A Different Way of Remembering?

Cultural Memory, Continuity, and Change in the First World War Centenary

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Abstract

This thesis explores how cultural memory of the First World War in Britain has changed in the digital age, and which elements have remained the same. Through a consideration of television programmes, websites, and social media posts, it reveals that longstanding aspects of cultural memory, primarily senses of futility and loss established in the 1960s, have remained entrenched in popular ideas about the conflict, and are now utilised in discussions about the war and its representations across the Internet. The number of people involved in discussions about the past is now greater than ever before, yet the online realm tends to exist as an echo chamber for popular ideas, rather than a debate ground for forming new ones.

On television, representations of the war have remained largely consistent with pre-Centenary tropes. Some of the most novel developments during the Centenary included an increased focus on 'forgotten' histories, and programming aimed at the younger generations. The BBC in particular often found itself commemorating its own programming history almost as much as the war itself, a habit which tended to foreground familiar veteran testimony and wartime footage over revealing new insights into the conflict. Attempts to break this mould, such as programmes targeted at young people using visual techniques more often associated with video games, were met with some criticism for breaking with 'authentic' visions of the war. Yet, they are all evidence of moves away from old ideas.

Online, websites have been viewed as creating a web of memory, with intersecting viewpoints evident across different platforms. While some websites are evident reservoirs of ongoing information beyond the Centenary, others have disappeared into digital oblivion. Thus, contemporary cultural memory is both a fluctuating and ephemeral phenomenon.

Contents

List of Abbreviations

AHRC   Arts & Humanities Research Council

ANZAC   Australia and New Zealand Army Corps

BBC   British Broadcasting Corporation

BBC WAC   British Broadcasting Corporation Written Archives Centre

CMC   Computer-Mediated Communication

CWGC   Commonwealth War Graves Commission

DCMS   Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport

FPS   First-Person Shooter

HLF   Heritage Lottery Fund

IIPC   International Internet Preservation Consortium

IWM   Imperial War Museum

NLHF   National Lottery Heritage Fund

List of Figures

Introduction

'Every act of remembering mingles elements of experience from the past with elements of experience from the present'.[1]

History is like clay on a potter's wheel. It is constantly being reworked and remoulded to suit our changing needs and preferences. Yet, for everything we might add to it, the fingerprints of those who came before often remain. As historical events are shaped by our evolving environment, so too are the ways we remember them — or, as the sociologist Jeffery Olick succinctly put it, 'contemporary circumstances provide the cues for certain images of the past'.[2] The digital age (herein defined as commencing in 2006 with the birth of Web 2.0, a 'turning point for online communal interactions')[3] has reframed the methods through which we remember and represent our relationship with the past. The First World War Centenary, from 2014 to 2018, offers a paradigmatic study of how we remember a historic event in an ever-changing modern world. It saw a plethora of representations and commemorations in the physical, televisual, and online worlds. While longstanding cultural myths about the conflict endured, technological developments allowed for the highlighting of new perspectives. This thesis will demonstrate that while it was clear that entrenched ideas of futility and 'mud, blood and poetry' from 1960s historiography have endured, there is also considerable evidence demonstrating elements of change in contemporary cultural memory.

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[1] Jens Brockmeier, 'After the Archive: Remapping Memory', *Culture & Psychology*, 16.1 (2010), p. 24.
[2] Jeffery K. Olick, 'Collective Memory: The Two Cultures', *Sociological Theory*, 17.3 (1999), p. 341.
[3] Jerome De Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture*, 2nd edn. (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2016), pp. 88–89.

For several decades now, historians have explored the ways we remember and represent the war — our cultural memory of the event. The 'cultural' element referred to has traditionally involved statues, memorials and, more recently, television and film. Owing to its nature, much of this work is done by historians. Yet, the field of memory studies, which has been increasingly drawing attention to how we remember and record our own life experiences, as well as contemporary events, has rapidly moved towards analysing social media as a source base for this behaviour. What is missing is a combination of these two approaches to assess to what extent cultural memory of the conflict has transformed in the digital age. Television itself is moving ever further into the digital realm, with an increasing number of people watching programmes via on-demand services such as iPlayer. However, a change in technology does not imply an immediate change in attitudes. Our cultural memory, while susceptible to change, is based in commonly shared ideas which have been reiterated and reinforced over time.

This thesis will demonstrate that while technological developments opened up new possibilities for representation of the war, they were also utilised as new avenues to tell a familiar story. An appreciation of the history of commemoration of the war is therefore crucial to interpreting cultural memory in the digital age in its context, rather than as a new phenomenon. This is the approach taken in this thesis—the Internet is new, but cultural memory is not, and thus the thesis begins with an exploration of representations of the war before the Centenary, to highlight previous tropes evident in Centenary broadcasting and online discussions.

The themes explored in the later chapters begin with considering the ways we remember the conflict in age when no one remembers it. What techniques are utilised to evoke a sense of

authenticity? Are these new, or are they continuations of previous methods? These methods include maintaining a sense of authenticity in representations, particularly through the re-use of veteran testimony, the consultation of historians, and the development of new documentaries. This opens the path to further questions; who is included in contemporary cultural memory? What approaches can be taken to expanding our understanding of the war? Is there more to be done? These are some of the most notable elements of change during the Centenary. Finally, the considerations turn towards the Internet; has it had a dramatic impact on cultural memory? Does the increased opportunity for discussion on social media result in more changes to cultural memory? Does the Internet offer a better chance of a legacy for the Centenary and cultural memory of the First World War? For the latter chapters, the majority of online sources will be drawn from Reddit, the social news and content aggregation forum founded in 2005, and Twitter. It should be noted here that for the purposes of this thesis, the latter site will be referred to by its original name of Twitter, and not X, which it was renamed to in 2023. This is for the purposes of clarity, both for the familiarity of the original name and because the links provided still use Twitter in the web address, and also because the site was referred to as Twitter for the period this thesis applies to. Overall, it will demonstrate that while the methods available to us to discuss and represent the First World War change and new representations find their place in the public eye, entrenched ideas in cultural memory, particularly those surrounding futility narratives, still hold a prominent place in cultural memory of the conflict.

Digital Memory

There has been a substantial amount of work on more traditional forms of remembrance, especially memorials, and an increasing amount on media representations and broader

cultural memory elements in the previous two decades.[4] Such works form an important

foundational framework for this thesis; thus, an appraisal of their major themes is a necessary

starting point. While statues, memorials and ceremonies may seem worlds apart from the

digital realm, they have fundamentally shaped our cultural memory of the war. These

traditional forms of commemoration laid the groundwork for how we remember the conflict

today, and resultingly ensured that themes such as sacrifice and loss remain deeply ingrained

in our understanding of the First World War. Just as the digital world can be viewed to increase

our sense of collectiveness, some of the earliest works on memory, borrowing from its usage

in psychology and sociology to debate its lexicological influence and meaning, referred to the

notion of 'collective memory' and 'collective remembrance'.[5] These early appraisals of cultural

memory are still relevant today, even as technological developments expand and shape the

methods with which we communicate with each other, particularly online. As noted by Brant

Burkey,

> any interaction with the same digital content among networked users poses
>
> the potential for collective remembering of those activities and experiences
>
> because they are being shared across a multiplicity of screens, devices, social
>
> platforms and networks.[6]

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[4] For example, Emma Hanna, *The Great War on the Small Screen: Representing the First World War in Contemporary Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009); Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory,* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2005); David Williams, *Media, Memory and the First World War,* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009); Jay Winter, *War Beyond Words: Languages of Remembrance from the Great War to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017);

[5] See Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, 'Setting the Framework', in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century,* ed. by Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 6–39.

[6] Brant Burkey, 'Repertoires of Remembering: A Conceptual Approach for Studying Memory Practices in the Digital Ecosystem', *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 44.2 (2020), p. 180.

The other significant point raised in this observation is that the digital age is also breaking down traditional and more restrictive notions of space and place in memorialisation. Digital spaces still bear some similarity to more traditional remembrance practices. For instance, it has been noted that institutional public memorials can also become spaces for personal memorialising when individuals leave items at the memorial.[7] This behaviour persists online in a different manner, whereby people add their ideas and histories to posts by larger institutions, once again blending the public and personal, albeit in a less delineated space. In this manner, 'electronic media have changed the significance of space, time, and physical barriers as communication variables'.[8] Joshua Meyrowitz's observation here applied to earlier forms of electronic media, such as television, but it also applies to the impact of social media and the Internet, as these have the same tendency to warp notions of time and space. This demonstrates how cultural memory adapts to new forms of media, maintaining its significance across different contexts.

This blend of the personal and the public also has implications when considering other definitions of cultural memory in its contemporary sense. For instance, cultural memory can be viewed as both an act, such as taking part in rituals such as the two-minute Silence on Remembrance Day, or as a 'product', such as televisual representations of the war or websites dedicated to its commemoration. Both of these are methods through which people situate themselves in history, and gain context for their own lives and contemporary environments through the experiences of others.[9] The development of the Internet and social media creates an ever-expanding realm of 'products' from which people can draw 'sense' to understand the

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[7] Kirsten Foot, Barbara Warnick, and Steven M. Schneider, 'Web-Based Memorializing after September 11: Toward a Conceptual Framework', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11.1 (2006), p. 75.

[8] Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 13.

[9] José van Dijck, *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 6.

lives of others. Naturally, these observations come from memory scholars working with modern, digital source material to understand how we formulate and develop memories in the present day.

Our rapidly evolving world is also changing how we perceive the past, and it has been doing so since before the boom of the Internet. As early as 1989, Pierre Nora defined 'the acceleration of history' as 'an increasingly rapid slippage of the present into a historical past that is gone for good, a general perception that anything and everything may disappear'.[10] As we are propelled ever further into the modern world, the past feels increasingly distant and unrecognisable. This is similar to the German philosopher Walter Benjamin's interpretation of the *Angelus Novelus* painting as the 'angel of history', which Simon Schama later summarised as being 'blown backwards into the future, stunned by the mounting wreckage of the past, incapable of making them whole again'.[11] A futile desire to making the past whole again is an apt description for our ongoing tendency to develop new ways of representing the past. The latter part of Nora's description—the sense that events are occurring and sliding out of reach—is also noteworthy for this thesis. The Internet has birthed a phenomenon in which we archive and curate our own lives on social media for all to see, preserving whatever we deem fit in perpetuity.

Yet, this 'perpetuity' is itself questionable when we acknowledge the rapid nature of social media, whereby someone's post is often only in someone's attention for a few seconds. Our archiving also includes aspects of the physical world, as 'the practice of archiving place

[10] Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*', *Representations*, 26 (1989), p. 7.
[11] Simon Schama, 'Television and the Trouble with History', *The Guardian* (18 June 2002), https://www.theguardian.com/g2/story/0,,739347,00.html [Accessed 9 October 2024].

through mobile media is part of the broader trend toward personal digital archiving'.[12] However, the rapidity of this activity, contributing to social media feeds in which multiple people are engaging in the same activity, results in all of these moments slipping past a user's eyes in an instant. The impetus is to leave a digital footprint, but the reality is the footprints have little more permanence than if they were left in sand. These concerns are an echo of criticisms against television in its earlier days, notably decried against in the hyper-critically named work, *Bonfire of the Humanities*.[13] The recurrence of such attitudes demonstrates that new technology is rarely met with positivity. Moreover, the digital age is causing us to further adapt the definition of culture itself. One such explanation of the word posits it as being 'more than the encounter of individuals with mental structures and social schemata, […] material artifacts, technologies, and practices are equally infested with culture, thus forming the interface between self and society'.[14] Thus, as the tools and technologies available to society expand, so too does its sense of culture. As will be shown in this thesis, a development of culture also tends to include a development of who is considered a part of that culture, and thus their inclusion in cultural representations.

