnipresent tropes of death and loss. At a slightly broader community level, the BBC broadcasted an episode of *Countryfile* on Remembrance Sunday 2018, in which Simon Blackwell, a local military historian in Rotherfield, East Sussex, noted he had researched the stories of the 93 men from the village who died in the Great War. The community had not previously been able to afford a stone memorial, but during the centenary they raised funds for a permanent memorial to be put in place.[63] This demonstrated how emotions can be heightened within a community through a shared experience of loss, as well as the centenary having been an opportunity for an increase in emotional foci.

In a particularly prominent example of connecting the public with an increasingly distant conflict, the veteran march past of the Cenotaph was followed by a civilian march past for the first time since 1919.[64] Dan Snow talked to some of the 10,000 members of the public who took part about the stories which had inspired them to be there. Ahead of the wreath laying ceremony,

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[61] 'In Flanders Fields'.
[62] *World War One Remembered: Westminster Abbey* (BBC1 London, 2018).
[63] 'East Sussex', *Countryfile* (BBC1 London, 2018).
[64] *World War One Remembered: The Cenotaph* (BBC1 London, 2018).

the Prince of Wales noted his own ancestors' parts in the Great War, adding that he viewed silence as a 'great and fitting tribute' to their memory.[65] The national attachment to the war in this way is reflective of a wider concept in which memory endures through the desire to understand where we come from.[66] It also reveals the importance of family in our understanding of both the world and history. It is worth noting that presenting a familial connection to war was an established practice in BBC broadcasts. When service personnel have died in recent conflicts, the families they leave behind have been presented as victims of war themselves.[67] If we understand contemporary conflicts in familial terms, we are likely to use this framework to interpret earlier conflicts in a similar manner; the BBC were therefore likely to adopt this approach for commemorative purposes. It is also reflective of the fact that memorials for the Great War have served as centrepieces of remembrance for subsequent conflicts.

In Flanders Fields

One of the consistent features of the Great War centenary on the BBC was their use of place and space, and the encouragement they made for the public to visit the battlefields to improve their understanding of the conflict. The BBC broadcasted ceremonies from several key memorials, both at home and abroad. Certainly, the impetus to hold ceremonies in these locations came from external organising bodies, yet the BBC utilised the opportunity to present vast panning

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[65] For a deeper exploration of the significance of silence in commemoration, see Gregory, *The Silence of Memory*.
[66] Todman, *The Great War*, p. 70
[67] Andrews, 'Mediating Remembrance', p. 359.

shots of the scenery, giving the public at home an impression of the scale of the memorials and their place in the surrounding landscape (which itself is essentially a mass grave). This section will look at how the BBC benefited from the use of iconic locations for ceremonies; their involvement in other programmes; representation of the impact the war had on the landscape, and the encouragement made by the corporation for the public to visit the battlefields to gain a better understanding of the war.

On Location

The Memorial to the Missing at Thiepval in France is an iconic structure, a monument 'of massive, lowering solidity and improbable, airy mobility';[68] unsurprisingly, it featured not only in remembrance ceremonies, but also in separate programmes broadcasted by the BBC. When the *Antiques Roadshow* shot an episode near it in 2014, they remarked on the fact it commemorates 72,000 soldiers, and ran film footage from *Battle of the Somme* (1916).[69] Despite the memorial's association with the Somme, the programme itself was not focused around that specific battle, hence we can infer that the BBC chose this location for other reasons. Space itself is undoubtedly one, as other similarly recognisable monuments, such as the Menin Gate in Ypres or Cenotaph at

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[68] David Crane, *Empires of the Dead: How One Man's Vision Led to the Creation of WWI's War Graves* (London, 2014), p. 214.

[69] On the making of the film and its contemporary impact, see Stephen Badsey, 'Battle of the Somme: British War-Propaganda', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 3, 2 (1983), pp. 99–115; Taylor Downing, 'Battle of the Somme: The Making of the 1916 Propaganda Film, *Historian*, 129 (2016), pp. 6–11; Nicholas Reeves, 'Cinema, Spectatorship and Propaganda: 'Battle of the Somme' (1916) and Its Contemporary Audience', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 17, 1 (1997), pp. 5–28; Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (New York, 1991), pp. 122–126.

Whitehall, do not have the same sprawling land (and space to film) around them. Additionally, its recognisability and imposing size lend it significance, whilst its association with the Somme merits a certain gravitas. When it was the location for the Somme memorial service, Huw Edwards noted that 'it dominates the landscape for miles around'.[70] As Thiepval has a range of additional sites in the vicinity, the camera also panned over Lochnagar Crater, showing a giant poppy in its centre.

Furthermore, the BBC filmed at different locations to convey the scale of commemoration taking place. Whilst broadcasting from Westminster Abbey for the Somme service, they displayed shots from vigils held at the Somme Museum, County Down; Scottish National War Memorial, Edinburgh; National Memorial Arboretum, Staffordshire and Llandaff Cathedral, Cardiff. This not only demonstrated the number of services taking place, but also their geographical spread across the UK. Possibly due to its prominent status, Thiepval was also the location for the Passchendaele commemoration ceremony. Here the BBC once again used panning shots of the surrounding areas to display the number of additional memorials and cemeteries scattered across the landscape, an action which further emphasised the scale of loss, and the swathes of land impacted both directly and indirectly by the war.

Locations were not simply convenient spaces for the BBC, as the places themselves are bound in memory.[71] The event held for the anniversary of the battle of Passchendaele in Ypres was significant because it was not simply a commemoration of the battle, but of the town itself

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[70] *Battle of the Somme: Zero Hour*.

[71] On the relationship between landscape and memory, see Brian S. Osborne, 'Landscapes, Memory, Monuments, and Commemoration: Putting Identity in its Place', *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 33, 3 (2001), pp. 39–77.

– both the part it played in the war and its significance to soldiers were referenced. It is indeed 'a transnational site of experience and memory, a global and local place'.[72] The third battle may be the most widely known, but this event recognised it was not the only one, and in broadcasting this the BBC presented an important message about spaces in war — that whilst we may (even collectively) associate a place with a specific event, the space itself will have a longer history with further defining moments. Therefore, in this manner the BBC aided in providing a form of geohistory for spaces on the Western Front, by placing recognisable locations in their historical context.

A Scarred Landscape

As acknowledged early in the BBC's centenary schedule, the Great War 'left physical and emotional scars all over Europe and beyond'.[73] Having considered the emotional scars, it would be pertinent to address the presentation of the physical scars which remain. Some are immediately apparent, such as the craters which carve the landscape. Others lie hidden – the remnants of war buried across the battlefields. Baroness Williams highlighted the inability of people to forget the war, particularly in France, 'because it's part now of the living soil of France'.[74] This notion of a link forged by the presence of foreign bodies in French soil was another common reference point. Benoit Mottrie, the Chairman of the Last Post Association, noted that

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[72] Mark Connelly and Stefan Goebel, *Ypres*, (Oxford, 2018), p. 200.
[73] 'World War 1 Special'.
[74] *Battle of the Somme: The Vigil*.

'their blood is in our soil, so there is always a link between Ypres and all those other cities and countries from where they came'.[75] This connection reached its emotional zenith when King Philippe of Belgium gave his speech later during the Passchendaele commemoration, noting of the British that 'your graves on our soil have become our graves on your soil'.[76] This aspect was represented more consciously by the BBC when David Olusoga picked up a handful of soil and, letting it slip through his fingers, noted the ongoing presence of thousands of remains in the Ypres Salient.[77] Here we see how the presence of physical remains provides an emotional connection between countries, alongside the continued reverence of battlefield soil (as established with its enshrinement in the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior).

Bodies and war paraphernalia continue to rise to the surface of the former battlefields every year. A documentary on the use of tunnelling during the Somme offensive touched on this with a sensitive approach, as the camera shots provided brief glimpses of a skeleton, a button and the heel of a boot.[78] The programme went on to note that some men will likely remain buried forever, as they travelled down a mine shaft where two miners are still buried underground, the tunnels serving as their own personal monument.[79] This connected with another common point of reference for the BBC: that of the history we are *not* able to see in the landscape today. The scars reveal a glimpse of the past, yet they are surrounded by countryside which has since recovered. This presents a striking juxtaposition between the beauty of the present day

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[75] 'For the Fallen'
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.
[78] *The Somme: Secret Tunnel Wars* (BBC4, 2018). A similar scenario was shown in *Timewatch: The Last Day of World War One* (BBC4, 2018).
[79] *The Somme: Secret Tunnel Wars*.

landscape of areas such as the Somme, with the harsh reality of their past.[80] What was not

remarked upon is how this reflected the nature-war dichotomy identified by the soldiers, as

outlined earlier in this chapter.

On a more literal note, the landscape itself bears the memory of the conflict. As noted by

Dan Snow during the Somme commemorations, 'the names of woods, farms and fields became

forever attached to the battalions who traded their lives for these tiny parts of France'.[81] In

addition to the landscape preserving memory, certain commemorative activities during the

centenary further memorialised certain spaces. For the Pages of the Sea event, portraits of

people associated with the war were engraved on beaches around the UK. The BBC provided

coverage of one event at Folkestone throughout the morning and showed shots of further

portraits at other locations later in the day. The commentator described the temporary

memorials in particularly striking terms: 'Eventually the waters of impatient tides rolled in across

each face, like the tears of a lost generation. Masked by the waves, but enduring in memory'.[82]

This interpretation seemed to echo the understanding of the landscape of the battlefields — that

time continues to heal them and conceal the past, but that we will continue to remember what

happened on those fields. Much like the BBC's virtual forms of commemoration, it is was also

symptomatic of a new, more modern kind of memorial, serving different purposes to those

produced in the post-war period. One of the contemporary benefits of those early memorials is

that they are tangible — mourners would touch them and the names inscribed on them.[83] They

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[80] *War of Words*.
[81] *Battle of the Somme: Thiepval*.
[82] *BBC News*, (BBC1 London, 11 November 2018 16:45).
[83] Winter, *Sites of Memory*, p. 113.

are also indicative of the increased importance of 'necronominalism' in modern history, where the naming of the dead on memorials avoids the 'unbearable' alternative of the unknown dead.[84] The design of the memorials, now bestowed with symbolism and awe, were similarly practical in origin. Their size was dictated by the sheer quantity of names with which they were inscribed.[85] Both Pages of the Sea and the virtual memorials produced by the BBC are intangible, and thus reflect a shift in purpose for memorialising the war dead. As we become further removed from the names on the memorials, our need to physically connect with them decreases, and so alternative forms of memorialisation come to the fore to reflect this change in purpose.

Battlefield Tourism

A frequent theme throughout the BBC's centenary coverage was the encouragement for people to visit the battlefields to gain a better understanding of the landscape for themselves. The suggestion that we can gain a better understanding of the Western Front by being there was outlined by Kirsty Young during the BBC's coverage of the Passchendaele commemoration, when she noted that 'it seems not just fitting, but absolutely vital that we stand here and recognise what happened 100 years ago'.[86] It was remarked upon during the Somme commemorations that in contrast to the numbers that attended the ceremony in 2016, the only person there in 1976

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[84] Thomas W. Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (Princeton, 2015), p. 366.
[85] Ibid., pp. 476–477.
[86] 'For The Fallen'.

was the priest, reflecting a growth in interest of the battlefields.[87] During the latter stages of these commemorations, Richard van Emden specifically encouraged schools to bring children to the Somme to 'get a feel for what happened'.[88] This usage of the term 'feel' implied an emotional connection with the landscape, beyond simply seeing it and understanding its geography. It is also of note that the emphasis was on visiting the battlefields themselves, not the plethora of museums in France which provide information about the landscape's history regarding the war. This could be seen to tie in with the aims of the First World War Centenary Battlefield Tours Programme (FWWCBTP), which intended to encourage participating pupils to develop their own understanding of events.[89] Visiting the former battlefields undoubtedly provides a better understanding of the Western Front; yet emphasising this aspect alone could potentially reinforce a Eurocentric understanding of the conflict, in contrast to more recent attempts by historians to expand historiography and discourse to other theatres of war. Overall, it indicated a suggestion on the BBC's part that understanding the conflict cannot be understood through textbooks and television programmes alone, presenting something of self-critical awareness of the limitations of their own media.

Yet visiting the battlefields and visualising the conflict through the remaining stimuli is still not deemed enough to understand it. Whilst cemeteries may be a more emotively powerful

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[87] *Battle of the Somme: Zero Hour*. On the history of battlefield tourism, see Jennifer Iles, 'Recalling the Ghosts of War: Performing Tourism on the Battlefields of the Western Front', *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 26, 2 (2006), pp. 162–180; David W. Lloyd, *Battlefield Tourism: Pilgrimage and the Commemoration of the Great War in Britain, Australia and Canada, 1919–1939* (Oxford, 1998); Bruce Scates, *Return to Gallipoli: Walking the Battlefields of the Great War* (Cambridge, 2006); Daniel J. Sherman, *The Construction of Memory in Interwar France* (London, 1999), pp. 35–49.

[88] *Battle of the Somme: Thiepval.*

[89] For a more in-depth analysis of the outcomes of the FWWCBTP, see Catriona Pennell, 'Taught to Remember? British Youth and First World War Centenary Battlefield Tours', *Cultural Trends*, 27, 2 (2018), pp. 83–98.

visual than statistics, Peter Barton noted that whilst looking at them we may try to understand the scale of death, 'but we will always fail, for our imaginations are, perhaps thankfully, ill-equipped'.[90] This tied in with an established historiographical thread which argues that whilst there are many ways in which we attempt to represent and interpret the war, we are ultimately incapable of doing so. Jay Winter interprets the ways we represent the war as 'lenses', designed to 'filter out some of its blinding, terrifying light'.[91] It was also reflective of an understanding during the war that the conflict was too difficult to accurately represent. Whilst outlining the life and work of the artist Paul Nash, Jonathon Bailey quoted from him that 'no pen or painting can convey this country'.[92] If the war is ultimately too complex to understand and represent, a more emotive understanding and memory of the conflict will be reinforced and maintained.

Overall, these elements combined to present an emotive image of war commemoration familiar with previous decades, yet there was evidence of some aspects of change. Familiar images of the battlefield were presented, but in a wide variety of forms, from accounts in diaries, oral testimony of veterans, and visual representations such as those during the Passchendaele ceremony in Ypres. Death was still the keystone of remembrance, although it was explored in more personalised terms than simple statistics. Poetry held a key role, albeit with a little more awareness of its emotive power over historiography. There were clear efforts to encourage the public to explore their family connections with the war, and also to visit the battlefields to connect with the landscape and understand it. All of these areas founded their connection with

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[90] 'End Game — End Spiel'.
[91] Winter, *War Beyond Words*, p. 1.
[92] 'For the Fallen'.

the war through emotion; primarily via the feelings evoked by their imagery or, in the sense of space, their impression. Emotion was clearly a significant component in the BBC's commemoration of the war, and whilst it was not the sole component, it held a power less commonly found in other aspects, such as the political motivations for commemoration of the war.