In a world of change, however, some aspects endure. While the environments and societies through which the past is remembered are continuously evolving, certain aspects remain. For instance, while the digital age can push us to reflect on what we mean by culture, some elements of it are resistant to change. The impact of politics on our appraisal of history continues to shape and inform our commemorative practices.[15] Some of the earliest works on

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[12] Jordan Frith and Jason Kalin, 'Here, I Used to Be: Mobile Media and Practices of Place-Based Digital Memory', *Space and Culture*, 19.1 (2016), p. 44.

[13] David Marc, *Bonfire of the Humanities: Essays on Television, Subliteracy and Long-Term Memory Loss* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995).

[14] José van Dijck, *Mediated Memories*, p. 12.

[15] For a collection of essays on this theme, see T.G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper (eds.), *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration* (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2000).

this dealt with notions of war and sacrifice, most notably the 'Myth of the War Experience',

which posits death as a form of quasi-religious sacrifice, a belief which finds its foundations in

nationalist political ideologies.[16] The importance of sacrifice in cultural memory of the war is

something that has endured to the present day, though it has taken on something of a more

reverential than religious nature. The meaning behind this sacrifice is also something the press

has sought to emphasise through coverage of commemoration events, by making 'a sustained

effort to convey a meaningful, political message about the worthwhile nature of the cause in

which so many had died'.[17] Showing respect to those who gave their lives is a common trope

in online discussions about the First World War, as will be noted in the latter chapters of this

thesis. Another scholar has noted 'serious epistemological and political objections' being

raised about 'an extreme form of relativism resulting in the blurring of boundaries between

fact and fiction in new mass media cultural products'.[18] This distortion of the real and the

recreated is not only significant for presenting an honest and clear view of the conflict, but

because such representations can also influence people's ideas about the war, and relatedly

their political attitudes connected to it.

Thus, this viewpoint is also relevant to manipulation of cultural memory of the war for

the purposes of political debate. The online realm can make this a particularly perilous activity,

as it has made it easier 'for alternative beliefs to be constructed merely on the basis of feelings

or idiosyncratic observations, and then for these contrived truths to be shared, no matter how

empirically erroneous or politically obnoxious they may be'.[19] This issue is amplified by the

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[16] See George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[17] Jenny Macleod and Yvonne Inall, 'A Century of Armistice Day: Memorialisation in the Wake of the First World War', *Mortality*, 25.1 (2020), p. 52.

[18] Alejandro Baer, 'Consuming History and Memory through Mass Media Products', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 4.4 (2001), p. 493.

[19] Edward Relph, 'Digital Disorientation and Place', *Memory Studies*, 14.3 (2021), p. 575.

nature of social media usage, namely the majority of users scrolling at high speed giving predominantly superficial levels of consideration to the information they are consuming. To this end, a user 'may scan an incoming message to see if it confirms or challenges their existing views, and decide how much further and carefully they should process it, if at all'.[20] This issue will be of note in the later chapters when considering public responses to institutional posts on Twitter during the Centenary, notably with a lack of attention to additional information provided or historical context. As will be revealed in the earlier chapters, though, there was a push on television towards expanding the public's awareness of the diverse groups of people who lived through the war, and their differing experiences of it.

The First World War Centenary

The manipulation of topics for ideological purposes has been a growing feature in online communication in recent years, as the political landscape of the United Kingdom (UK) and its relationship with Europe have been through considerable upheaval. While remembrance of the war has often served as a reminder of the importance of continued peaceful diplomatic relations with the continent, the Brexit referendum in 2016 planted a wedge in this area, on both a national and continental level. Naturally, national experiences of the war have always been different between the UK and Europe, given that the former was spared from having its territory destroyed by conflict. The nationalised aspect of commemoration is thus difficult to escape, partly 'because it relies on and activates versions of the past in which nation-states are the main categories of collectivity', with such states themselves being the organisers of

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[20] Eun-Ju Lee, 'Authenticity Model of (Mass-Oriented) Computer-Mediated Communication: Conceptual Explorations and Testable Propositions', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 25.1 (2020), p. 65.

commemorative activity.[21] T.G. Ashplant has noted that in the twentieth century, the 'acute social divisions' impacting societies were broadly defined as involving 'shifts in national borders, class conflicts within societies, ideological allegiances cutting across nationality, occupation by foreign powers and separation from colonized territories'.[22] These issues persist in the twenty-first century, and the UK saw its own risk of partial disintegration with the Scottish Referendum in 2014 which, while being voted against, furthered tensions between nations. Indeed, when discussing the Scottish Referendum, former Prime Minister John Major referred to the fact that England and Scotland had fought together in two world wars.[23]

The Centenary itself was something of a political controversy from its initial planning stages, largely owing to criticism of the then British Prime Minister David Cameron's framing of it. The particular point of contention was his hope that the Centenary could be 'a commemoration that, like the Diamond Jubilee celebrated this year, says something about who we are as a people'.[24] His use of the word 'celebrated' drew concerns over the potential overtly positive and militaristic tone the commemorations might adopt, and gave rise to the formation of the No Glory in War campaign, whose backers included the poet Carol Ann Duffy and the actors Alan Rickman and Jude Law. The campaign pushed for commemoration activities to not present the war as 'something glorious', but to acknowledge the scale of death

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[21] Shanti Sumartojo, 'Reframing Commemoration at the End of the First World War Centenary: New Approaches and Case Studies', in *Experiencing 11 November 2018: Commemoration and the First World War Centenary*, ed. by Shanti Sumartojo (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2021), p. 1.
[22] T.G. Ashplant, 'War Commemoration in Western Europe: Changing Meanings, Divisive Loyalties, Unheard Voices', in *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration*, ed. by Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 263.
[23] 'Sir John Major's Speech at the Scottish Parliamentary Journalists' Association', *John Major Archive* (17 June 2014), https://johnmajorarchive.org.uk/2014/06/17/sir-john-majors-speech-at-the-scottish-parliamentary-journalists-association-17-june-2014/ [Accessed 14 October 2024].
[24] 'Speech at Imperial War Museum on First World War Centenary Plans', *Gov.uk* (11 October 2012), https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/speech-at-imperial-war-museum-on-first-world-war-centenary-plans [Accessed 10 September 2024].

and destruction it wrought, particularly during a time of economic difficulty.[25] Thus, the ongoing convoluted relationship between politics and cultural memory was brought to the fore before the Centenary had begun.

These issues have served to divide society across various political cleavages, which have become so pronounced in recent years that they have led to what are now broadly termed 'culture wars'. While the term is often used to refer to the increasingly extreme partisanship seen in the United States of America, it has more specific applications in Britain, where it is often tied up with issues relating to the colonial history of the British Empire. A growing unease has emerged between the need to understand our history, and the implications of commemorating certain historical figures. Relatedly, some have argued that removing statues is an act of erasing history.

Yet, as noted by one historian, it is the job of academics to understand historical figures rather than judge them, whereas statues serve purely to honour an individual.[26] This obfuscation of the differences between history and commemoration also connect with debates about rewriting history. For some, the matter is used to accuse television producers and academics of giving certain groups more prominence in historical narratives than they had. For historians, it is adopted as an opportunity to rebalance historical perspectives – not to overwrite history, but write previously neglected groups in to it and understand their

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[25] Ben Quinn, 'Anti-War Activists Battle to get their Voices Heard in WW1 Centenary Events', *The Guardian* (8 September 2013), https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/08/anti-war-activists-ww1-centenary [Accessed 10 September 2024].

[26] Priya Satia, 'Britain's Culture War: Disguising Imperial Politics as Historical Debate about Empire', *Journal of Genocide Research*, 24.2 (2022), p. 310.

contributions. These efforts underpin the programmes explored in the 'Whose World War?' chapter. They have also formed the foundation of events in academia.[27]

Returning to the notion of digital footprints having all the permanence of footprints left in sand, one institution-organised commemorative event specifically emphasised the notion of a past that we cannot grasp, forever slipping away from us. *Pages of the Sea*, an event by 14-18 NOW, saw the portraits of various figures associated with the First World War drawn on beaches across the UK on the morning of 11 November 2018. The symbolism behind this act was defined more sombrely by the then poet laureate Carol Ann Duffy, who penned a poem entitled *The Wound in Time* (2018) for the event, featuring the notable lines 'History might as well be water, chastising this shore; for we learn nothing from your endless sacrifice'. As noted earlier, according to Google Trends, interest in the war seems to have waned again since the Centenary, thus in addition to Duffy's reflection, it also feels that this event swept part of our engagement and awareness off into the sea as well. Nevertheless, its poignancy and importance were felt by the public at the time. As noted by Emma Hanna, while attending the event at Folkestone, despite no barriers preventing them from doing so, members of the public stayed off the beach, and 'several people were wearing their forebears' war medals, and others had brought wartime photographs of their relatives'.[28]

Television also forms a useful gateway into consideration of the anniversary, largely owing to the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) commitment to 2,500 hours of programming across television and radio across the four-year period. As shown in Figure 1,

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[27] For example, see Maggie Andrews, Alison Fell, Lucy Noakes & Jane Purvis, 'Representing, Remembering and Rewriting Women's Histories of the First World War', *Women's History Review*, 27.4 (2018), pp. 511-515. This introduction notes the articles in the special issue were drawn from papers from the 2015 conference, 'Women, Gender and the First World War: Home Fronts and War Fronts'.

[28] Emma Hanna, '*Pages of the Sea*: A UK Case Study', in *Experiencing 11 November 2018: Commemoration and the First World War Centenary*, ed. by Shanti Sumartojo (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2021), p. 129.

however, the majority of this coverage was focussed in 2014 and 2018, essentially bookending the event and leaving the interim years considerably lower in activity. This is partially explained by the BBC having 'a planned pause in the coverage in 2015'.[29] It can also be noted on this graph that radio, rather than television, was responsible for most of the programming, owing in part to the drama series, *Home Front* (BBC Radio 4, 2014 – 2018).
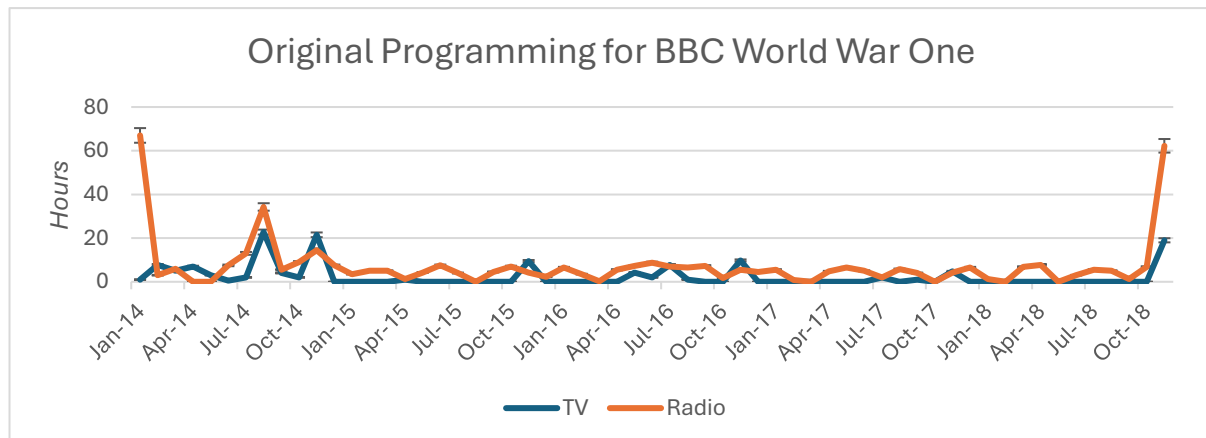
Figure 1*: Graph showing broadcasting hours on BBC television and radio from 2014 – 2018* [30]

It is worth noting here that this concentration of activity in 2014 and 2018 mirrored the search popularity for 'WW1' in the UK during this period. Figure 2 depicts a graph showing the popularity of the term from 2013 to 2018, the period being extended to show what activity looks like outside of commemorative milestones. The graph depicts the popularity of a search term by comparison to its peak, indicated by 100, which occurred in November 2018. The search popularity for the term for the rest of the Centenary was largely in line with that outside the anniversary, with Remembrance Day forming habitual peaks (when broadcasters

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[29] Jane Ellison, 'World War One on the BBC', *Cultural Trends*, 27.2 (2018), p. 129.
[30] This graph was also published in Helena Power, 'Repetition versus Revision: Narratives in the BBC's Great War Centenary', *British Journal for Military History*, 7.1 (2021), p. 137.

also return their attention to the conflict). This suggests something of a correlation between broadcaster activity and public interest.
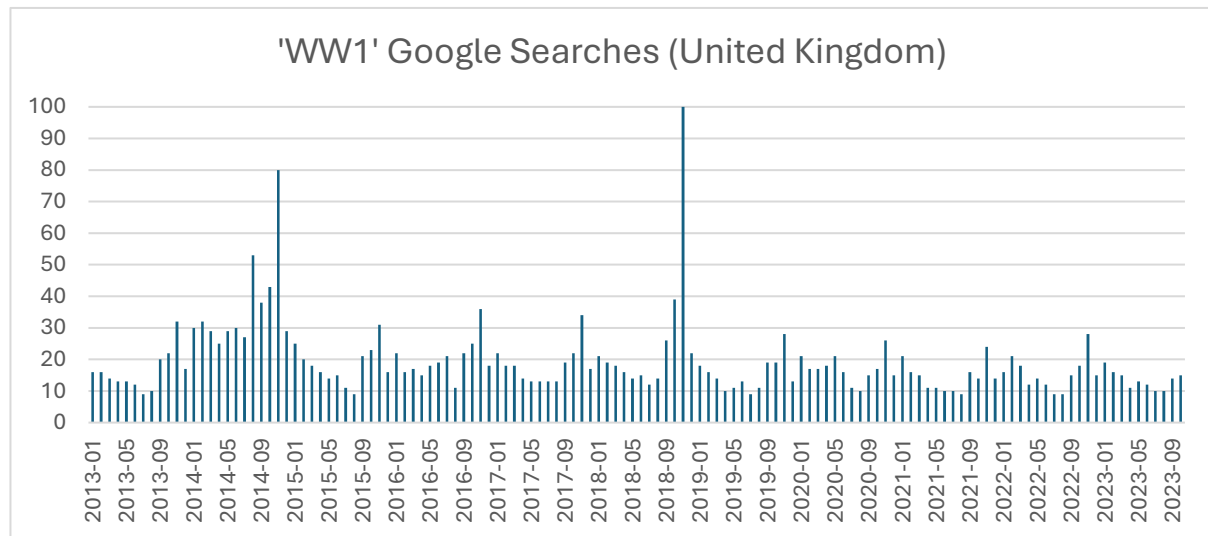
Figure 2: Graph showing popularity of the search term 'WW1' in the UK from 2013–2023 [31]

As alluded to earlier, some of the televisual depictions of the war within this period have already been considered, both specifically and thematically. One such theme was the exploration of less typically highlighted elements of wartime experience. Emma Hanna noted the emergence of these aspects in pre-Centenary television programming. She highlights that these had previously been left out, as 'in *The Great War* [BBC, 1964], those whose deaths were ordered by courts martial as punishment for treachery, desertion, cowardice, mutiny, murder, striking or violence, disobedience, sleeping on post, quitting post and casting away arms were not discussed'.[32] The notable exception to the exclusion of coverage of mutiny in the First World War on British television is of course the controversial series *The Monocled Mutineer* (BBC, 1986), though it is worth noting that this has not been aired by the BBC again

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[31] Graph produced using Google Trends (https://trends.google.com/trends/).

[32] Emma Hanna, 'Figures of Transgression in Representations of the First World War on British Television', in *Mediating War and Identity: Figures of Transgression in 20th- and 21st-Century War Representation*, ed. by Lisa Purse and Ute Wölfel (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Scholarship Online, 2021), https://doi-org.chain.kent.ac.uk/10.3366/edinburgh/9781474446266.003.0004, p. 55.

since 1988.[33] More recently, programmes such as *Peaky Blinders* (BBC, 2013–2022) have shown 'that wartime trauma can be depicted for today's audiences via a range of transgressive characters who can convey disturbing elements of the conflict in the context of their dramatic settings'.[34] Thus, we begin to see that television broadcasters have recently been growing the ways in which the war is depicted on screen, a point which will be considered in further detail in the following chapters.

Literature Review & Methodology

Memory studies is one of the most rapidly growing fields of the past three decades. From its roots in cognitive psychology and cultural history, it has expanded across other disciplines and been explored and analysed in a multitude of ways, with the most recent developments considering the relationship between cultural memory and social media. This has led to a considerable divergence of research focus and methodology, as each discipline approaches the topic in different ways. Across history, journalism, media and communication studies, and digital studies, each field offers important unique interpretations, yet often remains separated from its research counterparts. This literature review will offer a consideration of memory studies across these fields, demonstrating how this thesis seeks to combine their approaches for a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary memory of the First World War, and the impact of a rapidly developing technological landscape on its evolution and representation. It will consider transdisciplinary studies of memory, media, public history, and

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[33] According to the BBC's record for the episodes on its website, 'The Monocled Mutineer', *BBC* (2024), https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00tjf57/episodes/guide [Accessed 11 September 2024].
[34] Hanna, 'Figures of Transgression', p. 69.

digital studies of history and memory. It will ultimately note that while each discipline offers valuable insight in to the concept of memory, what is desperately needed is a cohesive response to these works, and the application of historical context. For while they are seemingly disparate elements, broadcasting, public history and social media all engage with and help shape our cultural memory of the First World War.

Much of the literature on cultural memory addresses the issue of utilising the term 'memory' in different ways. While it is a commonly accepted term, it occasionally means slightly different things, often depending on the emphasis of the relevant historian, and has resulted in a number of similar terms to apply to more specific areas. The most significant of these refer to Durkheimian-based interpretations, which view memory and society as being intertwined, in the sense that society is the framework through which we develop memory.[35] This understanding lends itself towards alternative terms for cultural memory, such as collective memory and social memory. In addition to the sense of community both terms conjure up, they also tend to have an emphasis on memory being a phenomenon which is conveyed generationally, and thus evolves through generational transmission.[36] An emphasis on sociological interpretations of memory is often preferable to psychological ones for historians, as the latter tends to lack consideration for the impact of sociological factors on the ways we remember and represent the past.[37] Indeed, one of the most useful definitions of collective memory for this thesis is 'the site of mediation where professional history must

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[35] Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, p. 43.

[36] Aleida Assmann, 'Re-framing Memory: Between Individual and Collective Forms of Constructing the Past', in *Performing the Past: Memory, History and Identity in Modern Europe*, ed. by Karin Tilmans, Frank Van Vree and Jay Winter (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), pp. 41–42; Nigel C. Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 180.

[37] Winter and Sivan, Setting the Framework, p. 29.

ultimately share space with popular history'.[38] This highlights the interplay between two different worlds, while subtly acknowledging that sharing space does not necessarily imply that one can completely transform the other.

Cultural memory, on the other hand, tends to move beyond an interpretation of something which is passed between people to something which can be conveyed through a variety of cultural media. Naturally, 'culture' is something of an ambiguous term, and subject to varying definitions of its own.[39] For all of the phenomena which can fall under its lexicological umbrella, cultural representations of history are still something which continue to occur after an event, thereby demarcating them outside of communicative interpretations of memory which rely on the experiences of contemporaries to be passed down.[40] Moreover, the media and cultural studies scholar Marita Sturken has noted that 'the concept of cultural memory (as opposed to collective memory) is deeply allied with the notion of memory practices'.[41] This connects with Jan Assmann's distinction between cultural and communicative memory, namely that the former is also defined by its distance.[42] This distance creates a reliance on media to create and preserve a cultural memory.

Indeed, this broader interpretation of memory in its cultural form offers a plethora of sources for historians working in memory studies. Yet, it is not devoid of the influence of our family histories. 'Memories circulate and are reproduced and reformed within family and

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[38] Gary R. Edgerton, 'Television as Historian: A Different Kind of History Altogether', in *Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age*, ed. by Gary R. Edgerton and Peter C. Rollins (Lexington, Ky: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), p. 5.

[39] See Peter Burke, *History & Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), pp. 118–119.

[40] Jan Assmann, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', in *New German Critique*, trans. by John Czaplicka, 65 (1995), pp. 128–129.

[41] Marita Sturken, 'Memory, Consumerism and Media: Reflections on the Emergence of the Field', *Memory Studies*, 1.1 (2008), p. 74.

[42] Assmann, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', p. 129.

kinship networks, entering onto the public stage when they relate to elements of the wider cultural memory in circulation there'.[43] If we combine the understanding of cultural memory with elements of social memory, then we see culture as something interpreted by society which adds its own understanding and forms cultural memory. Thus, this definition of cultural memory is most applicable to this thesis.

Historians have examined the various reasons behind the endurance of memory of the First World War and the different ways it has been represented, with a steadily emerging amount of research on representations and events which took place during the Centenary. The reasoning behind the perseverance and development of modern memory has traditionally been split in to two categories – emotional need and political motivation. Examinations of emotional incentives behind enduring memory of the conflict largely focus on the interwar period, when the emotional intensity of the event was at its highest as bereaved families sought ways to process their grief over their losses. A key advocator of this approach is Jay Winter. In his seminal work, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, he explores how the interwar population, particularly the bereaved, helped to develop and then interact with war memorials and other commemorative forms. He also counters arguments suggesting that the upheavals of the war created a schism between traditionalism and modernism, arguing instead that the British public held on to familiar Victorian traditions to process their grief.[44] His sources centre around artistic representations of the conflict, particularly war memorials which, he acquiesces, for all their emotive power are unavoidably political in

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[43] 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. 613.

[44] The use of familiar referential frameworks from the past to comprehend an unfamiliar present has also been expanded on; See Stefan Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remembrance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

nature. He notes that one of their key purposes was to serve as a tangible connection between the living and the dead, as the former could touch the names of the latter. [45]

The aspect of naming the dead itself was an emergent phenomenon of the First World War, as Thomas Laqueur identifies 1915 as the time when 'a new era of remembrance began: the era of the common soldier's name or its self-conscious and sacralized oblivion'.[46] The latter point here is noteworthy as it raises the fact that naming soldiers did not guarantee that they would necessarily be 'remembered', as memory is selective and exclusionary by nature – this point will be considered in detail in the 'Whose World War?' chapter. The need to remember the fallen marked a shift from unmarked singular or mass graves to identifiable places where the bereaved could grieve. Of course, the need to memorialise in stone also raises issues of space, with some 58,600 names on the Menin Gate alone.[47] The physicality of war memorials is an aspect which has become increasingly muted in the digital age, as virtual forms of representation become more common.