A European Tragedy: The Political Climate Then and Now

Despite its intended neutral stance, the BBC (and the content it broadcasts) has been unavoidably entangled with politics for most of the corporation's history, a matter which has often been subject to controversy.[1] This has included criticism targeted at a range of BBC broadcasting, from news coverage of current events to creative output. One of the more renowned and public instances of this was the debate raised by the then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, in which he argued against the showing of *Blackadder Goes Forth* in schools on the basis that it promoted a futile narrative about the war.[2] One historian has noted that the debate which followed highlighted the 'remarkable chasm between popular public memory in Britain of the war and academic research'.[3] What was particularly striking about Gove's argument though, was that he specifically referred to the Great War in relation to 'our nation's story' – not global history, or even European history. The nationalist undertones of his article unwittingly exposed a common flaw in representations of the conflict – it was a *global* one, and Anglo-centrism distorts this fact. Ultimately, however, Gove's argument served for little more than political point-scoring; in attacking left-wing academics, he failed to acknowledge the futility narratives pressed by right-wing academics such as the former Conservative MP Alan Clark in his work *The Donkeys* (1961), or Niall Ferguson's *The Pity of War* (1998). There is no clear-cut political divide

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[1] For details of political involvement and controversy across the BBC's history, see Briggs, *The BBC: The First Fifty Years*, pp. 66–68, 215–216; Briggs, *War of Words*, pp. 598–635; Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Sound and Vision* vol. IV (Oxford, 1979), pp. 613–686.

[2] Michael Gove, 'Why Does the Left Insist on Belittling True British Heroes? Michael Gove Asks Damning Question as the Anniversary of the First World War Approaches', *Daily Mail*, 2 January 2014, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2532930/MICHAEL-GOVE-Why-does-Left-insist-belittling-true-British-heroes.html [accessed 23 November 2018].

[3] Jones, 'Goodbye to All That?', p. 289.

for attitudes towards the war, and the root of the futility narrative that Gove was searching for can be more readily located in the historiography of the semi-centenary in the 1960s. Attempts to project a modern left-right political divide on the war is little more than an ahistorical anachronism.[4]

Politics, the BBC and the Centenary

The central argument over the BBC and its politics concerns the issue of impartiality. As a publicly funded institution, the corporation is expected to maintain a neutral stance, devoid of any overt political influence or government-leaning attitudes. Concerns over this issue are not new either — impartiality has been a problem since early on in the corporation's history.[5] Jamie Medhurst has noted that BBC1 and BBC2 'had, at the outset, a southern metropolitan bias'.[6] There are still accusations of political bias today, yet despite previous allegations of its focus there is no actual consensus on where the bias lies, with each political wing claiming a corporate predisposition in favour of the other.[7] The reason for this is open to interpretation — it could be argued that the BBC must be neutral if both sides perceive a bias, but it could also be viewed in relation to the growth in the extremes of the political spectrum. With regards to the war though, the implication often goes in the same direction; as well as the argument over *Blackadder* noted previously, there

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[4] Ibid., p. 287.
[5] Higgins, *This New Noise*, p. 31.
[6] Medhurst, 'What a Hullabaloo!', p. 278.
[7] 'Is the BBC Biased? 40 per cent of People Say Yes — But Disagree on Which Way', *iNews*, 16 May 2018, https://inews.co.uk/culture/television/bbc-left-right-wing-bias [accessed 8 May 2019].

were accusations of a left-wing bias after the BBC aired *The Monocled Mutineer* (1986).[8]

Of course, the political implications of commemoration are not exclusive to, or even born from, the BBC – as the original medium of commemoration, war memorials have been imbued with political messages since before the Great War began.[9] War itself is a highly politicised topic, thus it is impossible to approach it without some consideration of the political implications. Moreover, 'memory is political: what is forgotten is as important, says as much, as what is remembered'.[10] Thus, in addition to paying attention to what was said on the BBC during the centenary, this chapter will also consider areas which were less talked about.[11] It is apparent that the BBC found itself in a difficult position, having to post a neutral, broad representation against any potential criticism of bias. Despite this, the BBC was generally not criticised for its political approach to the centenary. Aside from its own political involvement, in its coverage of government events the BBC aired the political machinations and complexities of the nation's centenary as a whole. Commencing in a period when national identity was transforming and uncertain, the centenary combined a broad spectrum of motivations and involvement.[12] This unintentionally mirrored the political intricacies involved in the outbreak of the Great War itself. This was outlined during the Somme commemorations, when the Bishop of London noted that 'the 20th century had begun in a spirit of optimism. [...] It was a hopeful picture obliterated by

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[8] For a detailed exploration of this, see Hanna, *The Great War on the Small Screen*, pp. 116–117.
[9] See Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, pp. 46–47; King, *Memorials of the Great War*, p. 1. On more recent memorials, see Ross J. Wilson, 'Witnessing the Great War in Britain: Centenaries and the Making of Modern Identities', *Anglica*, 27, 3 (2018), pp. 235–239.
[10] Webber and Long, 'The Last Post', p. 275.
[11] Not in an exhaustive sense, as this would require a separate paper in itself.
[12] Andrews, 'Poppies, Tommies and Remembrance', p. 104.

massive failures of statesmanship'.[13] One might cynically argue that the UK's increasingly fractured relationship with Europe suggested a similar situation.

There was also some debate about the attention given by the public to the factors which led to the outbreak of war. Keith Jeffery argued that the general public perceive the Great War as 'little more than a futile slaughter for irrelevant issues in which millions of men (on all sides) had needlessly been sacrificed on some altar of obsolete militarism and patriotism'.[14] Arguments over the causes of the war and their relative importance are far too extensive to cover here, hence 2014 has been excluded from the scope of this paper. Moreover, perhaps it is even an area that we need to move on from — Heather Jones noted that the issue of futility has been dominating Great War discourse for the past forty years, and is a topic which has virtually been exhausted.[15] Yet it is debatable that we should abandon this area completely, as will be noted later in this chapter under discussion about the issue of avoiding such a war from happening again.

Despite ongoing controversies regarding the BBC's political neutrality, during the centenary they generally refrained from presenting overtly political opinions about the conduct of the war. They did broadcast the opinions of guests, but overall these were not particularly ground-breaking. During the Somme commemorations, Prince William acknowledged 'the failures of European governments, including our own, to prevent the catastrophe of world war'.[16]

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[13] *Battle of the Somme: The Vigil*. Heather Jones made a similar comment about the 'appalling outcome of the failure of international relations' on *Battle of the Somme: Thiepval*.
[14] Jeffery, 'Commemoration in the United Kingdom', p. 563
[15] Jones, 'Goodbye to All That?', p. 288.
[16] *Battle of the Somme: The Vigil*.

By eschewing an approach of placing the blame for the war solely with Germany, Prince William also highlighted the more complicated nature of the war's outbreak. It was also reflective of (or possibly even influenced by) recent historiography considering alternative factors in the outbreak of war.[17] This approach appeared elsewhere in the BBC's centenary coverage, including more explicitly at its conclusion on the anniversary of the Armistice, when Sir Harold Evans, Editor-at-large at Reuters, noted that Germany should not be held purely responsible for the war.[18] These viewpoints showed an encouraging awareness and desire to discuss the war beyond its usual terms, and at least some form of an attempt to eschew an Anglo-German-centric approach to, and understanding of, the conflict in general.

There was at least some attention given to previous political issues concerning the war on the BBC's part. An episode of *Our World War* entitled 'Pals' focused not only on the titular battalions, but also the matter of death by firing squad. Whilst searching for water in Trones Wood, Private Paddy Kennedy came across Private William Hunt, who claimed he had lost his battalion — Hunt was later accused of desertion and sentenced to death by firing squad, with Paddy being assigned as a member of the squad. The episode was told as a recollection during a discussion between Paddy and a chaplain. It also touched on areas such as the relationship between religion, morality and warfare, succinctly connected when Paddy noted to the chaplain, 'it's not the artillery that keeps you awake at night, is it, Father?'[19] At the end of the episode there was a note recalling the pardon of those killed by firing squad in 2006, followed by an audio

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[17] For example, Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (London, 2013).
[18] *The Andrew Marr Show*, (BBC1 London, 11 November 2018).
[19] 'Pals', *Our World War* (BBC1 London, 2014).

clip of Paddy from 1976 in which he remarked upon the camaraderie of Pals Battalions. The 'shot

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Figure 1: Our World War, BBC3

at dawn' issue is also centred around the pitying image of the soldier, with one historian viewing

it as 'the quintessential narrative of the individual life destroyed by those in power on behalf of

the "national" good'.[20] Thus we see that even in relatively modernised representations of war,

familiar themes about the war emerged. The series itself received a mixed reception by

reviewers; *The Guardian* praised its modernised videography as 'innovative', whereas *The*

Telegraph lambasted it as having 'a whiff of spoof'.[21]

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[20] Andrews, 'Poppies, Tommies and Remembrance', p. 113.
[21] 'Our World War Review – Excellent, Innovative and Moving Television', *The Guardian*, 8 August 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2014/aug/08/our-world-war-review-first-world-war-bbc3-cuckoo-siblings [accessed 22 February 2019]; 'Our World War, BBC Three, Review: "A Whiff of Spoof"', *The Telegraph*, 7 August 2014, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/tv-and-radio-reviews/11018605/Our-World-War-BBC-Three-review-a-whiff-of-spoof.html [accessed 22 February 2019].

Representations of Race and Gender

Despite attempts to present a unifying centenary of the war, there was an imbalance in the representation of the inclusion of ethnic minorities involved in the conflict, and the involvement of women in the war effort. The foundations of this imbalance were cemented by the research habits of the BBC in the twentieth century. The video interviews carried out for *The Great War* were frequently recycled throughout the BBC's centenary coverage. This revealed a rather striking flaw about their racial imbalance; whilst these interviews involved veterans from both sides, they were all of European descent, thus the documentary presented an 'exclusively Western depiction of the war'.[22] The compounding issue was that this could not be rectified for the centenary – all of the veterans had passed away, so the BBC had no choice but to use the footage they had previously recorded. Naturally, this was an irreversible handicap imposed by the limits of existing footage. It also effectively demonstrated the difficulty of finding new ways to commemorate an event for which all of the survivors have passed away, and thus the primary source material available is fixed. Nevertheless, it had far-reaching implications for the reception of the centenary in the UK. The various, contrasting narratives applied to the war are influenced by contemporary circumstances as much as they are by the past, yet Britain's multicultural nature often belies attempts to produce a universal sense of nationhood.[23] If the centenary was intended to unite the nation, it was inherently problematic for ethnic minorities residing within the nation to be less featured in the coverage of it.

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[22] Meghan Tinsley, '"We Will Re-Member Them": Muslims in the Great War Semi-Centenary', *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 14, 3 (2014), p. 408.
[23] Andrews, 'Poppies, Tommies and Remembrance', p. 105.

Despite this setback, there was some attempt to rectify it during centenary events. When diary entries were read out by armed forces personnel during commemorative ceremonies, those written by soldiers from other combatant nations were read out by serving soldiers of the same ethnicity. On a broader scale, there was also at least some indication of an improved understanding of the involvement of ethnic minorities in the conflict. Surveys across the centenary noted that in 2018, 71% of respondents knew that more than 1,000 troops came from India, up from 44% in 2012.[24] Yet this was not indicative of a complete understanding of the ethnic composition of Great War troops. The same survey found that only 22% of respondents in 2012 were aware of the involvement of Kenya, which only increased to 38% in 2018. This was likely due to more attention being given to the involvement of Indian troops than to the East African Campaign. This gives some weight to Andrew Mycock's claim that the government's centenary plans 'failed to recognise fully and to accommodate sufficiently the complex and entangled memories and histories of the citizens and nations of the UK and its former Empire'.[25] The BBC previously had an awareness of, relationship with, and representation of, the Empire[26] — perhaps this was merely a reflection of a decline in imperialism.

Whilst the BBC had little control over coverage in regard to government events, they had the ability to produce their own relevant programming, and there was at least some evidence of an attempt to engage with the involvement of the Empire beyond the tri-battle remit which this paper primarily concerns.[27] Yet given the involvement of Indian and South African troops at the

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[24] Buckerfield and Ballinger, *The People's Centenary*, p. 26.
[25] Mycock, 'The First World War Centenary in the UK', p. 161.
[26] Simon J. Potter, *Broadcasting Empire: The BBC and the British World, 1922–1970* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 1–15.
[27] *The World's War: Forgotten Soldiers of Empire* (BBC2 England, 2014).

Somme, their lack of representation in programming surrounding the battle's anniversary is arguably at least partially indicative of a racial bias. This lack of their involvement in programming was also reflected in the survey, which found that only 33% of respondents in 2018 recalled having heard anything about soldiers from the Empire (on any media format) during the centenary.[28]

It is noteworthy that where histories of BAME involvement in the Great War was covered, it was done so under the notion of a 'forgotten' history.[29] This concept is inherently problematic as it subliminally places a value judgement on the repression of certain histories as bad, and something that needs to be resurrected. Consideration is rarely given to why certain narratives in history have been 'forgotten'.[30] A key example in the roots of this example is the work of the Chinese Labour Corps during the war. There are two identified causes for the 'forgotten' status of their history: a primarily Anglocentric focus in English-language histories of the war, and a desire on the part of the Chinese to repress the narrative as a 'minor and shameful episode in the longer history of imperialist exploitation of China'.[31] The former reason indicates a lack of historical attention, in which case the broadcasting of 'forgotten' histories is an attempt to rectify it. The latter reason however, demonstrates why the term can be dangerous – if the group involved has actively decided not to promote an element of their history, where external groups take it upon themselves to do so instead, they remove the agency of such groups to dictate the

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[28] Buckerfield and Ballinger, *The People's Centenary*, p. 29.
[29] *The World's War*.
[30] For a broader consideration of the relationship between forgetting and cultural memory, see Paul Connerton, 'Seven Types of Forgetting', *Memory Studies*, 1, 1 (2008), pp. 59–71.
[31] Paul J. Bailey, 'Chinese Labour in World War I France and the Fluctuations of Historical Memory', *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 14, 2 (2014), pp. 372–373.

importance of their narratives. Thus the complexities of a globalised history of the war from the perspective of one nation become apparent.