In his recent work, *War Beyond Words*, Winter revisits a similar source base but extends the temporal range beyond the interwar years to the present. As the need for memorials to serve as a focal point of bereavement passed, Winter argues that they acted as 'lenses' through which the public could more comfortably perceive the 'blinding, terrifying light' of the war.[48] Winter's considerations of the impact of the horrors of war are reflective of earlier works on the area; Paul Fussell argues that the war was a cultural schism which broke traditional ideals. He examined literary works from the war, noting their juxtaposition

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[45] Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 113.
[46] Thomas W. Laqueur, 'Memory and Naming in the Great War', in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity,* ed. by John R. Gillis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 152.
[47] Ibid., p. 154.
[48] Winter, *War Beyond Words*, p. 1.

to the harsh reality of warfare, and ultimately argued the great irony of the war was the imbalance between its brutality and its aims and airs of patriotism.[49] Fussell's work has since been frequently criticised by historians for its restrictive literary canon, and the conceivably unavoidable impact of experiencing the Second World War on his perceptions of the earlier conflict. However, it has also been acknowledged that Fussell should not be criticised for failing to foresee the future of cultural history on the war, and that his work should be seen as a step in the development of such history itself.[50] Thus, it remains one of the most extensive examinations of literary representations of war and is still foundational in approaching the subject.

These works are foundational in understanding contemporary representations of the war, but the source bases utilised appear increasingly outdated in the digital era, with the Internet becoming more widely used, and the growth of the social media monoliths of Facebook, Twitter and Reddit. Indeed, the emergence of the digital era and the ubiquity of smart devices calls into question the potential changes to the emotional impact of war memorials, as they are more frequently represented through screens and via social media, a point which is considered later in this literature review. Highlighting this aspect of how the public experiences commemorative events is reflective of calls in recent works to move from what is conveyed to how it is experienced and felt, thus framing studies of commemoration in experiential rather than performative frameworks.[51] Moreover, as the public's attention is increasingly focussed on electronic screens, physical memorials have slowly been reduced to

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[49] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 4th edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
[50] See Leonard V. Smith, 'Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*: Twenty-five Years Later', *History and Theory*, 40.2 (2001), pp. 241–260.
[51] Shanti Sumartojo, 'Reframing Commemoration', p. 3.

background scenery, returning to take the spotlight fleetingly each Remembrance Sunday, albeit mostly via broadcast through television screens.

While literature was a foundational element of Fussell's work, contemporary literary works may have less power than they once did, their presence now most commonly being found in the GCSE English Literature syllabus. The role of this particular subject in the curriculum came to the fore during the Centenary, when teachers were criticized for reinforcing a narrative of the war focussed around 'mud, blood and the tragedy of the Western Front'.[52] The conflict struggles to find its footing in History lessons, where it jostles with other subjects in the Key Stage 3 syllabus, and the causes and origins of the war find more prominence than later events.[53] Yet, while these initial introductions to the First World War are important, they are often either reinforced or remoulded by representations encountered outside the classroom. This thesis will expand on the foundations laid out in these earlier works (and more recent ones) by offering considerations of how digital representations of physical memorials and memorial spaces may have altered our perception of them and the resulting impact on cultural memory. Crucially, it will examine how the Internet is destabilising the more common methods of learning about history. As Jason Steinhauer has argued,

> Technology has not only disrupted how we learn history; it has disrupted the
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> entire history profession. The Web and social media have birthed new forms
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> of communicating history that, over time, have made the classroom lecture,
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> the scholarly monograph and the journal article feel increasingly antiquated

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[52] Catriona Pennell, 'Learning Lessons from War? Inclusions and Exclusions in Teaching First World War History in English Secondary Schools', *History and Memory*, 28.1 (2016), p. 41.
[53] Ibid., p. 43.

and impenetrable as new forms of history communication better accommodate the sensibilities of digital consumers.[54]

In addition to considerations of this aspect of public history and 'education', this thesis will also appraise virtual forms of memorialisation and our evolving engagement with them in the digital era.

The counterpoint to the emotive reasoning behind the endurance of cultural memory is historiography which emphasises the political motivations behind memory and remembrance activities. One of the key works in this area is George L. Mosse's *Fallen Soldiers*, in which he explores the 'Myth of the War Experience', the utilisation of remembrance for nationalist purposes and the justification of war through patriotic sacrifice. Mosse identifies a correlation between the two, arguing that at times of heightened nationalist sentiment, sentiments towards warfare will lean more heavily on notions of fanaticism and sacrifice.[55] Mosse's research is significant as nationalist sentiments ran high during the various political upheavals which occurred during the Centenary; this is reflected by concerns over the nature of remembrance activities and potential political influences as highlighted in several works examining commemorative activities which took place during the Centenary.

Catriona Pennell studied participants of the First World War Centenary Battlefield Tours Programme and noted that the pupils who took part largely experienced the tours through familiar, traditional tropes of remembrance such as sacrifice and gratitude.[56] This is

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[54] Jason Steinhauer, *History Disrupted: How Social Media and the World Wide Web Have Changed the Past* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), p. 5.
[55] See Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*.
[56] Catriona Pennell, '"Remembrance Isn't Working": First World War Battlefield Tours and the Militarisation of British Youth during the Centenary', *Childhood*, 27.3 (2020), pp. 383–98; See also Catriona Pennell, 'Taught to Remember? British Youth and First World War Centenary Battlefield Tours', *Cultural Trends*, 27.2 (2018), pp. 83–98.

synonymous with the immutable fact that what we say about the past has much to do with the time in which we say it. Furthermore, whereas emotional incentives for commemoration are often identified as coming 'from below' (as noted previously with grieving families), many of the political incentives for commemoration come 'from above'. The impact of state institutions on ritualised remembrance is a key factor when considering activities during the Centenary, largely due to the substantial involvement of the British government in funding national and international remembrance events. This research will expand on this by considering not only the politicisation of institutional remembrance itself, but also the politicised language used on social media when discussing the First World War's legacy, its representations and commemoration.

The British government has been closely involved with formal remembrance events since their inception, most prominently the wreath-laying ceremony at the Cenotaph in Whitehall and the two-minute silence observed on Remembrance Sunday/Armistice Day. Due to its prominent and historical status in the remembrance calendar, it has received a considerable degree of academic attention. Adrian Gregory produced a monograph on the event, *The Silence of Memory*, in which he explored the history of the event during the interwar period and its reception by the British public.[57] His work is significant because while the directly bereaved are no longer present, the event still holds an emotive impact today, and its format has remained largely unchanged (other than the inclusion of its broadcast on television). More recent studies have considered the history of the Silence on a broader chronological scale. Mark Connelly explored the changing tone of Armistice Day and its rituals

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

during the interwar period.[58] Jenny Macleod and Yvonne Inall have tracked the history of Armistice Day over the preceding century. They noted that while the core of the day has remained unchanged – that of the simplicity and individualistic nature of the Silence – the way the overall event has been conducted has changed over time, largely in response to reflecting the diversity of military service to an increasingly diverse population.[59]

This shift in focus to a more inclusive and diverse representation is reflected by various broadcasts, initiatives and events in the Centenary which sought to broaden public understanding of the war, as will be explored in the third chapter of this thesis. Moreover, it highlights the second element in the commemorative activity alongside silence – connectivity. This is particularly evident in organised events, such as that at the Cenotaph on Remembrance Day.[60] As will be noted later in this thesis, this activity has expanded its collective nature in the online realm, whereby the connectivity is formed by users refraining from posting anything during the Silence.

Of broader significance to the subject of memory of the First World War are more general works on the relevance and observance of anniversaries, in addition to specific considerations of the Centenary itself. Anniversaries are viewed as a natural point in time to reflect on the past and commemorate it. Rather than simply being an innate human need, one historian has argued that the 'strict and explicit demand for repetition seems to come from a European understanding of culture as a permanent dialogue with the past'.[61] This observation

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[58] Mark Connelly, *The Great War, Memory and Ritual: Commemoration in the City and East London, 1916-1939* (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2002).

[59] Macleod and Inall, 'A Century of Armistice Day', pp. 48–68.

[60] For an expanded consideration of this, see James Wallis, 'Observing Silence: Experiential Reflections on the 11 November 2018 Armistice Day Commemorations in London', in *Experiencing 11 November 2018: Commemoration and the First World War Centenary*, ed. by Shanti Sumartojo (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2021), pp. 107–19.

[61] Konrad Köstlin, 'On Anniversaries', *Cultural Analysis*, 13 (2014), p. 12.

is reflective of common tropes observed throughout the Centenary of remembrance as a means of showing gratitude to those who took part in the conflict. He also notes that a common feature of anniversaries is the repetition of activities, particularly those which simulate the beginning of the event. This is significant because several broadcasts and commemorative initiatives from the first year of the Centenary (such as the #LightsOut event on 4 August 2014) were centred on or inspired by things from the pre-war period and the outbreak of the conflict. Yet it is still an examination of anniversaries as a cultural entity devoid of any particular temporal or technological influences. This thesis seeks to expand on this by understanding how a longstanding event has been changed by technological developments.

Essays on the Centenary often focus on a particular aspect of the anniversary, rather than the event as a whole. Some of these considered commemorative activities in the individual nations of the United Kingdom. While these are useful for more localised perspectives on the Centenary, and for insight of the impact of political instabilities within the union and the impact on commemoration, due to the concentrated nature of their research they are omitted from this literature review. Several papers were produced as reflections on the work of individual organisations. Paul Cornish produced one such paper reflecting on the activities of the Imperial War Museums (IWM). Of particular note is his discussion of the ability of digital technology to broaden public engagement, which inspired the increased digitisation of the IWM's collections.[62] The then Head of Creative Partnerships for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Jane Ellison, produced a paper considering the corporation's intentions behind its planned commemorative broadcasting schedule.[63] This offers useful insight into the

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[62] Paul Cornish, 'Imperial War Museums and the Centenary of the First World War', *Twentieth Century British History*, 27.4 (2016), pp. 513–514.
[63] Ellison, 'World War One on the BBC', pp. 125–30.

BBC's intentions and reasoning behind their broadcast programmes and schedules. Similarly, Karen Brookfield's exploration of the funding activities of the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) provides a valuable overview of the range of projects which took place over the course of the Centenary.[64] However, both of these articles were produced by employees of the respective institutions. They must thus be treated cautiously as they are likely to be focussed on presenting their respective activities in a favourable light, and thus can function slightly more as press releases than academic articles. This is indicated by the lack of critical observations of events in either paper. They have limited scope for this thesis but are valuable insights when considered carefully.

Although the field of memory studies has had limited engagement with journalism, the latter has been exploring its connection with memory for some time. Barbie Zelizer highlights the disconnect between journalism and memory studies, whereby journalism consistently contributes to the endurance of memory, an activity which she argues has been largely disregarded by memory studies scholars.[65] The impact of journalism on memory has been a topic of scholarly discussion for some time, so the lack of consideration from the field of memory studies is a surprising omission. Owing to the Centenary's presence and promulgation through news media, the relationship between journalism and memory is of considerable importance to this research. The key issue is to engage with journalism and memory as a bidirectional process. Where the relationship has been addressed, the perception of journalism as a singular form of representation for the masses has been criticised. Carolyn Kitch notes that 'in our typical scholarly attention to single themes and

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[64] Karen Brookfield, 'The People's Centenary: A Perspective from the Heritage Lottery Fund', *Cultural Trends*, 27.2 (2018), pp. 119–24.