There was a similarly low awareness of the involvement of troops from religions other than Christianity — this was particularly evident in regards to Muslim soldiers, whom only 38% of respondents in 2018 were aware of being involved.[32] One might argue, though, that this could also be due to the consistent prevalence of Christianity in remembrance tropes, from the prayers read at ceremonies to the Crosses of Sacrifice found at cemeteries and memorial sites across the continent. If Christianity has long dominated the character of remembrance in Britain,[33] then it is unsurprising that the BBC would simply echo this. This imbalance was also reflected across racial divides in regards to perceptions of the impact of the centenary. When asked in 2018 if the centenary had succeeded in uniting Britain, 53% of white respondents agreed it had, compared to only 33% of BAME respondents.[34] Given that television was one of the most widely recognised forms of information dissipation during the centenary, it apparently missed the opportunity to both broaden understanding of the war to a more global scale, and to achieve a more inclusive representation of wartime experience.[35]

A gender imbalance was also present, yet was somewhat less pronounced than the racial one. As with the reading of diary entries by members of the same ethnicity, women read out women's diary entries during commemorative events. It is noteworthy that these entries

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[32] Buckerfield and Ballinger, *The People's Centenary*, p. 17.
[33] For a detailed outline of this history, see Gregory, *The Silence of Memory*, pp. 184–207.
[34] Ibid., p. 28.
[35] On the history of the issue of racial representation in commemoration, see John Siblon, 'Negotiating Hierarchy and Memory: African and Caribbean Troops from Former British Colonies in London's Imperial Spaces', *London Journal*, 41, 3 (2016), pp. 299–312.

frequently involved a grieving mother or wife, thereby maintaining the centrality of the soldier

in wartime representation. This is indicative of an extant hierarchy within cultural memory, in

which the male combatant of the Western Front maintains primacy over other figures.[36] It also

reflected a gendered divide in perceived understanding of the war; women were less likely to

claim knowledge about the war and more likely to understand it in familial terms, opposed to

men who often claimed knowledge of a largely military nature, drawn from reading about the

war and engaging in masculine activities such as playing strategic war games.[37] Women's

involvement in the wartime effort was treated as something of a special subject, rather than an

integral part of events and, similarly to that of the experiences of BAME soldiers, the wartime

experiences of women were addressed in separate programming.[38] Their involvement did seem

to have achieved more awareness than soldiers from the Empire though — 44% of survey

respondents in 2014 and again in 2018 recalled having seen or heard something in the previous

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[36] Lucy Noakes, '"My Husband Is Interested in War Generally": Gender, Family History and the Emotional Legacies of Total War', *Women's History Review*, 27, 4 (2018), p. 614.
[37] Ibid., p. 618.
[38] *Kate Adie's Women of World War One* (BBC2 England, 2014).

two months about the role of women in the war.[39]

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Figure 2: Forgotten Soldiers of Empire (BBC).

Debating Commemoration

In a particularly strong moment of self-reflection, on 13 July 2017 MPs held a debate in the House of Commons about the commemoration of the Battle of Passchendaele, which was later broadcast on BBC Parliament.[40] The inclusion of BBC Parliament programming is something of an anomaly in the context of this paper, as it is not identified in the BBC's official centenary schedule,

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[39] Buckerfield and Ballinger, *The People's Centenary*, p. 29. The survey shows a slightly lower response to this question in 2016, which may be reflective of the fact that Kate Adie's programme was aired in 2014 and again in 2018.
[40] Full transcript available on Hansard https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2017-07-13/debates/69871535-88DE-4EF8-AE0C-9653C8E1B045/Passchendaele. A similar debate was held in the Lords Chamber on 19 October 2017, but this was not broadcast by the BBC.

and coverage from the House of Commons is broadcasted without external input from the BBC. However, the fact that this debate was broadcast *after* it took place in the Chamber implies the BBC felt it deserved its own programming slot, thus the content of the debate will be considered in comparison to the BBC's wider centenary coverage.

Present in the Chamber at the time of the debate were two police officers who had apprehended the murderer of MP Jo Cox, and their bravery was compared by Deputy Speaker Eleanor Laing to the men they sought to commemorate therein. It was also later pointed out that Jo Cox's plaque was on the wall alongside the memorial to MPs who gave their lives in conflict. Whether there are parallels to be drawn between the conflict the MPs died in and the political conflict that resulted in Cox's murder is open to speculation – it may simply refer to the loss of life during their service as MP.

The debate itself was led by John Glen, minister for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). He began by outlining the commemorative events that had taken place to date, before giving way to Jim Cunningham MP, who asked if there were plans to commemorate the Battle of Loos. This query seemed symptomatic of the delayed nature with which the government approached the centenary, given that the anniversary of Loos occurred two years earlier, and events were held in France and Scotland to mark it. Relatedly, Nick Thomas-Symonds MP asked for remembrance of those who had died before Passchendaele as well. It is unclear if this was indicative of a lack of awareness of the commemorative events that had taken place earlier in the centenary, or simply because there had not previously been a debate about it in the Commons. This would appear to support arguments that the centenary was poorly

planned by the government, having been approached at a later stage than it was by historians.[41]

The debate demonstrated an awareness of the significance of the topic of commemoration above usual affairs. When Julian Lewis MP presented photos showing the impact of the battle, the Deputy Speaker noted props were not usually allowed in the chamber (highlighting that their use and imagery could not be easily transcribed in Hansard), but recognised the value of their use in this case. Paul Flynn MP also presented a photo of his father who had joined the war at the age of fifteen.[42] In these situations, BBC Parliament proved a more useful means for understanding the debate than Hansard through its ability to provide images. What Flynn also demonstrated here though, was the inexorable connection between the war and its place in family history, as noted in more detail in the first chapter of this dissertation. There was also a reflection on the difference between how we perceive the two world wars. John Woodcock MP commented on the 'dreadful, needless mass loss of life' in the Great War, and pointed out that this was 'different to the Second World War'. This provides some indication that the tone of the centenary for the Second World War (on the government's part) may be slightly different.

Gratitude was also expressed towards partners who worked with the government during the centenary, such as the CWGC, and John Glen pointed out he was 'delighted' that the BBC was broadcasting the commemorative events they had organised. In a notable move from the overwhelming focus on the dead, Martin Docherty-Hughes MP asked if there would be

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[41] See Spiers, 'The British Centennial Commemoration', p. 78; Badsey, 'A Muddy Vision', p. 47.
[42] On the importance of photographs within cultural memory, see Justin Carville, '"This Postcard Album will Tell my Name, when I am quite Forgotten": Cultural Memory and First World War Soldier Photograph Albums', *Modernist Cultures*, 13, 3 (2018), pp. 417–444.

commemoration of those who survived and suffered shell shock. This also raised the question of why such a debate was not held earlier in (or before) the centenary, rather than in 2017 when there was little time left to arrange any new events. There also appeared to have been some uncertainty about what happened during the commemorations that had taken place. Liz Saville Roberts MP (along with several other Welsh MPs) talked about Hedd Wyn, noting that 'some stories are more retold than others'. Yet Hedd Wyn was a key figure in the Passchendaele commemoration ceremony, an apparent effort on the government's part to give representation to all member nations of the UK. This attempt to include all regions of the UK in commemoration was at odds with one historian's assessment of 'the conflation of British and English narratives informing state war commemoration', though his identification of the majority of funding being granted to England does carry more weight.[43] Therefore, it depends on whether the specific mention and brief coverage of events in parts of the UK outside England could be deemed as inclusive, or whether they were simply piecemeal acknowledgements which still implied an Anglo-myopic imbalance to the centenary.

The debate also highlighted the friction around the tone of events — commemoration as opposed to celebration. John Woodcock MP identified a tension between the need to commemorate, and concerns about what might be perceived as overwhelming levels of patriotism. This was comparable with an issue outlined by Keith Jeffery, of the difficult balance between the 'perceived historical significance of the event' and governmental encouragement of recognition of the armed forces, noting that it is difficult to be 'agnostic (at least) about the

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[43] Mycock, 'First World War Centenary in the UK', p. 158.

former without apparently denigrating the latter'.[44] This highlights the issue of how commemoration of those who served in a past conflict can be mediated with an urging for peace in the present. Andrew Murrison MP also addressed the issue of tone in the centenary, stating that 'this is commemoration, it is most certainly not celebration'.[45] One would assume he therefore placed a good deal of importance in relaying the history of the war, rather than celebratory ideas about it. Despite this (and indeed his involvement with the Centenary Advisory Group), he made the somewhat jarring claim that contemporary historians were more valid than current historians. This somewhat negated the methodology by which current historians work, and their ongoing efforts to continue unfolding events once all those who lived through them have passed away. It also disparaged the use of historians for the educational aspect of the centenary.

There was evidence of further incongruity of opinion in the debate. Following various references to waste of life, Mark Francis MP asked for young people to be allowed to recognise the sacrifice made by previous generations which enabled them to live freely. These two viewpoints are not concordant — a death cannot readily be viewed as sacrificial *and* wasteful. Given that the MPs gave no awareness of this during their debate, an image of a Schrödinger's War emerged, where the conflict was simultaneously a needless waste of life and a worthy battle for freedom until someone commented on it. Some disagreement also emerged throughout the debate over Sir Bill Cash MP's use of the term 'wonderful battle', whereby he qualified the usage

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[44] Jeffery, 'Commemoration in the United Kingdom', p. 564.
[45] *House of Commons: Passchendaele* (BBC Parliament, 2017).

as an 'admiration for heroism and courage'.[46] This demonstrated how tensions about the tone of commemoration extended beyond what should be commemorated, to what was to be regarded as appropriate terminology when doing so.

There also appeared to be a degree of a lack of understanding about the battle itself. Paul Flynn MP referred to Passchendaele as 'a terrible scene of slaughter where men died like cattle and lives were not counted, with 16 million deaths'. For all of the uncertainty over casualty figures for the battle, this was wide of even the highest estimate, being closer to the total for military and civilian deaths from both sides for the entire war. There is much to be said about the accuracy of facts presented in the centenary – this will be addressed in more detail in the next chapter. Additionally, Andrew Murrison MP asked who would have signed up to serve if they had known 'in advance what the cost would be'. Whilst no one would have had the specific foresight to know exactly what lay ahead, enough diary entries were read out during centenary commemorations demonstrating that many soldiers were aware of the probability of dying, and in some cases faced that reality with remarkable resolution. In the process of analogising with lessons to be learnt in regards to the Iraq War, Paul Flynn MP argued that the Great War was 'a terrible error' as it led to the Second World War. It is a rather reductive argument to claim that the Second World War happened purely because of the First, as it negates the geopolitical tensions which were extent prior to the war, and remained unresolved by the conflict. There were occasional references to the rain, yet no mention of how artillery barrages had destroyed the drainage ditches which resulted in the iconic flooding of the battlefield.

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[46] Ibid.

Much of this also reflected the difficulty around how our own political stances can impact our representation of (and discussion about) the war. Heather Jones noted that 'the legacy of the first world war [*sic*] often serves in contemporary Britain as a proxy for current identity politics, something which risks distorting public knowledge of the actual history of the conflict'.[47] This arguably demonstrates the need to acknowledge that whilst it is reasonable to consider the lessons that can be taken from the war, caution should be given to ensure that it does not obscure the ability to openly discuss different aspects of the conflict. It seems there was a fear that by acknowledging certain areas (such as men who served willingly and did not regret their service), one might be seen to endorse warfare in general, rather than simply addressing the reality of the variety of attitudes to the war. In this regard, political concerns over commemoration of the conflict were different to contemporary concerns, where support for the war effort united broad swathes of the political spectrum.[48] This also illustrated the need for commemoration to be at least partially separated from contemporary political standpoints.

Despite the nature of the debate, and an awareness of its significance, it was poorly attended. This was clearly an attempt for MPs to carry out their own form of memorialisation. It is therefore not clear why so few MPs felt the need to be present in the Chamber, and also why such a debate had not previously been held during the centenary, which might have allowed a broad discussion about what should be commemorated during the centenary. John Glen asked his fellow MPs to encourage their constituents to take part in commemorative events, yet mid-2017 seemed a little late in proceedings to suggest this. Had this been a more regular feature of

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[47] Jones, 'Goodbye to All That?', p. 287.
[48] Ibid., p. 288.

the centenary, they would also not have been left apparently uncertain about what had and had not happened in the preceding three years. This was undoubtedly at least partially a result of the delay in planning for the centenary. Given that the centenary for the Second World War will cover an additional two years, it would be prudent for lessons to be learned in this regard.

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Figure 3: House of Commons: Passchendaele (BBC Parliament).

Political Atmosphere

The centenary presented an opportunity to strengthen bonds with other nations by joining together in commemoration, and to reconcile the past with former opposing combatant nations. Therefore, it did not go unnoticed when the centenary found itself sharing the spotlight with two referendums: the 2014 Scottish Independence referendum, and the 2016 European Union (EU) Membership Referendum. The centenary was referred to for both — in relation to unity within

the United Kingdom for the former, and European relations for the latter. Due to the proximity of the EU Referendum to the Somme commemorations, it holds the most relevance here. As the debate over EU membership continued well beyond the referendum, the impact of the event reached from the Somme commemorations, through the Passchendaele ones and past the Armistice. The attention it garnered raised concern from some that it would 'mute' the centenary.[49] Whilst it did share a platform with the centenary, it did not steal the spotlight completely; instead it often served as a contextual aside for more political reflections on commemorative activities.[50]

The referendum also served as an occasional subtext for commentary, particularly in regard to the presence of European politicians at national commemoration events. At the first service for the commemoration of the Somme, the BBC's commentator noted it as an opportunity 'for David Cameron to leave his concerns over the current tumultuous political events at the door of the [Westminster] Abbey'.[51] At another Somme service the following day, Huw Edwards highlighted that it was one of the last events the prime minister would attend.[52] David Cameron may have intended for the centenary to be part of his political legacy, but he would not see it through — having previously announced his intention to resign, he did so formally less than two weeks after the Somme service. His departure from events did not signal the last mention of the referendum by the BBC though. At a commemoration ceremony for

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[49] 'Don't Let Brexit Talks "Mute Centenary" of Great War, Historian Warns', *BBC*, 29 December 2017, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-42512543?ocid [accessed 2 May 2019].
[50] On its application to memory of the war, see Jay Winter, 'Commemorating Catastrophe: 100 Years On', *War & Society*, 36, 4 (2017), p. 240.
[51] *Battle of the Somme: The Vigil*.
[52] *Battle of the Somme: Thiepval*.