[65] Barbie Zelizer, 'Why Memory's Work on Journalism Does Not Reflect Journalism's Work on Memory', *Memory Studies*, 1.1 (2008), pp. 79–87.

single types of media, we write as though memory were beamed directly at each of us through a technologically discrete and temporally bounded delivery system', going on to clarify that we receive information and form memory from different sources.[66] This is a highly significant point, as it correlates with more recent interpretations of cultural memory existing in increasingly multitudinous forms, consistently reshaped as it is transmitted back and forth between different media platforms and communities. The connection between journalism and commemoration is particularly conspicuous, as 'commemorative stories are sometimes referred to as "anniversary journalism."'[67] This relationship is of considerable relevance to this research, due to the focus on television and radio broadcast as a means of commemoration. The habitual broadcast of activities such as the Silence and the Royal British Legion's Festival of Remembrance have taken place for decades, and thus provide a useful historical backdrop when considering milestone anniversaries in the Centenary.

While journalism may have received little attention in memory studies, there have been several notable examinations of media representations of the First World War. Emma Hanna's *The Great War on the Small Screen* is a keystone study of earlier media representations of the conflict. She provides a comprehensive overview of the development of remembrance up to the early twenty-first century, from earlier forms of commemoration such as memorials to more modern forms covering a range of television series from 1964–2005. She also notes other factors which have affected popular interpretations of the war, such the education system and its curricular focus on war poetry, and the differences between veteran memory and public memory.[68] Her work provides a methodologically and

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[66] Carolyn Kitch, 'Placing Journalism inside Memory - and Memory Studies', *Memory Studies*, 1.3 (2008), p. 316.
[67] Jill A. Edy, 'Journalistic Uses of Collective Memory', *Journal of Communication*, 49.2 (1999), p. 74.
[68] Hanna, *The Great War on the Small Screen*.

chronologically useful precursor to this research, which will extend the temporal scope and broaden the source base to include digital representations online. There have also been more specific studies of media representation, such as Mark Connelly's work on the thirteenth episode of *The Great War* (BBC, 1964), which focussed on the Battle of the Somme, arguably the most prominent narrative in modern memory of the war. Connelly begins by noting that the 'hallowed and traumatic image' of the battle has endured over time, and that this episode was seen as 'a chance to straighten the record' on the Somme, an approach which was broadly echoed when the Centenary was seen as a critical opportunity to do the same on a wider scale. To this end, the main rationale of the programme was to highlight the need to 'grind down the Germans', to counteract the extant narrative of futility and waste, and to note that it was ultimately a success, albeit at considerable cost. Connelly concludes by noting the overwhelmingly positive reception the series as a whole received, and reiterates the particular power held by the Somme episode.[69]

The importance of the Somme has endured in televisual representations of the war, as it regularly continued to be commemorated on 1 July beyond the 50th anniversary.[70] *The Great War* is often viewed as a benchmark for documentaries about the conflict, and consideration of it is undeniably important to this research, given the number of documentaries broadcast during the Centenary which also sought to improve public understanding of the war. Indeed, Dan Todman also recognises it as the 'most popular and most influential production' of its era.[71] As will be shown later in this thesis, while modern television has adapted from its earlier

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[69] M[ark] L. Connelly, 'The Great War, *Part 13: The Devil Is Coming*', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 22.1 (2002), pp. 21–28.
[70] Dan Todman, 'The Ninetieth Anniversary of the Battle of the Somme', in *War Memory and Popular Culture: Essays on Modes of Remembrance and Commemoration*, ed. by Michael Keren and Holger H. Herwig (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009), p. 34 & p. 38.
[71] Todman, *The Great War*, p. 29.

days, the series formed a framework for producing successful documentaries. As will also be demonstrated, the battle of the Somme itself has become a byword to encapsulate the futility and 'mud, blood and poetry' sentiments embodied by much 1960's historiography on the conflict. The most apparent example of this was the monograph published by the former Conservative MP, Alan Clark, *The Donkeys* (1961). The title, and the work itself, centralise the notion of 'lions' (brave soldiers) being led by 'donkeys' (inept generals). Such attitudes, combined with the rise of anti-nuclear movements during the 1960s are often cited for the comparable reactions elicited by viewers to television of the period, including *The Great War*. However, as Todman has argued, the reasons for shifts in cultural memory are less easy to delineate and define, and the temporal distance of generations from the conflict also plays a role in less ambiguous sentiments being formed amongst the viewing audience.[72] It can be assumed that the historiography of the period is less relevant to the average television viewer than popular documentaries such as this, and as will be demonstrated, it forms a foundation on which centenary programming both builds itself, and deviates from.

Most studies of the relationship between media and memory tend to address media as a broader phenomenon. They focus on a range of considerations, such as the impact of media on our recollection of the past. Some scholars have reflected on the impact of film on our memory of events. Marita Sturken has highlighted that much extant work on memory comes from historians, or heavily refers to works produced by them. She reflects on the impact of film narratives on the personal recollections of survivors, particularly the integration of the former into the latter. Critically, she outlines the power of mass media to 'co-opt memories and reconfigure histories' as simple narratives can be deployed to evoke an empathetic

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[72] Dan Todman, 'The Reception of *The Great War* in the 1960s', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 22.1 (2002), pp. 32-36.

response from the audience.[73] These observations are critical in assessing fictional representations of the war, as their impetus towards entertainment encourages the use of popularly familiar tropes at the potential expense of accuracy. Similar observations have been made regarding film and memory, particularly the ability of the media to diminish the sense of time and, by narrative imperative, any notion that things could have happened differently.[74] These observations feed into wider concerns about the ability of popular entertainment to educate and inform the public, and moreover to think critically about the matter presented to them. This is a criticism commonly espoused by historians, whose reverence of the importance of source analysis and reasoned argument often finds them at odds with the more laidback requirements of public history.[75] This dichotomic clash has endured throughout the Centenary and beyond; it must be redressed to consider the benefits of both sides.

Public history itself is a variable term. It 'is highly flexible, engaging with diverse media presentations of history (from novels and films to exhibition labels and to political support for history such as national commemorations)'.[76] Scholars of public history have outlined the differences between public and academic history. David Glassberg states that 'while professional historians talk about having an interpretation of history, the public talks about having a sense of history'.[77] Addressing memory, Glassberg goes on to argue that in-person events are 'often better suited than a journal article to explore the contrast between history and memory'.[78] This is a somewhat questionable assertion and is emblematic of the

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[73] Sturken, 'Memory, Consumerism and Media', pp. 73–78.

[74] Williams, *Media, Memory and the First World War*, *passim*.

[75] Maggie Andrews, 'Tropes and Trench Cakes: The Home Front in the Media and Community History', *Twentieth Century British History*, 27.4 (2016), pp. 508–512.

[76] Melinda Haunton and Georgie Salzedo, '"A Duty, an Opportunity and a Pleasure": Connecting Archives and Public History', *Archives and Records*, 42.1 (2021), p. 41.

[77] David Glassberg, 'A Sense of History', *Public Historian*, 19.2 (1997), p. 70.

[78] Ibid., p. 71

differences between public and academic history. In-person events are undeniably more engaging and involving than an academic article, and thus will more readily convey a narrative to an audience. They are also useful as research sources of modern memory. However, they are less well-suited to debate on the nature of memory, how it is represented and communicated, and how it changes. These, of course, are the concerns of academics. It is therefore advisable to maintain an awareness of the strengths and advantages of the two fields.

The tensions between academics and television producers have previously been outlined, but John Tosh expands on this by noting that one of the reasons for the different tone of public history is that it is largely intended for professionals and amateurs outside of academic institutions.[79] This may seem an obvious statement, but it is worth highlighting that academic and public historians communicate in different manners because they are writing for differing purposes and audiences. The disconnect with much commentary on the subject is the apparent insistence that they should do the same thing. Tosh touches on this when he describes the benefits of the academic and public facets of history – while academic history instils scholars with the ability to be well-informed in their area and utilise their knowledge base to understand current affairs, public history benefits the population by exposing them to and improving their knowledge of events which are less apparent to them.[80] Herein lies a key issue for this research – public history can be appraised by academics, but it should be done so as public history in its own right, and not viewed as a pound-shop version of academia. Public history can benefit from the inclusion of academics, and this research will take careful

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[79] John Tosh, 'Public History, Civic Engagement and the Historical Profession in Britain', *History*, 99.335 (2014), p. 192.
[80] Ibid., pp. 196–198

consideration of the merging of the two fields. It is useful to understand the differences and benefits of each field, but it is more useful to consider the ways in which they interact with each other, particularly where this interaction has the potential to influence cultural memory.

Given the development of new technologies and social media, the scale of their adoption, and the propensity of the population to detail their lives and opinions online, it is of little surprise that digital studies scholars have approached the topic of memory with a modern scope. A focus on digital representations has progressively saturated the field of memory studies, where social media and personal memory representations are burgeoning areas of research. While the growing phenomenon of memory as a digital practice has received increasing amounts of attention, surprisingly little has been produced in terms of methodological research frameworks. Indeed, Brant Burkey has identified that 'a conspicuous gap remains in the conversation regarding how to specifically study digital practices of remembering in a multimodal context'.[81] Here the 'multimodal context' refers to the multiplicity of screens and devices by which we engage with memory and remembering processes. It also connects with a modern trend of recognising memory as a multitudinous phenomenon rather than a singular one – not only is memory represented in ever-diversifying ways, but so too are the ways we communicate it. The title of his work is also significant, as referencing an 'ecosystem' is evocative of an interdependent web of communities, ensuring the survival and development of a larger system. This is crucial for the nature of this thesis, as it highlights that the various media representations now develop and inform each other, rather than existing as separate areas. Indeed, this notion was expanded on by Andrew Hoskins, who both identified 'a contemporary ecology of "metamemory" where discourses

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[81] Burkey, 'Repertoires of Remembering', p. 180.

and debates attempt to reconcile or challenge the function or purpose of particular cultural memory markers', and also argued that 'contemporary memory is thoroughly interpenetrated by a technological unconscious in that there occurs a "co-evolution" of memory and technology'.[82] Ergo, the evolvement of one element impacts the evolution of the other.

Burkey also notes that the pluralistic and interactive nature of the modern digital landscape means that memory is now less affected by top-down influences, and instead is being consistently evolved and remoulded by the engagement and interaction of online communities.[83] He encapsulates these ideas under the terminology of a 'digital ecosystem', implying a comprehensive variety of environments with varying levels of impact and importance. This is reflective of a key shift in previous works on cultural memory, which have largely approached memory as something which is linearly dictated to the population by memorials, institutions, and television. This shift towards a more congruent understanding of the elements of cultural memory also applies to the interpretation of the digital – rather than viewing a source as wholly physical or digital, these elements are 'connected and encountered through the confluence of digitality that shapes, embodies and permeates our experiential worlds'.[84] This research will incorporate this approach to memory as a multitude to consider televisual and online representations of the Great War as distinct elements of the post-broadcast era.

This collectivisation (or democratisation) of memory has been utilised to explore the proximity and amalgamation of individual and collective memory in online spaces. The

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[82] Andrew Hoskins, 'Digital Network Memory', in *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, ed. by Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), pp. 94–96.
[83] Burkey, 'Repertoires of Remembering', pp. 182–183.
[84] Danielle Drozdzewski, Shanti Sumartojo, and Emma Waterton, *Geographies of Commemoration in a Digital World: Anzac @ 100* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), p. 11.

extensive uptake of the Internet and social media has led to widespread access to large

amounts of information, and consequently a broader range of people can now document and

disseminate their experiences and views.[85] The vast amount of information available to such

a broad audience was largely unprecedented in the late-twentieth century, when many works

on memory emerged, and thus an understanding of the impact of these developments on

memory and memory studies is critical. Moreover, in addition to having access to vast

amounts of information, the public are now able to contribute to such digital archives as well.

As highlighted by Lucy Noakes, 'the internet has become a key site for the collection and

transmission of individual wartime memories, helping to transform separate and sometimes

disparate acts of remembering into new, shared, sites of remembrance'.[86] The expansion of

individual memory into the public realm is also reflective of initiatives during the Centenary

which explored individual stories and encouraged the public to research their family histories.

Genealogy has been a growing area of public interest for some years, fuelled in part by the

popularity of the television series *Who Do You Think You Are?* (BBC, 2004–present), and there

is a common tendency for the public to share the results of their family history research on

social media. Ekaterina Haskins has noted that this dissemination of private memory into the

public realm has created 'an evolving patchwork of public memory'.[87] The aspect of sharing

family histories online is also a prominent example of representing the past in the modern

world, and it occurs alongside representations of contemporary life, effectively blurring the

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[85] Hillary Savoie, 'Memory Work in the Digital Age: Exploring the Boundary Between Universal and Particular Memory Online', *Global Media Journal*, 9.16 (2010), http://chain.kent.ac.uk/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/memory-work-digital-age-exploring-boundary/docview/325208898/se-2?accountid=7408, p. 4.

[86] Lucy Noakes, 'The BBC's "People's War" Website', in *War Memory and Popular Culture: Essays on Modes of Remembrance and Commemoration*, ed. by Michael Keren and Holger H. Herwig (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009), p. 136.

[87] Ekaterina Haskins, 'Between Archive and Participation: Public Memory in a Digital Age', *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 37.4 (2007), p. 405.

lines between past and present. This is again reflective of the need for historians to recognise cultural memory as a much more complicated and multifaceted phenomenon than is implied in extant historiography.

There are also relevant examinations in digital studies literature on the impact of the digital era (in particular the rise of social media) on the way we commemorate historical events, and also how we engage with heritage institutions. The omnipresence of tourists at memorial sites with smartphone in hand taking photos and 'selfies' is so familiar that it requires little explication. Memory studies scholars are instead exploring how this behaviour affects a historically individual and linear relationship between visitor and space. Christoph Bareither carried out one such study by focussing on visitors to the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, focussing on the visitors' emotional experience of the space and how they relayed it on social media. He notably 'raises the question of whether and how the digital presence of heritage sites is still connected to the experiences enabled through their materiality and architecture'. He argues that digital media does not negate the impact of memorials and posits that the 'emotional affordances' of the technology enable 'a practice of presencing the past through emotions'.[88] This is a useful reflection on the impact of digital technology on extant traditional (and tangible) forms of commemoration – the majority of modern memory studies focus on born-digital forms of remembrance.

Similarly, Brant Burkey has considered the use of digital initiatives by cultural heritage institutions. This move towards more participatory and communal digital interfaces has reoriented the hierarchical flow of information away from its previous inclination towards

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[88] Christoph Bareither, 'Capture the Feeling: Memory Practices in between the Emotional Affordances of Heritage Sites and Digital Media', *Memory Studies*, 14.3 (2021), pp. 578–91.

curatorial authority. He also encourages an awareness beyond that of collective memory, which is ultimately the end-product of 'collective remembering' – this shift in focus places the emphasis on the community involved in the act of remembering, as well as 'the memory sharing practices that connect them'.[89] An emphasis on memory activities is important to this research, as the use of social media to discuss and share representations of the war during the Centenary are as much examples of collective remembering as they are of collective memory. Burkey also touches upon the issues noted earlier of failing to consider memory in terms of the post-broadcast era, as he argues that such approaches are inadequately equipped 'to explain the construction of collective memory in the more participatory age of Web 2.0, mobile technologies, and social networking'.[90] This warning is primarily for heritage institutions, but it extends to wider reflections on our understanding of collective memory. He concludes by noting the wealth of new digital sources available to scholars studying modern memory, in the form of web data such as searches, page hits and likes, all of which can be viewed as 'digital breadcrumbs, even institutional memory, that were never before available'.[91] The key takeaway here is to apply these digital sources to historical study, whereby we can trace a long-term phenomenon such as cultural memory of the First World War from its traditional archival roots to its modern form.

Of course, digital sources are only useful if they remain available. The LAIRAH (Log Analysis of Internet Resources in the Arts and Humanities) Project inspired several papers analysing and expanding on its findings and considerations of the potential consequences for

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[89] Brant Burkey, 'Total Recall: How Cultural Heritage Communities Use Digital Initiatives and Platforms for Collective Remembering', *Journal of Creative Communications*, 14.3 (2019), p. 236.
[90] Ibid., p. 239.
[91] Ibid., p. 244.

the Arts and Humanities.[92] The findings of one such paper crucially noted that despite the funding of 250 digital humanities projects by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), there is little understanding of what happens to the resources produced once the projects end. It also explored the ways users interact with online history resources. One of the major conclusions in this area was that users generally approach online resources in the same way they might treat a library or archive i.e., as a way to access information, rather than as a research resource in its own right (such as they might use a monograph). Highlighting a notable distinction between different users, the findings also reveal that academic users interact with web resources in a particular way. Academics are more persistent about seeking information, an element which 'supports the impression of a divide between the enthusiastically digital (who appear to be a minority) and the majority of the academic profession'. They also tend to be critical of resources which do not adequately indicate where information is sourced from, such as would usually be available in footnotes or a bibliography.[93] These differences in the use of online history resources are possibly reflective of the differences in the ways academics respond to representations of war in contrast to the general public. This research will therefore build on these findings by developing a broad overview of the interactions of different users with different forms of media.

The Centenary encouraged the development of web-based resources from archival materials. As previously noted, the IWM was inspired to increase the digitisation of its collections during the Centenary, and similar inspirations occurred elsewhere. Anna-Maria

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[92] For the full report, see Claire Warwick et al, *The LAIRAH Project: Log Analysis of Digital Resources in the Arts and Humanities. Final Report to the Arts and Humanities Research Council* (Swindon: Arts and Humanities Research Council, 2006).

[93] Claire Warwick et al, 'If You Build It Will They Come? The LAIRAH Study: Quantifying the Use of Online Resources in the Arts and Humanities through Statistical Analysis of User Log Data', *Literary and Linguistic Computing*, 23.1 (2008), p. 94.

Hajba has noted how the Glucksman Library at the University of Limerick held the papers of the Armstrong family of Moyaliffe Castle, County Tipperary, which contained a range of ephemera related to the First World War. The papers had been catalogued prior to the Centenary; from 2014 to 2018 they were exhibited online in a series of weekly blog posts. Critically, in relation to issues over online longevity raised earlier, Hajba's paper explores how a small team managed to produce 'a large-scale long-term online project at minimal cost'.[94] A noteworthy start for the project was reaching out beyond the academic institution which housed it to the general public, thereby increasing its remit to public history. To reach this intended audience, the exhibition was advertised on the websites The Great War Forum and Reddit. To improve interactivity with the exhibition, a Twitter feed and Facebook page were also set up. The exhibition reached a reported global audience of 35,000 people and received positive spontaneous feedback, with one user noting the 'serial drama' impression of the weekly updates.[95] While this is a very specific case study, it is indicative of wider themes across the Centenary. The desire to reach a more public audience, the adoption of social media, and the regular drip-feeding of information were broadly adopted objectives, as this thesis will reveal. These case studies are useful, but what is needed now, and what this research will explore, are the overarching themes covering the benefits and issues encountered by organisations working with digital representations of the war during the Centenary. Moreover, it will also consider to what extent these digital legacies have survived, as many have fallen into virtual obscurity due to a lack of maintenance and upkeep.[96]

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[94] Anna-Maria Hajba, '"It's a Long Way to Tipperary": Using an Estate Collection to Develop an Online Presence', *Archives and Records*, 40.1 (2019), p. 56.

[95] Ibid., pp. 67–68.

[96] Emma Hanna et al, *Reflections on the Centenary of the First World War: Learning and Legacies for the Future* (Colchester: University of Essex, 2021), pp. 87–108.

This literature review spans several academic fields, each with their own particular focus and recurrent themes. What is obviously needed, and indeed is acknowledged and recognised in some of the literature, is to combine these works to provide a comprehensive overview of modern cultural memory in its contemporary technologically advanced, multi-platform and interactive environment. Historians have explored the history of cultural memory, but they have failed to account for the changes brought about by the digital age (or to highlight the continuities in spite of it), save for a scattering of microhistories from the centenary. Media, communication, and journalism studies have acknowledged their part in memory-making, but there has been little movement beyond the media world to explore memory as a historical and culturally extensive phenomenon. A handful of works on media representations of the war have attempted to redress this, but these must now be updated to account for the impact of the Internet. Digital studies scholars have rapidly adopted memory studies into their remit, largely with the intent of exploring how social media has turned us into digital curators of our own lives. There is some engagement with digitised historical artifacts, but this must be explored further to understand the practice in its historical context. This thesis will therefore seek to redress the lacunae present between these fields and present a modernised, interdisciplinary understanding of cultural memory and public history in the digital age, by utilising aspects from the methodologies of these broadly independent areas.

Theoretical frameworks and definitions of memory have evolved in recent decades, and owing to the varied nature of source material in this thesis, it is necessary to combine them in relatively unique ways. 'Memory' in its most traditional sense is a psychological process, whereby events and information are stored in our brains for later retrieval. Naturally, this does not apply to an event which none of us have a lived experience of, so we turn to the notion of memory in its more sociological sense. Some of the most significant studies in this

area relate to (or have evolved from) the work of the French sociologist Émile Durkheim, whereby society and memory are closely intertwined, moving it beyond an individual cognitive process to a social phenomenon helping us to maintain continuity and cohesion in our societies. Viewed through this lens, memory becomes 'a richly textured, multivocal text, as potentially relevant to the literary critic or cultural historian as to the psychologist'.[97] This thesis uses this understanding to construe cultural memory as something which is shaped and informed by society, whereby television programmes or online posts are not standalone objects, but part of an ongoing and interrelated process to mould our interpretation and remembrance of the past, in this case the First World War.

Scholarship on cultural memory of the war is an ever-increasing field addressing a growing range of sources, and consequently a variety of ways to approach the source material. Here, theories lean more towards the sociological than the psychological, with an awareness raised of how borrowing terminology from other disciplines to adopt terms such as 'collective memory' can complicate our understanding of the phenomenon.[98] Generally, it is taken to understand a narrative held about a particular event by a community or group, delineated by various definitions and demographics. Broadly speaking, interpretations of cultural memory do not cross geographic boundaries (unless doing so comparatively), a fact which emphasises the power of a society and its experiences to shape its understanding of the past. A common exploration of cultural memory in a particular society often considers the ability of certain narratives to endure over time, which are often enforced through cultural representations. It has become common to refer to certain popular narratives as a form of 'mythology', alluding

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[97] Mark Freeman, 'Telling Stories: Memory and Narrative', in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, ed. by Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), p. 263.
[98] Winter and Sivan, 'Setting the Framework', p.29.

to the fact they are often based more in sentiment than evidence and nuance. The most prominently espoused trope in cultural memory of the First World War is that of 'mud, blood and poetry', essentially a tautological triptych for futility.