Passchendaele in 2017, Prince William gave a speech under the Menin Gate in which he noted that 'during the First World War, British and Belgians stood shoulder to shoulder. 100 years on, we still stand together'.[53] Given the events unfolding at the time, this was a debatable notion, which Kirsty Young touched on later when she raised the 'political complexities' highlighted in his speech.[54] It is possible that as European reconciliation had been a growing feature of commemoration in recent decades, the UK evidently struggled to find ways to unite in commemoration that were not at odds with current political events.

The failure to recognise the implications of the referendum result on proceedings was reflected in another speech broadcast by the BBC, namely the debate about Passchendaele commemoration covered in detail earlier in this chapter. Andrew Murrison claimed that 'there is no country in Europe that is more engaged in Europe than the United Kingdom'.[55] This signified a failure to appreciate that the events being commemorated had taken place a century beforehand under different circumstances, and as such should maintain an awareness of the differences between the contemporary and current political atmospheres. On a broader scale, there was even the suggestion that the 'divisive and recriminatory atmosphere generated by the Referendum' might have impacted public engagement with centenary projects.[56] This was of course merely speculation, and there were various reasons why members of the public may not have been involved in commemoration activities. A survey published after the centenary found that 55% of respondents felt the centenary was important to bring people together at a time of

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[53] 'In Flanders Fields'.
[54] Ibid.
[55] *House of Commons: Passchendaele*.
[56] Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, p. 278.

division, outlining a clear awareness for its relevance and significance; however, only 13% recalled having taken part in centenary activities — there was no information given for the reasons behind this.[57] For some of the respondents, the practicalities of attending an event may simply have been unmanageable — in this regard, the BBC provided a useful means of bringing commemorative events in to peoples' homes.[58] Indeed, the ability of the BBC to bring public commemoration in to private spaces is one of its widely acknowledged benefits, and in doing so it symbolises the blurring of the two spheres of remembrance.[59] Nevertheless, the Referendum was a common reference point, and the consistent raising of the uncertainty of future Anglo-European relations was ironically juxtaposed with a key centenary theme – reconciliation.

Reconciliation

The Great War signalled something of a failure in European relations, so it seemed fitting that one of the overarching themes in the centenary was reconciliation between former warring nations. It was not a new theme, as reconciliation was at the centre of numerous events during the fiftieth anniversary of the conflict.[60] The key difference here is that during the centenary, reconciliatory efforts sat somewhat ironically next to the EU Referendum result, but regardless

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[57] Buckerfield and Ballinger, *The People's Centenary*, p. 13.
[58] Ibid., p. 9.
[59] In regards to the BBC's role here, see Andrews, 'Mediating Remembrance', p. 358. For the blurring of private and public remembrance, see Winter and Sivan, 'Setting the Framework', p. 10; Catherine Moriarty, 'Private Grief and Public Remembrance: British First World War Memorials', in Martin Evans and Ken Lunn (eds.), *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 1997), p. 125.
[60] Connelly and Goebel, *Ypres*, pp. 166–167.

of that the intention to maintain reasonable relations remained. It was arguably also part of a broader desire to learn the lessons of the past, as well as to avoid repeating the circumstances which led to it. The message of European unity may have been somewhat dampened by the result of the referendum, yet there were still clear efforts towards reconciliation and European cohesion. Stewart M. McDonald MP argued that the Great War highlighted the importance of international unity and peace.[61] The centenary provided an opportunity to practice this, by bringing nations together in commemoration. It should be noted that the centenary was not unique in its emphasis on reconciliation – this theme grew during the fiftieth anniversary, when Ypres was also a centralised point for reconciliatory commemoration.[62] The two connecting areas to be considered here are the importance of reconciliation (and the impact of the Referendum on this theme), and the value of learning why the Great War happened in order to identify and prevent similar circumstances arising in the future.

One of the foremost examples of reconciliation was the invitation for German politicians and diplomats to take part in commemorative events in Europe and the UK. The decision for President Frank-Walter Steinmeier to attend the Armistice service at the Cenotaph was particularly prominent, though it was not without opposition.[63] The significance of the invitation was recognised by the BBC though, as a newscaster referred to it as 'an historic gesture of

[61] *House of Commons: Passchendaele*.
[62] Connelly and Goebel, *Ypres*, pp. 166–168.
[63] See '"One Angry Veteran is One Too Many", *Daily Mail*, 24 September 2018, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6199859/Ex-Army-chief-warns-against-inviting-German-president-Cenotaph-armistice-100th-anniversary.html [accessed 3 May 2019]; 'Top Brass Fear Secret Plans to Invite Germany's President to the Cenotaph for WW1 Centenary Could Spark Outcry Among Veterans', *The Sun*, 23 September 2018, https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/7329146/ww1-centenary-cenotaph-german-plans [accessed 3 May 2019].

reconciliation'.[64] Steinmeier himself spoke in terms evocative of healing and reconciliation. During his speech at the Armistice service at Westminster Abbey, he read 1 St John 4: 7–11, which opens 'Dear friends, let us love one another'.[65] His open call for unity was at odds with the concerns expressed about his attendance, and might indicate that Europe was not moving away from the war at an even pace. There was also an awareness that reconciliation alone was not enough to avoid repeating the past. David Olusoga noted that Steinmeier had stressed the importance of paying attention to 'peripheral conflicts'.[66] His presence, and its significance in the use of the centenary as a platform for reconciliation, was particularly evident in the fact that the final official act of the centenary was a handshake between Steinmeier and the Queen.[67]

On a broader scale, there was awareness of the need to encourage reconciliation on the international stage, both during the war and in the present day. During the Somme service, Huw Edwards highlighted our duty to lead other nations in peace.[68] This was echoed by words from Tom Kettle, an Irishman from the Great War, when he stated that 'this tragedy of Europe may be and must be the prologue to the two reconciliations which all statesmen have dreamed: The reconciliation of Protestant Ulster with Ireland, and the reconciliation of Ireland with Great Britain'.[69] The use of this quotation during the Somme commemorations was particularly significant; at the service at Thiepval, Heather Jones noted the importance of the presence of President Higgins, as the Republic of Ireland had only held their first official state

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[64] *BBC News* (11 November 2018, 16:45).
[65] *World War One Remembered: Westminster Abbey*.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] *Battle of the Somme: The Vigil*.
[69] Ibid.

commemoration of the battle in 2006.[70] It was also a poignant point to make at a time when the unity of the UK appeared increasingly fragile. It was noted later in the commemorations that there was a drive for European peace and reconciliation in the inter-war period, and again after 1945.[71] The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, stated that the Great War failed to reconcile extant issues, thus the Second World War came about.[72] This serves as a useful balance to the usual sweeping phrases of 'never again' which bely the fact that a second global conflict did break out, instead encouraging the public to consider why the Great War failed to be the 'war to end all wars'.

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[70] *Battle of the Somme: Thiepval*.
[71] Ibid*.*
[72] *World War One Remembered: Westminster Abbey*.

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Figure 5: President Frank-Walter Steinmeier shakes hands with HRH Queen Elizabeth II.

Avoidance

Another commonly expressed view to this end was that we should do everything possible to ensure that the events of a century ago are never repeated (with or without reference to the Second World War). When opening the Somme commemoration service, the Dean of Westminster stated 'we shall pray that we continue to learn the lessons of history, to build a world at peace'.[73] This was similar to Jens Stoltenberg, the NATO Secretary General, when he appeared on BBC News and stated that we must not take peace for granted, and the need to

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[73] *Battle of the Somme: The Vigil.*

learn from the past.[74] The minor difference between the two appeared to be the extent to which each individual believed the world was at peace. In this regard, an awareness of the 'peripheral conflicts' noted by Steinmeier earlier seemed particularly prudent.

In a similar vein, the journalist and former *Sunday Times* editor Sir Harold Evans encouraged an active awareness of how the war started, noting that we must 'understand how nationalism, of a crude kind, got us into it'.[75] Perhaps it was an awareness of this in President Macron's words, broadcast on *BBC News* on the afternoon of the Armistice, when he urged hope for the future, and encouraged patriotism but not nationalism.[76] It was later noted that his encouragement of a 'stronger together' approach was also at odds with the political outlooks of the attending Presidents Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin.[77] In this manner, the BBC began to expose a tension between the reconciliations deemed necessary for the stability of international relations, and the difficulties in pursuing them on an increasingly unstable political stage. The relationship between nationalism and cultural memory has also been highlighted in historiography. George Mosse has argued that the 'Myth of the War Experience' would likely return if nationalism saw a resurgence.[78] As previously noted, nationalism had become an increasingly common topic in political discourse prior to and during the centenary. One historian has asserted that there was a paradoxical correlation between the increase in globalisation and the concurrent rise of nationalism.[79] It is therefore possible, concerning Mosse's Myth, that the

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[74] *BBC News* (BBC1 London, 11 November 2018, 22:30).
[75] *The Andrew Marr Show*.
[76] *BBC News* (11 November 2018, 16:45).
[77] *BBC News* (11 November 2018, 22:30).
[78] Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, p. 224.
[79] Beaumont, 'The Politics of Memory', p. 530.

struggle observed during the centenary between celebration and glorification was a result of increasing struggles with nationalism.

In general, the political approach to the centenary on the BBC's part was more concerned with contemporary political changes rather than any strong political interpretation of the war itself by the corporation. The European Referendum unavoidably generated a rather divisive political atmosphere, both in the UK and across Europe, which was made all the more apparent during shared commemorative events. Additionally, there was evidence of the relationship between politics and remembrance, as well as some specific politically charged aspects such as the Shot At Dawn campaign. The BBC may have been continuously embroiled in disagreements over their political leanings, but their coverage of the centenary did not add much fuel to this debate. What their broadcasts did demonstrate, was how the existing political environment can affect our interpretation of a historic one, and in turn the parallels we might then draw between them. One of the key messages of the centenary was to learn the lessons of the past in order to move towards peace, both internally and through international relations; at one of the most politically tumultuous moments in recent British history, this was a particularly significant theme.

Repetition *versus* Revision: Historians and Narrative on the BBC

It is clear that extant themes of remembrance were present in the BBC's centenary programmes. What remains is to determine whether these themes were utilised to express prevalent narratives from older historiography, or new narratives reflective of more recent historiography. This chapter will consider the broader context of the BBC's centenary activities with an overview of the schedule, as well as the use of technology in developing new ways to discuss and interpret the Great War. It will then address common narrative tropes adopted during centenary programming, namely the familiar 'Lions Led by Donkeys' argument, references to the previous landmark series *The Great War* (1964), and the use of statistics when discussing the conflict, particularly in regard to casualty numbers. It will then outline the use of historians by the BBC more specifically where they appeared on programmes rather than their role as consultants, as an element of present new narratives. Finally, it will examine two keystones within the centenary coverage, as case studies of the narratives the BBC wished to present.

The Centenary across the BBC

One of the primary goals for the centenary was to increase public knowledge about the Great War. As what was likely the last major commemoration of the conflict, it was potentially the final main opportunity to do so.[1] One of the earliest concerns raised, however, was that the front-loading of events in the government's plans would result in 'centenary fatigue' within the first

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[1] Badsey, 'A Muddy Vision', p. 46; Sheffield, 'A Once in a Century Opportunity?', p. 2.

year.[2] There was a similar balancing issue with the BBC's centenary schedule (See Appendix A). A significant amount of programming was broadcasted in 2014, with much of it before the anniversary of the outbreak of war. There may have been some awareness of this on the BBC's part, as they allocated 'a planned pause in the coverage in 2015'.[3] Intentionally or not, this arguably had the regrettable consequence of distorting public understanding of wartime chronology, by essentially suggesting that nothing of note happened in 1915.

This imbalance was not consistent across the BBC's broadcasting platforms – broadcasting of commemorative programming on radio remained reasonably steady across all four years (See Appendix A). This was potentially due to the difference between the two mediums in the nature of their audiences — someone can listen to the radio whilst carrying on with other tasks, whereas the visual stimulus of television requires focus to effectively digest the material. It was therefore possible for the BBC to commence its centenary season on Radio 3 with a remarkable 65 hours of material in January alone; to put this in context, the combined total of centenary programming across all BBC television channels in 2014 was 76 hours. These figures dwindled during the next few years with clear imbalances between the start, middle and end of the centenary schedule. Overall, the graph suggests a broadcasting schedule similar to a runner who started a marathon with an overzealous sprint, then ran out of energy for most of the course before finding a second wind at the end.[4]

The intensity of programming at the start of the centenary, in comparison to the rest, was

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[2] Ibid., p. 9; Jeffery, 'Commemoration in the United Kingdom', p. 566.
[3] Ellison, 'World War One on the BBC', p. 129.
[4] This frontloading of activity was also present in the wider centenary – see Jeffery, 'Commemoration in the United Kingdom', p. 566.

reflected in the number of people who recalled having recently seen something about the centenary on television, as the figure dropped from 48% in 2014 to 38% in 2018.[5] Given that the centenary for the Second World War will be two years longer, a more balanced approach to programming would be beneficial in this regard. There was however, a benefit to the explosion of activity on the BBC in 2014; the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) indicated that the 'flood of Centenary broadcasting' in 2014 was a potential factor in the 'surge in public interest' in the same year, and consequently also partially responsible for the unprecedented requests for funding the HLF received.[6] The role of the BBC within the promotion of anniversaries, and the impact of this further afield, is therefore clear.

Memorial Milestones

Anniversaries are the milestones of memory. Aside from their continuous status as fixed moments for remembrance, their purpose as milestones works in two different ways: the public experience anniversaries as an indicator of the increasing temporal distance of an event, and historians use them to consider the ways in which cultural memory of the event has (or has not) evolved over a period of time. Anniversaries also paradoxically transform historical events into current events, with media playing a key role in this through the emphasis of the importance of

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[5] Buckerfield and Ballinger, *The People's Centenary*, p. 29 .
[6] Karen Brookfield, 'The People's Centenary: A Perspective from the Heritage Lottery Fund', *Cultural Trends*, 27, 2 (2018), p. 120.

remembrance.[7]

Public adherence to remembrance rituals has been reflected in the consistent observance of Remembrance Day. The BBC has a longstanding relationship with this event in particular, with the service at the Cenotaph having first been broadcast on radio in 1928. This was a remarkable decision for a medium with an aural output, yet 'the crucial element in broadcasting the Silence was that it was not silence that was being broadcast, but rather the absence of deliberate noise'.[8] This is particularly evident in Whitehall, where the contrast between the silence on 11 November and the cacophony of sound present for the rest of the year is stark. Furthermore, by broadcasting the Silence into people's homes, the BBC has broadened awareness of this contrast whilst simultaneously expanding the sombre atmosphere of the Silence itself across the nation. In this manner, whether in public or in private, 'silence remains an essential part of our landscape of memory'.[9] As one of the longest-standing rituals in Great War remembrance, Remembrance Day has remained a key component in the BBC's annual schedule.[10] Throughout the centenary, broadcasts of the *The Royal British Legion Festival of Remembrance* on BBC1 consistently achieved an audience of over five million, which peaked in 2018 at over seven million.[11] Thus the

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[7] Tobias Ebbrecht, 'History, Public Memory and Media Event: Codes and Conventions of Historical Event-Television in Germany', *Media History*, 13, 2‑3 (2007), p. 223; T.G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper, 'The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration: Contexts, Structures and Dynamics' in T.G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper (eds) *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration* (London, 2015), p. 4. On the issues this involves with presentism, see Edgerton, 'Television as Historian', p. 3.

[8] Gregory, *The Silence of Memory*, p. 135.

[9] Winter, *War Beyond Words*, p. 202.

[10] On the history of Remembrance Day, see Mark Connelly, *The Great War, Memory and Ritual: Commemoration in the City and East London, 1916–1939* (Suffolk, 2002), pp. 139–149; Gregory, *The Silence of Memory*, pp. 8–50.

[11] 'Weekly Top 30', *British Audience Research Board*, https://www.barb.co.uk/viewing-data/four-screen-dashboard/ [accessed 17 June 2019]. This peak is somewhat diminished by the fact that the figures also indicate that over 4 million people changed the channel once *Strictly Come Dancing* had finished.

BBC broadened the 'landscape of memory' beyond memorials in to the privacy of peoples'

homes, and maintained the recognition of key anniversaries of the war in the process.

It has been noted that television served a further key role in the centenary; namely its

role in generating 'our obsession with commemoration and anniversaries, through its repetition

and continual re-narrativisation of grand historical narratives'.[12] The repetition aspect here is

pertinent, yet it is inaccurate to suggest that television in particular 'generates' this interest. The

BBC has an enduring tradition of promoting anniversaries to the public, originating with the

development of a working relationship with the IWM in 1923, wherein they frequently presented

the museum with a list of anniversaries they intended to mention and enquired if the IWM hosted

any relevant exhibits.[13] The repetition aspect on the other hand, is of significance in the use of

familiar images and footage, which in themselves serve as 'stereotyped symbols of past events'.[14]

The images most frequently used by the media thereby form the foundation for a visual

understanding of the war, and provide a 'lexicon of images' from which an understanding of

conflict and remembrance is formed.[15] This visual cache of wartime imagery has been built up

over decades of BBC broadcasting, originating with the opening montage of images for *The Great

War*, with which the public formed a strong connection.[16] These images, such as footage of the

explosion of the mine on Hawthorn Ridge, were recycled during the BBC's centenary to present

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[12] Amy Holdsworth, *Television, Memory and Nostalgia* (Baskingstoke, 2011), p. 1.

[13] Imperial War Museum, London, EN1/1/BRO/001, 'Correspondence regarding suggestions for programmes or features, including anniversaries of significant dates, and a talk by Sir Martin Conway about the IWM, broadcast on 12 November 1924'. This venture often proved fruitless, as the BBC neglected to realise that the IWM's focus was Great War exhibits, and as such were unable to help with many of the anniversaries presented to them.

[14] Ebbrecht, 'History, Public Memory and Media Event', p. 222.

[15] Andrews, 'Poppies, Tommies and Remembrance', p. 106.

[16] Hanna, *The Great War on the Small Screen*, p. 39.

a familiar imagery of war to the public.

Television and Other Technologies

Owing to its extant large audience, television was a well-placed medium to undertake the commemorative and educational objectives of the centenary. As noted in the introduction, television was the prime method through which the public encountered the centenary, with the BBC having been the most commonly cited source within this medium. To improve knowledge of the conflict, television producers needed to amend the narrative of programming surrounding the Great War to reflect more recent historiography, in order to move on from the popular narratives of previous decades (particularly the prominent futility narrative of the 1960s). As recently as the 1990s however, television was failing to keep pace with contemporary changes in historiography, partially due to documentary editors having been unwilling to present content which might be deemed controversial.[17] Therein lies the issue: television can only keep up with historiographical developments if producers are willing to present an unfamiliar narrative to the public. It is possible, of course, that the reasoning behind this apparent stagnation in narrative is purely pragmatic. Throughout previous decades, 'a complex network of narrative patterns, personal experiences, testimonies, [and] images' has been produced.[18] The development of these patterns is likely connected to audience reception, and where a particular narrative proves popular, producers will be unwilling to risk their ratings by veering from the established format.

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[17] Badsey, 'A Muddy Vision', p. 47; Roger Smither, 'Why is so much Television History about War?', in David Cannadine (ed.), *History and the Media* (Basingstoke, 2007), p. 51.
[18] Ebbrecht, 'History, Public Memory and Media Event', p. 232.

Nevertheless, keeping in step with previously established tropes would not change anything; if the BBC truly wished to take up the mantle of transforming popular knowledge, a new approach was required. Given the increasing number of technological media available in the digital era, there were numerous avenues through which such shifts could be enacted. The BBC clearly attempted to maximise the use of different mediums, with a prime example being 'Nothing to be Written', an interactive 360° video of the trenches (which also raised the issue of censorship in letters) intended for viewing using a virtual reality (VR) headset.[19] This utilisation of a relatively new technology was a promising indicator of the BBC's adoption of new platforms, and was also potentially an attempt to engage with younger generations. As VR technology continues to be developed (and if the BBC VR Hub remains active), it may be a more prominent feature of the centenary for the Second World War.

There was a recognised need to combine the expertise available with the technological opportunities presented by the medium of television. Jane Ellison, former Head of Creative Partnerships at the BBC, claimed that the centenary was 'built on world class academic excellence, curatorial expertise and artistic integrity — a unique combination that with new technology [has shaped] another chapter in the history of Commemoration [*sic*]'.[20] This highlights the importance of technology in modern commemoration, and connects with Winter's observations of the relationship between technological developments and the evolution of the

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[19] 'Nothing to be Written', *BBC*, https://canvas-story.bbcrewind.co.uk/sites/virtual-reality-prom [accessed 18 June 2019]. The video can be viewed without VR technology using the navigational controls on screen.
[20] Ellison, 'World War One on the BBC', p. 129.

previous 'memory booms'.[21] Television, in conjunction with the Internet, demonstrated its key

role in producing a digital archive for the future, which could preserve this period in the history

of commemoration. There was some evidence that the BBC utilised the Internet as a

supplementary source of information to television broadcasts. Their 'World War One' website

provides additional articles to topics covered during the centenary.[22] Yet the permanence of this

archive of information is uncertain; whilst the main website was still active at the time of writing,

the 'Somme 100' website, which they produced with additional information about the battle for

2016, has since been removed and replaced with a reduced version with a handful of video clips.[23]

The disappearance of websites has thrown into question the digital legacy the centenary was

expected to leave behind. Despite the centenary having rendered the Great War as 'the most

digitally documented period in history, [...] it is not clear that this material will be discoverable or

useable in 5, let alone 50 or 100, years' time'.[24] Even if the websites are collected by the British

Library Web Archive, with access for many sites only possible on their physical premises, the

availability of sources of information on the war in these instances will be no better than the

traditional archives primarily inhabited by professional historians and research enthusiasts.

The relationship between history, television, and the broader technological landscape is

evidently not a settled one. This might in part be due to the clashes between history as practice,

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[21] Winter, *War Beyond Words*, pp. 203–205. On the relationship between the memory of the war and the Internet, see Nils Fabiansson, 'The Internet and the Great War: The Impact on the Making and Meaning of Great War History', in Nicholas J. Saunders (ed.) *Matters of Conflict: Material Culture, Memory and the First World War* (London, 2004), pp. 166–178.
[22] 'World War One', *BBC*, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01nb93y [accessed 18 June 2019].
[23] Previous versions of the website are available on the British Library Web Archive, yet only on their premises, which removes the accessible nature of websites.
[24] Brookfield, 'The People's Centenary', p. 122.

and history as television. As Stephen Badsey has noted, 'what makes good history may not make good TV'.[25] Producers face the unenviable task of appeasing historians with rigorous analysis on the one hand, and entertaining the average viewer enough to keep them tuned in on the other. The modern world, with its consistently growing plethora of channels, has ensured that maintaining an audience is far more difficult now than it was in the early years of the BBC. Thus, 'as producers chase discerning, discriminating, elusive and fickle audiences with their fingers on the remote control button, remembrance television has had to become more televisual, hybridizing remembrance and entertainment'.[26] This connects with previously raised concerns that an audience will not stay with a programme for the sole purpose of being informed and educated.[27] This may have been the awareness reflected by Director R.F. Palmer in 1924 when, in response to revisions to a programme suggested by the Imperial War Museum, he stated that 'one can hardly expect every member of our immense audience to take sufficient interest in this subject to obtain and read books'.[28] The need to entertain the audience therefore cannot be ignored by producers at the expense of not entertaining the audience.

Unsurprisingly, attempts made by the BBC at engaging with audiences through new methods was not always welcomed. As noted earlier in this dissertation, *Our World War* was criticised by one reviewer for its markedly modern soundtrack and jerky gun-cam footage. Whilst this may have been jarring to someone unfamiliar with these cultural forms, they would have been entirely recognisable to a young audience with experience of shooting games and similar

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[25] Badsey, 'A Muddy Vision', p. 46.
[26] Andrews, 'Mediating Remembrance', p. 361.
[27] Higgins, *This New Noise*, p. 53.
[28] Imperial War Museum, EN1/1/BRO/001.

musical genres. The most pertinent example of this in the broader centenary was the launch

trailer for *Battlefield 1*, which featured rapidly changing perspectives of war to the thumping

soundtrack of a dubstep cover of *Seven Nation Army*.[29] Considering that BBC 3 has the younger

generation as a target audience (reflective of its current existence online only), such a method of

presentation was understandable. Thus, whilst the BBC found itself trying to not only appease a

cross-section of audience type (professional historians and the public), but also a cross-

generational audience, the effective utilisation of different channels (and viewing platforms) was

evident as a means for resolving this.

The heyday that television has enjoyed since the fiftieth anniversary of the war is

becoming increasingly tenuous, however, as alternative technologies and media outlets encroach

on its cultural dominance. In addition to the vast competition faced by the BBC on television,

online on-demand streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime have been rapidly

increasing their audience share, putting the future of live broadcasting in a state of uncertainty.

Whilst live television viewing has remained the primary means of watching programmes, the gap

between live television and delayed, on-demand viewing of television programmes has been

slowly narrowing since its introduction.[30] Furthermore, subscription numbers for streaming

services have been rapidly outstripping prominent cable companies. Whereas it took Sky twenty

years to achieve 10 million subscriptions, Netflix was estimated to have reached this in only seven

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[29] EA DICE, *Battlefield 1* (2016), Microsoft Windows, Playstation 4 and Xbox One. Trailer viewable online: Battlefield, *Battlefield 1 Official Reveal Trailer*, YouTube, 6 May 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c7nRTF2SowQ [accessed 18 June 2019].

[30] 'Catch-up and Live TV Compared', *British Audience Research Board*, https://www.barb.co.uk/viewing-data/catch-up-and-live-tv-compared [accessed 18 June 2019].

years in early 2019, having overtaken the subscription numbers for Sky in 2018.[31] Whilst the total

number of active TV licences in the UK in 2018 was 25.8 million,[32] this does not necessarily

suggest that all of the licence holders were watching BBC channels – as a licence is necessary for

the ownership of a TV, this will include people who own 'smart' televisions and primarily use

applications such as Netflix. Whilst the BBC maintained its prominence in centenary awareness,

a different scenario for the centenary of the Second World War is. Whereas Netflix has, at the

time of writing, less than ten programmes and series related to the First World War, they have

over 40 related to the Second World War.[33] It is possible that the increased prominence of

content related to the later conflict may be reflected in its increased relevance in that war's

centenary.

Popular Tropes

The tone and delivery of narrative was an important factor in the BBC's success in improving

public knowledge of the Great War during the centenary. One of the issues encountered was the

lack of consistency in the chronology of the overall narrative, as previously mentioned, regarding

the imbalance of coverage across the four years. By providing extensive coverage around the

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[31] 'Netflix to Overtake Sky's Satellite TV Subscriptions by End of Year', *The Guardian*, 23 December 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/media/2018/dec/23/netflix-to-overtake-sky-satelite-tv-subscriptions-by-end-of-year [accessed 18 June 2019].
[32] 'Licenses Facts and Figures', *TV Licensing*, https://www.tvlicensing.co.uk/about/foi-licences-facts-and-figures-AB18 [accessed 19 June 2019].
[33] For the First World War, see *Netflix* https://www.netflix.com/search?q=World%20War%20I&suggestionId=108261_collection; For the Second World War, see *Netflix* https://www.netflix.com/search?q=World%20War%20I&suggestionId=108262_collection [accessed 19 June 2019].

outbreak of the war, and then having very little until the anniversary of the Somme in 2016, in addition to disrupting awareness of wartime chronology the BBC also re-emphasised the importance of the Somme in public understanding of the war. The Somme has long served as a keystone in the futility narrative of the war; a failure to develop on this epitomising approach to the battle would fail to move public understanding beyond that decade. It is therefore pertinent to consider whether tropes associated with the futility narrative, such as 'lions led by donkeys', endured during the BBC's centenary programming. Other narrative aspects will also be considered: the involvement of previously popular narratives such as *The Great War*; the reliance on statistics to inform and drive the narrative; the involvement of historians in lending expertise to the BBC's coverage; and finally two case studies which demonstrated the presentation of a 'new' narrative in a familiar format, and the presentation of a familiar narrative in a 'new' way.

Firstly however, it would be useful to outline how historiography of the Great War developed across the course of the past century, in order to effectively understand what sort of narratives the BBC presented, and whether or not they can be viewed as up-to-date. Winter and Prost produced a generational model of historiography on the conflict, outlining its progression in several stages. Accounts produced by contemporaries in the immediate aftermath of the war generally had a focus on military and diplomatic issues, with the inclusion of politics where it connected with these areas. There was also the notable omission of combatants from historical works – despite the deluge of memoirs in the post-war period,[34] contemporary historians focussed on 'history from above'. History of the war was in its infancy in this stage, and thus drew

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[34] On the post-war publishing period, see Janet S. K. Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 185–218.

from a restrictive group of sources. Following a pause in discussion brought about by the Second World War, increases in higher education, and thus historians, during the latter half of the twentieth century resulted in the emergence of social history, and a shift towards 'history from below'. The increased attention towards areas beyond the military also invited more global histories of the war. Crucially, combatant accounts were also utilised as sources, with the veterans themselves producing new publications as they approached their later years in life. This was also the period in which programmes about the war began to be produced, thus opening up further sources for research. These developments also produced changes in military history, such as a shift in focus from the origins of the war to the aims of it. The final generation of historiography emerged naturally from the second – cultural history was an emphasis on a particular aspect of social history. This focus on more psychological aspects of history also brought about the rise of memory studies. Questions also developed beyond what people lived through, to how they felt about it, and also considered the war's impact on various aspects of society. All three forms of history remain present in modern historiography, with the emphasis of each field remaining generally the same.[35]

'Lions Led by Donkeys'?