Owing to the sheer volume of programming produced for the BBC alone over the Centenary period, it has been necessary to be selective about which programmes were used for the purposes of this thesis. For the pre-Centenary period, and to some extent the Centenary, the programmes selected are those which have seen no or little consideration in the existing historiography. For the anniversary itself, the programmes utilised all lend themselves to some extent to apparent themes, namely the ones forming the thematic chapters in this thesis. The BBC Radio 4 drama *Home Front*, running to some 112 hours in total, features in several areas, though it is deserving of separate study due to its scope and length.

Certain exclusions have had to be made, such as deeper consideration of *The Passing Bells* (BBC One, 2014) and *The Crimson Field* (BBC One, 2014). While the latter does lend itself towards analysis of expanding narratives of the First World War beyond 'mud, blood and poetry' and raising awareness of the roles played by women in the conflict, both series were well marketed and known in the early-Centenary calendar. Had they not been cancelled after the first series, their inclusion would have been necessitated. There are a number of programmes which were considered in the research phase, but have similarly not found a place in the final thesis, as they do not lend themselves towards a useful understanding of how representations of the past did (or did not) change during the Centenary. None of the exclusions would have had a drastic impact on the overall thread and argument, but they remain avenues for further research.

It is of little surprise that the nature of this thesis does not particularly lend itself to archival study. Sources from the BBC's Written Archive Centre (WAC) do feature, but these apply only to the first chapter, as the organisation has been less consistent about keeping records and correspondence from the late 2000s onwards. Additionally, the WAC has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, facing an initial backlog of inquiries to deal with, and having recently ceased all new queries while it seeks to manage the existing ones. As demonstrated earlier, the latter half of this thesis lends itself towards research techniques partially adopted from the digital humanities, though applied through methods more familiar to a cultural historian. Certain avenues have been restricted, however, as the acquisition of Twitter by Elon Musk in 2022 brought about changes to how the platform operates, and restricted the use of web scrapers, which are useful software programmes for gaining large amount of information on a particular topic. Thus, obtaining source material for these chapters relied on manual use of the website's search function, which puts any form of quantitative analysis of responses to the Centenary beyond the time and resources allowable for a PhD thesis. Instead, a range of differing responses to posts and events have been shown in an attempt to represent the sort of discussions found online. This is a deviation from the more technical methods used in the digital humanities; in methodological terms it is more comparable to presenting an overview of a large amount of information. As such, this thesis cannot hope to represent the broader scope of opinion that techniques such as web scraping would provide, but it does provide a useful initial insight into sources left broadly untouched by historians.

It should also be highlighted here that utilising social media for source material comes with its own unique difficulties and matters for awareness. Despite its aims for broadening social communities and engagement between them, social media websites ultimately control

what people see based on algorithms. Such processes inherently offer primacy to posts based on factors such as existing engagement (i.e. the number of likes it has received), as well as more ambiguous features such as the language used. While the archive is a collection of documents selected by archivists operating on their own criteria, the social media posts cited within this thesis have been unavoidably selected at the behest of such algorithms. They are not intended to be a direct or complete representation of online opinion about centenary activity, though every effort has been made to show differences in opinion where possible. Thus, without the option to use web scrapers to circumvent the algorithms, the sources used are offered with the caveat that they are sometimes confined by what a website deems interesting or relevant.

Outline

Evidently, the key element underpinning this thesis is to explore how representations of the First World War, and opinions expressed about them, have changed or remained familiar during the Centenary. This includes a consideration of television and radio programmes at its fore, because the objective is to bridge the gap in our understanding, not to add a disparate new element. The core question is thus not simply how we remember the past today, but how that has (and has not) changed in comparison to previous examples and established methods. Examining these similarities and differences across time will provide a better insight of the impact modern technologies are having on our relationship with history. Thus, the first chapter will engage with television and radio programmes from before the Centenary, to set the foundations of understanding how earlier emergences of technology framed our representation and remembrance of the conflict, and to bolster the foundational examples

that later representations can be compared and contrasted with. It is not exhaustive, as it does not seek to reiterate existing historiography on the area. As such, the programmes selected for analysis are those which have not appeared (or have received relatively less attention) in the extant historiography. Naturally, much of this programming relies on the experiences of people who lived through the event, but the sources explored are also evident of a world which shared a closer temporal proximity to the event, and thus explored themes which still felt relevant at the time, such as the fissure the conflict created between an old world and a new one.

Moving on to Centenary material in the second chapter, concerns shift towards how the war is represented at a time when the war feels much further away, and when the veterans are no longer around to share their experiences. Naturally, their testimony still forms the backbone of some documentaries and panel discussions, but it is not enough to simply repeat this *ad nauseam* over four years, as the material has already been extensively used and thus reveals little that is novel. Instead, broadcasters attempted to utilise different techniques to find alternative ways of making their representations feel authentic. Explorations of the use of descendants, historians and artefacts will reveal that we still feel a strong connection to the war through ancestry, knowledge, and the tangible elements it has left behind. For all of the potential of modern technology, such as computer-generated imagery and artificial intelligence, it becomes evident that traditional methods remain popular for understanding the conflict in its 'truest' form. Thus, we start to see the emergence of new ways of connecting us to familiar elements of the past.

While much may have been said about what is remembered, less has been said about who is remembered, and the audience these representations and commemorative events are

therefore aimed at. Thus, the third chapter will consider how representations of the war intended to move public understanding of it beyond the archetypes of the Western Front and the white Tommy. This includes those who are occasionally considered as having gone 'forgotten', such as women and soldiers enlisted from the colonies. It also examines how theatres of war other than the staples of the Somme and Passchendaele have been presented to give a broader geographic overview of the conflict. Lastly, as one of the challenges of the Centenary was to engage the youngest generation, and thus the most removed from it, with the war, it will consider the techniques adopted to engage their interest, whereby the programming finds itself the furthest removed from more traditional standards. These aspects are some of the greatest examples of change in the Centenary, where narratives deviate from familiar characters and storylines to present representations which are considerably novel for television.

Having explored the Centenary as presented on radio and television, the thesis then moves to consider how the anniversary was presented online, and moreover, a consideration of some of the ways the public engaged with and responded to it. This raises new areas for consideration, such as the difference between physical and digital spaces, thus the fourth chapter opens by giving an overview of work on this debated dichotomy. Furthermore, an important aspect of this work is how the Internet has delineated the boundaries of Public History from something which is delivered through literature and broadcast to something which the audience can now actively contribute to and participate in. This expansion of Public History allows it to become more closely involved with the shaping and discussion of cultural memory. The website Reddit features prominently in this, owing to it having several 'subreddits' dedicated to discussion on the war and history in general, as well as activity on other subreddits which commented on representations of the war produced during the

Centenary. Additionally, it addresses the amalgamation of cultural memory of the war and political commentary on *Twitter*. This lends itself to consideration of the extent to which the Internet is (or is not) a beneficial tool for discussing and presenting the past in the modern age. It also demonstrates that social media can be seen to be developing as an area for the discussion and shaping of cultural memory and its representations.

As noted at the start, no event in history exists in isolation, thus the end of the thesis will define the elements of a digital legacy created during the Centenary and, more significantly, how many of them remain. By providing an overview of websites and digital initiatives by different institutions and organisations, it reveals that memories created online can be just as fleeting as physical events, and in some cases more so. Thus, in addition to providing an outline of Centenary activity in the digital world, it offers a glimpse into potential issues which should be avoided in the future, lest history repeat itself.

1 Foundations of the Future: Pre-Centenary Television and Radio

'The familiar will always remain the likely starting point for the rendering of the unfamiliar'.[99]

As with the major events in history which it reflects, cultural memory does not exist in a temporal vacuum – it is a consequence and development of what came before it, shaped by the world in which it exists. Thus, to fully appreciate the themes and attitudes of cultural memory in modern media representations of the First World War during the Centenary, one must first consider earlier iterations which provide a comparative foundation from which we can identify elements of continuity and change in the present. As will become evident in this thesis, cultural memory is often more reflective of the period it is produced in than the period it represents, essentially a reiteration or evolution of earlier ideas. This chapter will explore representations of the First World War on television and radio from the 1960s up to the 2000s in order to outline the historical backdrop of the programmes considered in later chapters. Radio broadcasts have seen less attention, thus their presence in this chapter largely predate the television programmes to aid in further filling the lacuna of cultural representations of the First World War. It will not be exhaustive, as there is a sufficient body of historiography on this period already. Rather, it will complement these works and fill in the lacunae in the source

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99 E[rnst] H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, 4th edn. (London: Phaidon, 1972), p. 72, cited in Rowan Wilken, *Teletechnologies, Place, and Community* (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2011), p. 12.

material to offer a deeper and broader overview of the pre-Centenary period. It will demonstrate that while the pre-television era resulted in a more top-down view of cultural memory, it laid the foundations for ideas and concepts which would still be echoed decades later.

A brief summary of the historiography on the period is useful to contextualise the broadcasts discussed in this chapter, and will serve as a short accompaniment to the broader literature review. These works consist of explorations of programmes which base themselves around the conflict and events within it, and others which use either the war or its aftermath as more of a backdrop to other events. A number of works have focussed either in whole or in part on the BBC's landmark series, *The Great War* (1964). The level of attention this particular series has received is understandable, given its popular reception from both the public and the press.[100] Common to all of these are analyses of the themes of futility and loss (which are similarly present in the programmes and films in this chapter), reflective of their prominent status in modern cultural memory of the war.[101] There has also been some exploration of the elements of representations which see less airtime; generally people or aspects deemed as 'transgressive' such as 'spies, deserters, cowards, mutineers and conscientious objectors'.[102] The cultural memory of the 50th anniversary of the war is a well-studied and established keystone in the overall landscape of media representations of the conflict produced since its conclusion. It hosted a centrepiece in BBC documentaries on the subject, namely *The Great War* (BBC One, 1964), which Dan Todman noted as being

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[100] Hanna, *The Great War on the Small Screen*, pp. 32, 36–37.
[101] Emma Hanna, 'Representations of the First World War in Contemporary British Television Drama', in *The Edinburgh Companion to the First World War and the Arts*, ed. by Ann-Marie Einhaus and Katherine Isobel Baxter (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), p. 340 <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474401647-024>.
[102] Hanna, 'Figures of Transgression', p. 2.

'mythologised as the ultimate in televisual representations of the First World War'.[103] As will be noted later in this thesis, the documentary became both a touchstone on broadcasting related to the conflict, and an event worthy of commemoration in itself. It is also worth stating at this point that none of the broadcasts considered in this chapter are documentaries – while there were a few of them between the 50th and 100th anniversaries, they have received attention in the extant historiography, and they are generally more prominent during the anniversaries themselves.

As noted earlier in the introduction, one of the foundations of historical research into televisual representations of the war is Emma Hanna's *The Great War on the Small Screen*, spanning a collection of broadcasts from *The Great War* (BBC, 1964) to *The Last Tommy* (BBC, 2005) with a variety of documentaries and fictional representations in between. Hanna herself has built on this work with a number of journal articles and book chapters, but this field has expanded more broadly, with additional works both covering programmes within this period, as well as more recent offerings such as *Downton Abbey* (ITV, 2010–15)[104] and *Peaky Blinders* (BBC, 2013–2022)[105]. Jessica Meyer's work on *Downton Abbey* is particularly noteworthy as it raises questions about historical accuracy, noting that 'the consistent use of the war as a framing device for the drama locates it in debates about accuracy and authenticity in fictional depictions of the war that date back at least to 1915'.[106] Concerns over accurate representations of the war reached a peak approaching the Centenary, and the next chapter

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[103] Todman, *The Great War*, p. 150.