This phrase has served as a sound-bite criticism of the failure of foolish Great War generals to adequately lead and protect their brave soldiers. It became the title for a programme on Channel

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[35] For a detailed explanation of the generations in this paragraph, see Winter and Prost, *The Great War in History*, pp. 7–31.

4 in 1985, which was the first programme to be openly critical of British High Command.[36] The idiom shares a strong association with the Somme, for which the death toll of the first day alone has often been conveyed as a catastrophic failure of British generalship. When discussing the battle before the ceremony at Thiepval, Dan Snow stated of the men that 'their generals had sent them in with the wrong tactics'.[37] He did not offer any input on why the objectives were initially unsuccessful, or what the 'right' tactics might have been.

In countenance to this, some academics have argued that rather than being an indication of failure, it was a single part of a long learning process.[38] This 'learning' motif was also echoed in centenary broadcasts. During further BBC coverage of commemorations for the battle, David Olusoga described the Somme as 'an awful and tragic stepping stone in a long process of learning'.[39] When Margaret Macmillan appeared on the BBC's coverage of the Armistice ceremony, she argued that the 'donkeys' analogy was unfair as the generals were learning.[40] Opinions about the learning process during the war have not been widely agreed upon amongst historians – despite the prevalence of the 'learning curve' interpretation in military historiographical discourse, it is not universally accepted.[41] Even alternatives to the learning curve, such as the 'staircase' posited by Gordon Corrigan,[42] do not allow for any setbacks in progress of warfare strategy.

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[36] Hanna, *The Great War on the Small Screen*, p. 22.
[37] *Battle of the Somme: Thiepval*.
[38] See Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*.
[39] *Battle of the Somme: Thiepval*.
[40] *World War One Remembered: The Cenotaph*.
[41] Heather Jones, 'As the Centenary Approaches: The Regeneration of First World War Historiography', *Historical Journal*, 56, 3 (2013), p. 862.
[42] Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycock*, p. 284.

The Somme was not the only example of this narrative though; during a discussion in the House of Commons about the Passchendaele commemorations, Paul Flynn MP referred to the battle as 'a terrible misjudgement' by leadership.[43] Thus we see that across the BBC's different outlets for centenary coverage, there was no clear consensus on whether the generals failed, or whether they had been learning. This is reflective of a conflicting narrative about futility present across the BBC's centenary as a whole — the Schrödinger's War concept outlined earlier.

Echoes of a Great Past

Given the success of their landmark series from the fiftieth anniversary of the conflict, it was unsurprising that *The Great War* (1964) served as an inspiration for the BBC's centenary programming. Speaking at the launch event for their World War One season, Director-General Tony Hall opened proceedings by recalling the series as one of his 'vivid' childhood memories, which represented 'the BBC at its best'.[44] Indeed, *The Great War* has proved a lasting foundation in the BBC's programming in relation to the conflict in the decades since, including the centenary. One of its defining features was the fact it gave a voice to low-ranking veterans, an aspect which was maintained through recycled footage and recordings of them during the centenary. This is also part of an ongoing trend in the personalisation of historical television, in which witnesses of historical events serve as 'protagonists' in related programming.[45] Indeed, the flurry of activity

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[43] *House of Commons: Passchendaele*.
[44] World War One Comms Launch.
[45] Ebbrecht, 'History, Public Memory and Media Event', p. 225.

around them when it became clear there was a diminishing amount of time left to collect their stories resulted in a 'moment of reinvigoration' of Great War memorialisation 'which preceded, perhaps perforce, the anniversary marked by 2014'.[46] As previously mentioned, the passing of the veterans meant no further recordings of them could be obtained. In this regard, it is their echoes, and those recorded for previous documentaries such as *The Great War*, which will endure in cultural memory through their repetition on the BBC.

Commemorating by Numbers

A regular feature throughout the centenary, both within BBC coverage and beyond, was the habitual deployment of statistics. Undoubtedly intended to provide short, clear facts about the conflict, their use was hampered by two issues: they were often incorrect or misleading, and they lent nothing towards a deepened understanding of the war. Their inaccurate use did not go unnoticed; Stephen Badsey noted that in an interview Stephen Knight, the writer for *Peaky Blinders*, claimed that 60,000 men died each day – if this had been the case, the total death toll for the war would have been over double the population of the UK.[47] The frequent and dominating use of statistics is particularly prevalent in relation to the Somme. Viewers would have struggled to watch any coverage of the Somme commemorations without encountering the

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[46] Webber and Long, 'The Last Post', p. 274.
[47] Badsey, 'A Muddy Vision', p. 47. The interview he indirectly refers to can be found in: 'Who Were the Real Peaky Blinders?', *Radio Times*, 7 June 2019, https://www.radiotimes.com/news/2019-06-07/who-were-the-peaky-blinders [accessed 18 June 2019].

ubiquitous figure of 60,000 in relation to first-day casualties.[48] As noted in the first chapter,
reducing men to a statistic enacts a disservice to their memory. The relationship between such
statistics and futility narratives of the war is also reflected by the fact it the figure was often
quoted near the start of the programme, reaffirming extant popular ideas about the battle before
any in-depth discussion took place. A further issue here is that casualty figures were often
presented as fact, with no allusion to their existence as estimates, nor any indication of their
inclusion or exclusion of civilians. As there have been recent efforts to demonstrate the difficult
of relaying figures for the war,[49] their unproblematic application should be redressed. Thus, if
casualty figures were the main takeaway for the public from the BBC's centenary programming,
then understanding of the war was arguably not improved. Statistics do not explain how battles
unfolded, or how the war progressed, or even the lives lived by the men they impersonally refer
to, thus they provide no representation of the complexity and nuance of wartime experiences.

Historians and the BBC

One of the goals outlined in the BBC's plans for the centenary was to improve understanding of
the war. Indeed, at the centenary launch event, then World War One Centenary Controller Adrian
Van Klaveren explicitly outlined the use of 'today's most eminent historians […] to take a fresh

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[48] Mentioned on *Battle of the Somme: The Vigil*; *Battle of the Somme: Zero Hour*; *Battle of the Somme: Thiepval*; 'Somme Centenary Service', *BBC News Special* (BBC News 24, 2016); 'The Battle of the Somme', *The People Remember*.
[49] Antoine Prost, 'The Dead', in Jay Winter et al (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the First World War* vol. III (Cambridge, 2016), pp. 563–567.

look at the war itself and how it shaped the world in which we now live'.[50] This necessitated experts in the field being featured in programmes, and by their use as historical consultants off-camera. There were also more specific initiatives for involving historians with the centenary. As part of the 'World War One at Home' project, which sought to describe the impact of the war within each part of the UK and Ireland, the BBC partnered with the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the Imperial War Museum, and selected a group of historians as researchers for each of the BBC Nations (i.e. BBC Scotland, BBC Wales and BBC Northern Ireland). The project has produced an archive of information available online (at present),[51] demonstrating the importance of historians in the educational legacy produced by the BBC during the centenary.

Given the impetus behind education, it was of little surprise that the BBC also frequently used historians during coverage of live events, albeit the largely repetitive use of a small group. Despite this small catchment of historians – a common practice within the BBC[52] – a balance in viewpoints was still broadly achieved. Richard van Emden featured regularly on BBC panels commenting on the coverage of government centenary events. His authority on the subject matter was often presented in reference to the significant number of interviews he had previously carried out with veterans, an aspect which tallied with the BBC's consistent use of interviews across their programmes. Dan Snow was more active in his role as presenter, interviewing members of the public attending events as well as relevant experts in the field on location, though he did occasionally contribute his own opinion on the issues at hand. David

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[50] Adrian Van Klaveren, World War One Comms Launch, 16 October 2013.
[51] Available at 'World War One at Home', *BBC*, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01nhwgx [accessed 12 July 2019].
[52] Higgins, *This New Noise*, p. 59.

Barton presented two documentaries on the Somme, with emphasis on aspects of battlefield archaeology as per some of his recent work.[53] David Olusoga appeared on several panels, provided short documentary sections during programmes and also presented programmes for other areas of the centenary. Through their regular appearances, these historians formed a foundation of understanding upon which the rest of the centenary coverage was built.

When panels were used to accompany coverage of government events, guest historians often appeared alongside the regular ones. Heather Jones appeared on one such panel during coverage of the commemoration of the Somme, which she described as 'a touchstone for all the carnage of the First World War'.[54] Her cultural knowledge of the war was usefully manifested in noting the experiences of surviving soldiers and their families, as well as understanding the contemporary cultural impetus behind enlistment. Sophie De Schaepdrijver participated in the panel for the Passchendaele commemorations. Despite presenter Kirsty Young's consistent appeals for her input 'as a Belgian', De Schaepdrijver noted the need of an awareness of transnational suffering in our commemorations, as well as highlighting a public 'disconnect coupled with an intense desire to understand'.[55] This is reflective of the findings of the *People's Centenary* survey as discussed in the next section of this chapter.

There is evidence of clashes between the BBC and the professional historians whose expertise they have sought out. As per the title of their centenary season, the BBC adopted 'World War One' in reference to the conflict. Some academics prefer, and thus more readily use,

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[53] Peter Barton, Peter Doyle and John Vandewalle, *Beneath Flanders Fields: The Tunnellers' War 1914–1918* (Staplehurst, 2007).
[54] *Battle of the Somme: Thiepval*.
[55] 'For the Fallen'.

alternative terms such as 'the Great War' or 'First World War'. Thus, whilst recording a video for the BBC website, one historian undertook numerous takes due to their automatic use of the term 'First World War' in contrast to the BBC's preferred term.[56] As noted previously in this paper, agreement on matters was not always present between BBC historians and external experts either, as Glyn Prysor challenged (or rather attempted to challenge) Dan Snow on his argument that the Battle of the Somme could be judged purely on the amount of land gained by its conclusion. As Prysor's rebuttal was cut short though, Snow's argument remained the dominant note, highlighting that the weight of the narrative put across depended on the historians most commonly used by the BBC.

Use of Non-Historians

Just as the government's centenary advisory committee featured authors and military personnel alongside historians, the BBC sought expertise in other forms for programmes. As previously noted in this dissertation, members of the armed forces were often interviewed to offer their views on the conflict through the lens of their own military experience. As they also took an active role in remembrance ceremonies, their involvement in proceedings is understandable. The use of authors by the government signifies an intent on their part to add an element of emotional atmosphere to commemorations – whereas historians are more adept at explaining how the war unfolded, creative writers are more familiar with describing how the war felt, thus reinforcing

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[56] Tweet by Gary Sheffield, *Twitter*, @ProfGSheffield, 4 June 2019, https://twitter.com/ProfGSheffield/status/1135855920221630464 [accessed 19 June 2019].

the role of emotional understanding of the conflict within the centenary. Their use by the BBC, however, was generally intended to utilise their relevant expertise – poets and authors were featured in the programmes on poetry discussed previously – although this still contributed to the emotive theme.

Narrative Keystones

Whilst analysis of narratives across the BBC's centenary has provided a good indication of the messages they wished to present, more specific analysis of key programmes can shed further light on prominent tropes. Programmes associated with two of the BBC's keystone anniversaries, specifically *The Somme 1916: From Both Sides of the Wires* for the titular battle, and *They Shall Not Grow Old* for the Armistice will now be considered in further detail. Whilst the BBC was only directly responsible for producing the former, their involvement and promotion with the latter outlines it for consideration as well. Both series were championed as presenting revolutionary aspects; respectively a transnational approach to the Somme, and a colourised, purely veteran-driven account of the war. As with other elements of centenary programming, the use of colourised footage in historical television documentaries was not new, and had been an evolving televisual trend for some time.[57] Anglo-German presentations of the battle were not a new development when historiography is considered either. Neither of these aspects were actually revolutionary in the wider context of histories of the war, instead being indicative of the

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[57] Ebbrecht, 'History, Public Memory and Media Event', pp. 225–226.

separation between television and history as practice, and also of a tendency to treat each application of a technique (i.e. colourisation) as new when it is applied to different footage.

The Somme 1916: From Both Sides of the Wire

This three-part documentary, presented on the battlefields by military historian and battlefield archaeologist Peter Barton, had the outlined intention to redress the primarily Anglo-centric focus prevalent in previous histories of the Somme. This was reflected in the naming of the episodes, with the title for each given in English and German. The titles were also presented in blue and red respectively, a visual aid for understanding the front lines shown on maps during the programmes. The presentation of this Anglo-German approach as pioneering did not sit well with some historians, with one complainant highlighting that Anglo-German histories of the Somme were not a new historiographical development.[58] This was true, yet it is likely this 'unique' aspect was in specific reference to previous television programmes rather than previous histories as a whole.

Throughout the series, first-hand accounts from soldiers were read out as evidence and to give authenticity to the narrative, though this authenticity was hampered somewhat by painfully artificial German accents. This jarring feature was slightly immersion-breaking, and the decision to not simply have the accounts read in German with subtitles (or at least to use German voice actors) was baffling given the impetus behind a transnational representation of the battle.

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[58] Tweet by Rob Schaefer, *Twitter*, @GERArmyResearch, 18 July 2016, https://twitter.com/GERArmyResearch/status/755127813750095872 [accessed 19 June 2019].

Unsurprisingly, the decision to present German accounts in this manner was not supported by the programme's historical consultant, but he was overruled in this regard.[59] This is thus also indicative of further disparity between the wishes of BBC producers and those of the historians they employ. It is somewhat surprising, given the efforts for continental involvement in the centenary, that a German production company was not involved with the programme – this would have, at the very least, resolved the voice acting issue. Nevertheless, the episodes do have considerable merits in terms of shifting the common narrative about the Somme, and they shall be considered in chronological order. It should be noted that when outlining the start and end points of each episode, dates were generally provided, but the names of the corresponding battles have been used herein for brevity.

Despite the primary focus on the first day of the battle in most of the commemorative events covered by the BBC, this documentary refreshingly only dedicated one episode to it, and endeavoured to explain failed objectives in terms beyond blundering generals. 'First Day — Erster Tag' covered the familiar aspects of the battle in tandem with lesser broadcast German perspectives, such as accounts of the physical and psychological impact of the preceding bombardment; the defensive nature of their trench and dugout system; interception of British phone calls relating to the attack using a Moritz machine, and the gathering of intelligence by Germans from British prisoners of war. None of these were revelations in terms of the relevant

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[59] Tweet by Jeremy Banning, *Twitter*, @jbanningww1, 1 August 2016, https://twitter.com/jbanningww1/status/760211147320651780 [accessed 19 June 2019].

historiography,[60] but they were alternative perspectives to the prevailing narrative that the Somme failed purely because it was a bad idea.

'Defence in Depth — Verteidigung in der Tiefe' continued the account of the offensive from the Battle of Bazentin Ridge, with the added mention of the presence of troops other than British or German on the Somme battlefield, in the form of the Indian cavalry. There was a detailed consideration of the titular tactical developments made by the German army during the battle, specifically the development of a more fluid defensive line by defending from camouflaged shell holes. There was also mention of the Germans having clamped down on British intelligence efforts by arresting 'watchers' behind their own lines and sealing the Dutch border, as well as the differences in interrogation techniques whereby the more convivial approach of the Germans often yielded better results. The episode concluded with the end of the Battle of Ginchy, having noted the replacement of General Erich von Falkenhayn with Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg and Quartermaster-General Erich Ludendorff, and their conception of the Hindenburg Line. The final episode, 'End Game — End Spiel [*sic*]' discussed the introduction of tanks to the battlefield, the debut of the 'creeping barrage', the difficulties presented by the mud in winter, the differing attitudes towards execution for desertion, and ultimately the withdrawal to the *Siegfriedstellung* (Hindenburg Line), which Barton argued was where the Battle of the Somme actually ended.

In his closing remarks, Barton noted that some historians have viewed the Somme as a

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[60] See, for example, Christopher Duffy, *Through German Eyes: The British and the Somme 1916* (London, 2007), pp. 13–19 ; Robert Kershaw, *24 Hrs at the Somme: 1 July 1916* (London, 2017), pp. 10–43; Martin Middlebrook, *The First Day on the Somme: 1 July 1916* (London, 2001), pp. 61—62.

'bloody but critical testing ground where vital lessons were learned that helped speed the Armistice.'[61] This is most likely in reference to the 'learning curve' theory as previously discussed. He retorted that whilst the battle did indeed damage German defences, it did not hasten the end of the war and was ultimately a German defensive victory. He also noted that 1917 was the most costly year of the war, in which the campaigns at Arras, Champagne and Passchendaele were a consequence of the lessons the Germans had learned at the Somme and Picardy — the eventual German downfall occurred under very different circumstances. In this manner, the programme directly challenged reductionist narratives which focus on the first day of the battle with little regard for its progression.

The documentary was well-received by media critics. As noted in the first chapter, audience figures remained around 1.8–1.7 million across the three episodes. *The Guardian* praised it as a 'clear, authoritative guide to the most costly war in the history of the British army'.[62] *The Telegraph* gave it four stars, and in a familiar cultural pairing of war and football, noted the British experience of the war 'was a tragic tale of tactical naiveté, faulty ammunition and fatally underestimating the enemy. Not unlike the England football team at major tournaments, in fact'.[63] The review also picked up on the emotional impact of the contemporary footage showing grinning soldiers who were about to face death, an impact mirrored in similar footage used in *They Shall Not Grow Old* (2018). Evidently, disparity between television and

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[61] 'End Game – End Spiel'.

[62] 'The Somme 1916 Review — a Fresh Take on an All Too Familiar Story', *The Guardian*, 19 July 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2016/jul/19/the-somme-1916-review [accessed 21 February 2019].

[63] 'The Somme 1916: From Both Sides of the Wire Debunks the Myths of Britain's Bloodiest Battle: Review', *The Telegraph*, 18 July 2016, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/tv/2016/07/18/the-somme-1916-from-both-sides-of-the-wire-debunks-the-myths-of [accessed 21 February 2019].

historiography is not of concern to media reviewers, and is more the concern of the 'historian-cop'[64] seeking to critique programmes on their own terms.

Figure 6: Director Clive Flowers with Peter Barton discussing filming near High Wood. (Courtesy of Jeremy Banning).

They Shall Not Grow Old

One of the key events in the BBC's centenary schedule was the screening of *They Shall Not Grow Old* (2018) on the anniversary of the Armistice, directed by Peter Jackson, renowned for having directed, written and produced the film trilogies for *Lord of the Rings* (2001–2003) and *The Hobbit*

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[64] Robert Sklar, 'Historical Films: Scofflaws and the Historian-Cop', *Reviews in American History*, 25, 2 (1997), *passim*. See also Badsey, 'A Muddy Vision', p. 48.

(2012–2014). Why Jackson chose to misquote Laurence Binyon's iconic work *For the Fallen* (1914)

has not been divulged.[65] It is doubtful that it was a pure misquote, given the involvement of the

IWM and 14–18 NOW. A more likely answer is that the language was modernised in a similar vein

to the colourisation of the footage — artistic license took precedent over poetic nuance. This is

not, of course, an issue that the BBC was responsible for. Given the impetus to broadcast it at the

last key anniversary in their centenary schedule though, its content and reception deserve some

consideration.

The sole use of recorded testimony was clearly an attempt to allow soldiers to speak of

their experiences in their own words with a minimal impact of bias. This perpetuation of audio-

visual material is a key element in the endurance of cultural memory.[66] In an interview about his

creation of the film, Jackson noted that he had not intended to 'impose' anything on the

narrative.[67] Indeed, aside from the notes in the opening and closing sequences, the film ran

contemporary footage and recordings of veterans without any additional interjection (other than

the modernised aspects of the aural atmosphere and colourised footage). This particular decision

was praised by one American reviewer as having left the film 'blessedly free of the sapient sounds

of experts and academic historians'.[68] This comment is somewhat at odds with the statement at

the end of the film credits which thanked the oral historians who had captured the voices of the

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[65] The actual quotation should be 'they shall grow not old'.

[66] Winter and Sivan, 'Setting the Framework', p. 31.

[67] Blavatnik School of Government, *They Shall Not Grow Old: Peter Jackson Q&A*, YouTube, 12 February 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KFMU_BGkleA [accessed 10 June 2019].

[68] 'A Few Thoughts on the Authenticity of Peter Jackson's "They Shall Not Grow Old"', *New Yorker*, 14 January 2019, https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/a-few-thoughts-on-the-authenticity-of-peter-jacksons-they-shall-not-grow-old [accessed 10 June 2019].

veterans. It also disregards an unavoidable aspect of the historical method, namely the selection of sources. It would have been impossible to have presented every piece of footage filmed during the war, and every account recorded since, in the confines of one film. Unavoidably, a selection process had to take place in which certain sources were used and others were not, thus (albeit indirectly or unconsciously) a narrative was formed.

In addition to the title, there was further evidence of touches of creative licence. The initial black-and-white footage expanded on screen to the tune of *Hanging on the Old Barbed Wire*, yet the song was not listed as such in the soundtrack,[69] and the end credits rolled to a lyrically-modified version of *Mademoiselle from Armentières*. These adjustments did not detract from the film's sense of authenticity though, and were unlikely to be noticed by a general audience not intimately acquainted with popular soldier songs. Certain editing aspects of the film could also be interpreted as having affected the narrative. Following the discussion of features of an unnamed battle (which logically appeared to have been the Somme), the footage flashed from footage of smiling young men to photos of corpses in a disturbing before-and-after montage. This was far from the first time creative license and documentary had been combined though — one of the most commonly used pieces of contemporary footage in Great War related programmes is the staged 'over-the-top' footage from *Battle of the Somme*.[70] One notably unusual aspect however, in comparison to most programming related to the conflict, was that the content of the film did not seek to obfuscate the varied experiences of the war — there were

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[69] It is officially recorded as *If You Want to Find — Official Trench Song* performed by Plan 9 and Hamish McKeich.
[70] See Hanna, *The Great War on the Small Screen*, pp. 19, 107, 135, 154; Hanna, 'Representations of the Battle of the Somme', p. 108.

many instances where the soldiers responded to their surroundings with humour, a feature largely devoid from such programming since *Blackadder*.

The film received very positive reviews in the media. *The Guardian*'s reviewer gave it five stars, noting that the modernising aspects made it appear 'as though 100 years of film history had been suddenly telescoped into a single moment'.[71] It was also given five stars by *The Independent*, with the tag-line 'No *Lord of the Rings* battle could match the sheer hellishness of what the filmmaker recreates here'.[72] The use of the term 'recreates' is a striking, yet possibly unintentional, reflection on the extent to which this is a documentary or a creative work. More noteworthy though, is the reference to J.R.R. Tolkien's iconic work — it was argued elsewhere in the BBC's centenary that Tolkien did not believe in the concept of a war to end all wars, which resulted in the perpetual conflict in Middle Earth.[73] There may have been a distinct lack of Orcs on the Western Front, but Tolkien's experiences undeniably influenced his literary work. Nevertheless, it is clear the film had a powerful, emotive impact on reviewers and the public alike.

It was not entirely without fault, though. Whilst the film may have intended to let the soldiers tell their own story, the lack of any information about the events resulted in a rather confused chronology. It was a representation of wartime life without context, giving the viewer

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[71] 'They Shall Not Grow Old Review – an Utterly Breathtaking Journey into the Trenches', *The Guardian*, 11 November 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/nov/11/they-shall-not-grow-old-peter-jackson-review-first-world-war-footage [accessed 10 June 2019].

[72] 'They Shall Not Grow Old Review: Peter Jackson's astonishing WW1 documentary is like no other', *The Independent*, 11 November 2018, https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/reviews/they-shall-not-grow-old-peter-jackson-review-first-world-war-ww1-lord-of-the-rings-hobbit-a8586401.html [accessed 10 June 2019].

[73] *War of Words*. John Garth provides a more in-depth analysis of the impact of the war on Tolkien's work in *Tolkien and the Great War: The Threshold of Middle-Earth* (London, 2003).

a *sense* of the war rather than detailed knowledge about it. One of the opening statements in the film explicitly noted that the war was different from year to year, so the lack of any reference to the time periods discussed was a bizarre omission. This is not to argue that the film required direct narration; in keeping with the time period, it could have used informational slides in the vein of *The Battle of the Somme* (1916). Furthermore, despite the good intentions behind the colourisation process, the colour grading itself was not without dispute, as one historian criticised 'the highly stylised palette of washed out colours [as] used in "Private Ryan"'.[74] The colourised presentation also lifted the footage out of its original time and enabled the audience to view it in a modern context. The same American reviewer who praised the lack of expert interjection in the film noted that contemporary audiences for the original footage would not have bemoaned its lack of colour or sound, and that whilst we might have openly interpreted the men smiling through the screens as broadly good-humoured, it is entirely possible that at the time they were simply amused by the novelty of being filmed, and the potential of being recognised by those at home.[75] Once again, the application of modern cultural frameworks to historical events can skew interpretation of them.

As noted above, whilst the battle featured in the middle of the film was never named, the characteristic moments of the Somme were apparent to a historian's eye. Yet the chronology of events was muddled: the men spoke of the bombardment; then the tanks advanced (which did

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[74] Tweet by Jonathan Boff, *Twitter*, @JonathanBoff, 12 November 2018, https://twitter.com/JonathanBoff/status/1061933692636020737 [accessed 10 June 2019].
[75] 'A Few Thoughts', *New Yorker*; Roger Smither, '"P'raps I Shall See You…": Recognition of Loved Ones in Non-Fiction Film of the First World War', in Nicholas J. Saunders and Paul Cornish (eds.), *Contested Objects: Material Memories of the Great War* (London, 2009), p. 181.

not occur until several months into the battle at Flers-Courcelette); followed by the acknowledgement that it had been a beautiful morning; then the explosion of a mine in the wrong place which gave the Germans time to prepare; recollections of walking steadily behind a barrage (the creeping barrage technique was not deployed on the first day of the battle); and discovering that despite the bombardment, the wire remained uncut. There was also the mention of *Flammenwerfer* troops in the German trenches, yet no mention of the debut of the Livens Large Gallery Flame Projector. Of course, these were ultimately technicalities which would only be picked up by those with previous knowledge of the Somme — the battle was not named to the audience, thus they were not technically being misinformed. Yet, given how the film unfolded, it did present a narrative which essentially played out as: war was declared, the troops went to France, the battle of the Somme took place, the Armistice was signed. Ultimately this reflects an ongoing tension of programmes related to the conflict, in which they can simultaneously appease the general public whilst frustrating historians. The two audiences remain disparate, and without any evidence of a change in this regard, this is not a feature of media commemoration of war which is likely to change.

Despite apparent attempts to present the war in new ways, and on new platforms, the narrative was often familiar with previous decades, with piecemeal moves away from it drowned out by the broad presence of futility narratives elsewhere. This clash between futility and more revisionist interpretations confused the overall narrative, an aspect which in itself further hampered chances of improving public knowledge about the conflict. Whilst historians were consistently featured on BBC programming, their restriction to answering questions posed by the presenter and comparatively diminutive involvement on a broader scale suggested that an

opportunity to challenge overriding narratives on a large scale was missed. The case studies demonstrated a clear drive to discuss the war from different angles and perspectives, yet alongside the regular presence of the futility trope elsewhere, their impact is uncertain.

It is not transparently clear how the overall narrative connects with Winter and Prost's generational model outlined at the start of this chapter. There are elements of all three, mashed in to an often bewildering amalgam. Military history was often featured, though it took the more modern approach of including accounts by soldiers rather than an exclusively top-down view. To this extent, it included elements of social history, by giving attention to the men on the ground – indeed, this was the driving force behind *They Shall Not Grow Old*. Referring to the first chapter, the inclusion of poetry (albeit a restricted canon), and leanings towards an emotional understanding of war are reflective of cultural history. Generally however, this did not extend to culture on a broad scale; the emphasis was on how soldiers felt about the war, rather than how the broader population felt about it. Thus, despite some involvement of the third historiographical generation, the bulk of the narrative is focussed around the social era, suggesting it is still largely stuck in the 1960s, having failed to develop much further beyond the fiftieth anniversary.

Conclusions and Future Considerations

The overall impression of the centenary on the BBC is that of an attempt to do something new whilst being hampered by old habits. There were clear efforts to present new histories about the Great War to a wide audience. New narratives, such as the German perspective of the Battle of the Somme, were indeed a feature. Yet these narratives were only 'new' in regards to previous broadcasts, and were still lagging behind historiographical developments. It was a notable attempt to present an alternative view to the common interpretation of the Somme as a futile waste and failure on the part of the generals. The main issue is that efforts such as this were ultimately drowned out by the consistent presence of familiar tropes. Opinions reflective of 'Mud, Blood and Poetry' and 'Lions Led by Donkeys' were recurrent throughout. Even accounting for necessarily reduced levels of input when broadcasting government commemorative events, the BBC's own commentators still leant towards these notions.

Family remained a key connector to the conflict, despite the strain of a widening generational gap, although this is essentially now a part of wider increase in interest in genealogy. The Western Front was still at the foreground of commemoration, with a key focus on encouraging the public to visit the area. Battlefield tourism is, of course, not new either; the phenomenon emerged before the conflict itself had even finished. These are the longstanding emotional bonds between the public and the war, and thus it was unsurprising that their importance in the framework of cultural memory was reflected in the BBC's centenary programming. The prominence of futility is also indicative of another aspect of cultural memory, revealed by its common reference points. The prevailing view of the Somme was that it was futile because of the losses on the first day, and moreover because the line only advanced six miles.

Similarly, the war itself is viewed as futile because it was not 'the war to end all wars'. For all of the efforts made to present the world the soldiers lived in, it was still interpreted in terms of the results. Hindsight is the prism through which history is unavoidably viewed. It may allow the historian to assess the factors in the outcome of historical events, but it can also blind them from understanding contemporaries.[1] The focus on death by the BBC only served to amplify this; by leaning towards this unfortunate outcome of battles, the reasons for starting them in the first place were (generally) overlooked.

Just as emotion and hindsight affect popular memory of the war, so too do contemporary politics. Despite the earlier noted political basis behind cultural memory, centenary programming on the BBC was relatively devoid of overt political interpretations. A more common reference point, from 2016 onwards, was the impact of the European Referendum on Anglo-European relations. This was not, however, a feature of the commemorative events themselves, but rather of the BBC's commentary on them. References to cooperation and the shared history of the UK and the mainland continent were indeed often ironic, in regards to the uncertain future of relations, and the BBC often highlighted this fact. This sat somewhat awkwardly next to reconciliation efforts, as the consistent interjections ostensibly served to dampen them. Even when the BBC broadcasted a debate by politicians about commemoration, with no external input the discussion was confusing in regards to the overall interpretation of the war. Arguably, as cultural memory spans the political compass, attempting to view it in these terms alone is largely unhelpful. By mostly avoiding political interpretations of the war, the BBC also met its remit of

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[1] Gregory, *The Last Great War*, p. 1.

appealing to a wide, politically-varied audience.

There were some notable examples of a shift in narrative, particularly in regards to original content. Despite a few criticisms, *They Shall Not Grow Old* colourised contemporary footage to present a direct account of the war to the modern palate of a twenty-first century audience, and demonstrated that an almost exclusive focus on contemporary footage can be an effective means of programming. *Both Sides of the Wire* presented an alternative viewpoint to the Somme; by usefully acknowledging that the German army were not simply a passive force on the battlefield, but that they also developed strategically, the emphasis was moved away from the dominant Anglo-centric view of the battle. These key examples were accompanied by the frequent use of historians throughout general coverage, which was also intended to aid with improving understanding of the war. The reality of this move was not without fault, however; external historians were often restricted by scripted interview formats, which rarely allowed for a deeper discussion of their knowledge. A larger shift away from the BBC's usual cache of historians would also have been welcomed, as this might also have served to redress the disparity between broadcasting and historiography.

A Centenary Squandered?

As previously acknowledged, this dissertation has been written too close to the culmination of the centenary to be able to fully analyse its long-term effects and outcomes. There are, however, a few tools available which reveal its short-term impact. Despite the flood of programming in 2014, by the end of 2018 45% of the public did not feel they had heard enough about the causes

of the Great War on television.[2] Ironically, these statistics (combined with those presented throughout the dissertation) call into dispute fears that the public was overwhelmed with information too early on by indicating that they wished to learn more.[3] Despite this enthusiasm for further information, evidence relating to knowledge retention was somewhat bleak. In 2014 77% of the public knew which year the war started, which decreased to 71% by 2018.[4] Whilst this is not a particularly large decrease, it is indicative of a gradual drop in knowledge over time. It would be pertinent to ask these questions again in several years' time to see whether there has been a further decrease.

In terms of a desire to learn more about the conflict, 57% of the public wanted to learn more in 2014, which decreased to 39% in 2018.[5] There is a notable discrepancy here between the numbers who felt they had not learned enough, and the numbers which actively wanted to learn more. The issue is that whilst television was one of the primary distributors of information during the centenary, the medium and its programmes have since moved on, with the BBC turning its attentions to planning for its own centenary in 2022. There are further considerations here in terms of disparity between age groups; 61% of those aged sixty-five and over felt the Great War was relevant to them in 2018, compared to only 36% of 18–24 year olds.[6] Generally, the younger generations more readily adopt new technology, and utilise the Internet more

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[2] Buckerfield and Ballinger, *The People's Centenary*, p. 11. The report suggested this may reflect a disquiet amongst the public about their own lack of knowledge regarding the war's 'complex origins'.
[3] Ibid., p. 26.
[4] Ibid., p. 25. The same question was asked about the year the war ended, which only increased by 1% across the centenary — this may have been due to more frequent references to the end of the war.
[5] Ibid., p. 26.
[6] Ibid., p. 27.

commonly for information. This casts further doubt on the relevance of television in the developing digital era, and its uncertain prominence as the main form of information distribution in the future.

The abrupt cessation of centenary programming on 11 November 2018 (and indeed the relative lack of coverage about the final months of the war) was also an issue, in regards to the unfolding of events throughout the rest of the first half of the twentieth century. [7] Given the volume of programming within the schedule, it is perhaps understandable that the BBC were keen to draw things to a close. Yet by stopping at the Armistice, the corporation arguably missed an opportunity to widen public understanding of the interwar period. This omission simply leaves the course of events in the public eye as follows – the Great War ended, then two decades later the Second World War started. The factors which arose in the interim thus appear irrelevant. It is possible that this lacuna might be partially addressed closer towards the centenary of the Second World War, potentially as a part of the circumstances which brought about the rise of the Nazi party. Nevertheless, the battlefields associated with the battles in the closing months of the war are still visited to a much lesser extent than those of the Somme and Passchendaele.[8] For all of the BBC's attempts to encourage battlefield tourism, the opportunity to increase the scope of this was missed.

It should be emphasised that these criticisms apply only to the BBC's television schedule for the centenary. As outlined earlier in this dissertation, the necessary restrictive scope occludes

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[7] This refers exclusively to television coverage; BBC Radio 4 broadcasted various programmes about the aftermath after this date, including material around the anniversaries of the Paris Peace Conference.
[8] Nick Lloyd, *Hundred Days: The End of the Great War* (London, 2014), p. 279.

discussion of other media, significantly that of radio where the difference in audience and reception allowed for a much broader discussion of the conflict and its aftermath. It is also not representative of the centenary as a whole, which encompassed a swathe of initiatives at both the public and academic level, where a variety of methods were employed to not only improve understanding of the conflict, but also to bridge the gap between the two usually disparate spheres.

Future Considerations

Centenaries

In addition to broadening understanding about the Great War, the centenary also undeniably served as a framework for future broadscale centenaries. Indeed, the report published by the government in 2019 specifically stated that 'this report serves as a resource for future commemorations'.[9] To date, the BBC has produced no such reflections. Instead, the 'lessons' for the BBC can be partially speculated from the analysis within this dissertation. The corporation intended to improve understanding of the conflict in a way which would appeal to a wide audience. As previously discussed, there were clear examples of an intent to do this, although the survey results noted suggest a diminished level of success in regards to minorities within that audience. It would be encouraging if, for future anniversaries, the BBC sought to challenge

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[9]   DCMS, *Lessons from the First World War Centenary*, p. 19, https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcumeds/2001/2001.pdf [accessed 26 July 2019].

established tropes directly, rather than simply allowing them to inform the debate and resonate with extant ideas in cultural memory. It should also ensure that planning of coverage allows for a broad representation of the event, as the lack of coverage for 2015 gave the impression that nothing happened between the outbreak of war and the Battle of the Somme (or Jutland, though this was covered a much lesser extent). In this manner, the BBC only sought to improve understanding of the war for events which the general public already held *some* understanding about.

Ultimately however, it is difficult to suggest that these issues can actually be viewed as lessons – if the BBC does not reflect on its activity during the centenary, it will bear no impact on the coverage of future anniversaries. The centenary for the Second World War will undoubtedly be the responsibility of a much different corporation, assuming it still exists in it current form in 2039. Aside from ongoing controversies increasing disapproval of the licence fee, the audience shares of the corporation's main formats (i.e. television and radio) have been increasingly challenged and encroached on by the growth of Internet on-demand services. Accounting for the rapid developments of technology in the modern age, it is impossible to state what the dominant form of media would be in twenty years.

There are, however, some more general areas that can be considered, namely the themes involved and their possible impact on the centenary of the next conflict. At the start of the centenary, Emma Hanna indirectly queried whether the controversy around *Blackadder* would be as central in 2018 as it was in 2014.[10] Mercifully, the debate moved beyond this issue during

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[10] Hanna, 'Contemporary Britain and Memory', p. 117.

the following four years. It is difficult to draw any conclusions about this in terms of its impact on the Second World War centenary though, because cultural memories of the two conflicts are so distinct. The representation of inept generals and mutinying soldiers in the Great War has been openly criticised. Yet this has not been the case for similar disparaging portrayals for the Second World War. The linguistically inept British spy (Officer/Captain Crabtree) in *'Allo 'Allo!* (1982–1992) draws no such ire, nor do the bumbling men of *Dad's Army* (1968–1977). This disparity reflects one of the key differences in memory between the two world wars, namely that there is a far greater level of sensitivity around the earlier conflict. *Blackadder* is something of an anomaly in terms of comedic representations of the Great War, yet there are far more examples within the genre for the Second World War. Thus the nature of the centenary for the second conflict will arguably be very different. If reconciliation is again a central theme, it remains to be seen if this aspect will face more criticism, given the clearer 'good' (Britain) versus 'evil' (Nazis) dichotomy in the latter world war. If improving understanding is also a focus again, it would be pertinent to move beyond this.[11] Indeed, there will be ample opportunity for a broad representation, as the lack of trench warfare removed the availability of a central front. Such interpretations are unavoidably little more than informed speculation; more accurate outcomes can be gleaned for repercussions on the study of cultural memory itself.

Memory Studies

This dissertation also sought to demonstrate the value of modern primary sources. As technology

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[11] For instance, by considering activity in the post-war period. See, for example, Stefan Goebel, 'Commemorative Cosmopolis: Transnational Networks of Remembrance in Post-War Coventry', in Stefan Goebel and Derek Keene (eds.), *Cities into Battlefields: Metropolitan Scenarios, Experiences and Commemorations of Total War* (Farnham, 2011), pp. 163–183.

continues to become an increasingly prominent part of daily life, the material it features simply cannot be ignored. Cultural memory is expressed through contemporary mediums, thus the field of memory studies will need to include such sources if it intends to include any reasonable analysis of contemporary history. Beyond television programmes, the Internet also served as a frequent resource for opinions, particularly through the open social media platform of Twitter. This is becoming an increasingly valuable window in to public opinion, and also presents the opinions of historians more regularly (and perhaps openly) than academic journal articles. The thought processes of the general public can also be inferred from search engine trend graphs, and they have been used here to this effect. Naturally, these sources are not without bias or shortcoming, yet they cannot be disregarded in the technological age.

Due to the narrowed scope of this research, there remains ample material to be considered. The BBC's centenary coverage on radio was of a much different character and focus, and provides a potential plethora of resources for examination. The centenary as a whole provides countless opportunities for research into modern cultural memory. Yet even with these possibilities, there are restrictions. Despite the large volume of radio programmes produced by the BBC, only a selection are preserved online. This is reflective of the limitations of the perceived legacy potential and digital archive capabilities of the Internet – organisations are selective about which material deserves space on the servers. There is thus an uncertain timespan on the availability of such sources. Furthermore, this aspect may impede studies of the centenary in the longer term. This is problematic, as it is difficult to gain a clear impression of the outcomes of the centenary at the current proximity to it. Cultural memory is moulded over time, not overnight, so long-term studies on a broader scale are vital to understanding how, and why, it changes. In

spite of the benefits of increasing utilisation of the Internet, particularly for the broadcasting of

programmes, the extent to which the media will be available for historians in the future is

unclear.

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Appendices
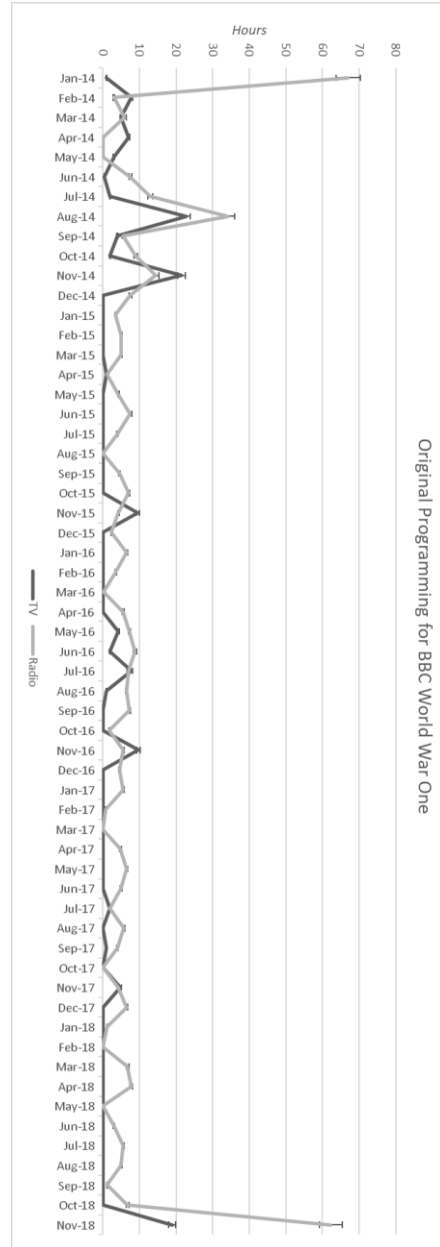
The graph represents the volume of searches made for the term 'In Parenthesis'. Generated using https://trends.google.com/trends/?geo=GB

In Parenthesis: (United Kingdom)