[104] See Jessica Meyer, 'Matthew's Legs and Thomas's Hand: Watching *Downton Abbey* as a First World War Historian', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 16.1 (2019), pp. 78–93, and Patricia Molloy, '*Downton Abbey* Goes to War: Cowards, Conscience, and Commemoration', *Critical Military Studies*, 7.3 (2021), pp. 296–312.

[105] See George S. Larke-Walsh, '"The King's Shilling": How *Peaky Blinders* Uses the Experience of War to Justify and Celebrate Toxic Masculinity', *Journal of Popular Television*, 7.1 (2019), pp. 39–56.

[106] Meyer, 'Matthew's Legs and Thomas's Hand', p. 79.

of this thesis focuses on how broadcasters attempted to maintain an authentic sense of the war following the loss of the veterans. It was a climax of a lengthy debate about appropriate representation of the conflict, which has been ongoing since the war itself, and prior to the Centenary famously referenced *Blackadder Goes Forth* (BBC One, 1989), when the then Education Secretary Michael Gove criticised its popularity for representing the war as a 'misbegotten shambles', and lambasting 'left-wing academics all too happy to feed those myths'.[107] *Blackadder* remains something of an anomaly in modern cultural memory of the war, though; excluding a televisual adaptation of the titular trench newspaper, *The Wipers Times* (BBC Two, 2016), which itself is far less comedic in nature, and *Chickens* (Sky 1, 2013), which is set entirely on the home front away from the war, broadcasters have largely steered away from comedy as a genre for representing the war.

Indeed, it is still something of a sensitive subject to apply humour to the conflict. During his most recent tour, the comedian Frankie Boyle made a joke about the construction of a football stadium, stating that 'the last time there were this many bodies under a football pitch, it was the Christmas Truce of 1914'. When this was met with the expected awkward 'Ooooh...' from the audience, Boyle immediately retorted with 'What, too soon?!'[108] Notably, this resulted in laughter from the audience, presumably in a stereotypically British self-conscious fashion, at the admission that the passage of time has not changed how we feel about combining comedy and memory of the First World War. While aspects such as humour are largely absent in televisual and radio representations of the war, some have remained predominant. Yet, there are themes which have become similarly less common, such as the

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107 Tim Shipman, 'Michael Gove blasts "Blackadder myths" about the First World War spread by television sit-coms and left-wing academics', *Mail Online* (2 January 2014), https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2532923/Michael-Gove-blasts-Blackadder-myths-First-World-War-spread-television-sit-coms-left-wing-academics.html [Accessed 21 May 2024].
108 Frankie Boyle, *Lap of Shame*, The Bath Forum, 20 November 2023.

change the war brought on the world around it, one which is more symptomatic of the passage of time than more stabilised sensitivities to how the war should be represented.

A Changing World

A common theme within pre-Centenary broadcasting, and indeed of the contemporary historiography, is the notion of the First World War as a caesura between the ideals and traditions of the Edwardian world and those of the modern era. Indeed, as observed by Stefan Goebel, the very naming of the event as 'the Great War' presented the conflict as 'a temporal watershed' whose 'attendant emotional shocks and socio-political upheavals rocked the foundations of all belligerent European societies'.[109] The topic was considered in several ways before 2014, yet by contrast, found itself as more of a footnote during the Centenary, where even the mini-series dedicated to the outbreak of the war, *37 Days* (BBC Two, 2014), backgrounded the notion of a changing world in favour of more short-term considerations of the event. This is understandable if we consider the ongoing passage of time, and the different worlds of today and the 1960s. As observed by Paul Fussell, 'the Great War took place in what was, compared with ours, a static world, where the values appeared stable and where the meanings of abstractions seemed permanent and reliable'.[110] The more static and entrenched a world and its values are, the more prone they are to serious upheaval. Naturally, by the 1960s there had been another world war and a collection of other factors which had changed the world again. However, in the modern era, with technological developments advancing at an accelerating rate, change is commonplace, and the notion of a cultural caesura something

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[109] Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memor*y, p. 1.
[110] Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 22.

of a distant memory in itself. For the postwar era though, it would result in a clash between the Edwardian and the modern worlds.

The theme was given in-depth consideration in 2012, with the second televisual adaptation of Ford Madox Ford's tetralogy *Parade's End* (1924–1928). The proximity of the novels' publication to the war is perhaps indicative of the more relevant nature of a changing world, one which by 2014 had dramatically evolved in ways which rendered the loss of Edwardian ideals an unfamiliar and distant notion. The books themselves have already received considerable attention from literary scholars, thus this section will feature solely on its televisual format.[111] The earlier television broadcast in December 1964 formed part of the BBC Two *Theatre 625* drama anthology series, and consisted of three episodes, with each addressing one of the novels. The 2012 broadcast of five episodes thus allowed for a slightly deeper exploration of the work, with each book being split across two to three episodes.

The concept of a dying Edwardian world rallying against modernisation is personified in the form of the main character, Christopher Tietjens. From the first episode set in 1908, Tietjens finds himself married to a woman who engages in affairs and chastises him for maintaining a stiff upper lip in the face of all of her trespasses, thus their marriage similarly embodies Tietjens' traditionalism battling against a world leaving traditions behind. The episode also lays out the reasoning behind the work's title – 'parade' means maintaining an appearance of chastity and monogamy despite the actual circumstances, thus foreshadowing the inevitable 'end' of this ideal which is yet to come. Facing this inescapable outcome is a British public unwilling to believe that the threat of war is looming over them.[112] This is

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[111] For example, see Sara Haslem, *Fragmenting Modernism: Ford Madox Ford, the Novel and the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); Ashley Chantler & Rob Hawkes (eds), *War and the Mind: Ford Madox Ford's* Parade's End*, Modernism, and Psychology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015).
[112] 'Episode 1', *Parade's End* (BBC Two, 24 August 2012).

potentially more foreshadowing; even after the outbreak of war, the conflict serves as more of a backdrop to Tietjens' changing character and ideals.

As war draws closer by the second episode, Tietjens' friend McMaster tells him he intends to spend August in Scotland, reflecting on the fact that they had previously mentioned that war would start around the same time as grouse shooting. This comment furthers the sense that the war occurred in a world which was carrying on as usual right up to its outbreak. When the war does start, Tietjens wants to enlist, which upsets his wife, as she notes that 'you're such a paragon of honourable behaviour, Christopher. You're the cruellest man I know'. When Valentine, a suffragette whom Tietjens has befriended, expresses her displeasure at the news, he voices his position as the embodiment of a changing time; 'If we'd stayed out of it, I'd have gone over to France to fight for France [...] for the 18th century against the 20th'.[113] Evidently, he feels that the new world is something to be rallied against, rather than viewed as an unavoidable change. Before he leaves for war, he notes to Valentine that he has 'nothing much to live for, because you know what I want I can't have'.[114] This is the first reveal of Tietjens' struggle to hold on to the concept of parade, which will gradually be pulled apart in the following years. His response also demonstrates the sense of a cultural caesura discussed in more modern historiography.

The timeline skips ahead to 1916, reflective of a tendency in televisual representations of the war (and indeed the later Centenary commemorations) to assume that nothing interesting happened between then and 1914. Tietjens awakens to find himself in a casualty clearing station in France. The dramatic scenes here, including a man on a stretcher missing

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[113] 'Episode 2', *Parade's End* (BBC Two, 31 August 2012).
[114] Ibid.

the lower half of his body, are contrasted with the relatively calm scenes back on the home front. Thus, not only is the emerging modern world an alien concept, but so too are the Western and home fronts unknowable to each other. McMaster receives a white feather in the post, which angers him.[115] This is demonstrative of a sense of duty towards the war at home, alongside the suspicion of others that often comes along with it—Sylvia's mother criticises her for keeping possession of her horse when they are needed by soldiers. The war has gone from being something that many of them did not think would happen, to something which everyone must now work in support of, and thus engage in the upheaval of their world and lives. It also highlights the power of warfare to destabilise previously cohesive communities.

The controversy around attitudes towards Germans is also raised by Tietjens to Sylvia when he returns home, as he notes that he was lying in a hospital bed with her 'friends' dropping bombs on the huts.[116] It is worth noting here that tensions between Brits and Germans at home was a subject of minimal consideration during the Centenary, excluding its notable coverage in the radio drama *Home Front* (BBC Radio 4, 2014–2018) for which it formed an ongoing storyline, as the overall tone of commemoration had moved towards one of a more internationally cohesive understanding of the conflict. From growing tensions around Tietjens' ideals about parade, Sylvia is upset that he has never said a bad word to her, to which he responds that he does not blame her for anything she has done. This is apparently an acknowledgement on his part that people are often warped by the world around them, including circumstances beyond their control. In tandem with this, Tietjen's asks Valentine to

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[115] On the memory of the white feather, see Nicoletta F. Gullace, 'White Feathers and Wounded Men: Female Patriotism and the Memory of the Great War', *Journal of British Studies*, 36 (1997), pp. 178–206.
[116] 'Episode 3', *Parade's End* (BBC Two, 7 September 2012).

be his mistress before he returns to war, and Sylvia notes that if he had actually managed to seduce Valentine, there may have been a chance for them.[117] This attempt of a push towards the end of Tietjens ideals of parade is chronologically parallel to the approach of the final push of the war.

In contrast to this awakening of changing times, the upper classes are depicted as remaining unaware of them in the opening of the penultimate episode, where a member of a dinner party encapsulates this in the line 'there won't always be a European war. But there'll always be an Empire!'[118] Sylvia notes that she would rather forget there was a war, immediately before bombs are heard dropping in the background. General Campion vocalises the dying of Tietjens' ideals, telling him 'there are no more parades for that regiment. It held out to the last man. But you were him'.[119] This analogy between war and Edwardian stoicism aptly demonstrates the impact of the war on the wider world around it, a metaphorical comparison which was not paralleled during the Centenary.

In the finale, Tietjens has returned to the trenches. General Campion views Tietjens' return to the front as 'a chance of glory, lucky beggar', presumably a nod to the notion that generals were ignorant to the plight of their men. This opinion is immediately contrasted with Tietjens wading through a flooded trench to highlight the inaccuracy of describing him as lucky. Tietjens throws a log from the tree from his family home in the fire, a final metaphor for the end of previously entrenched ideals and notions. The episode ends with a battalion on the training ground being told 'there will be no more parades'.[120] This engrains the concept of the war ending alongside the ideals and traditions of the world which came before it. *Parade's*

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[117] Ibid.
[118] 'Episode 4', *Parade's End* (BBC Two, 14 September 2012).
[119] Ibid.
[120] 'Episode 5', *Parade's End* (BBC Two, 21 September 2012).

End gained an audience of approximately two million viewers.[121] One reviewer, while praising the work and Cumberbatch's portrayal of Tietjens, expresses confusion at the decision to broadcast it on a Friday evening in August, arguing that it more naturally suited a Sunday evening in the autumn.[122] It is fair to acknowledge that the series did not share the sort of excitement, drama or action normally reserved for primetime television, yet the audience figures demonstrate this was not to its detriment.

Of course, it is an exaggeration to say that the war resulted in the complete abandonment of old ideals and cultural references. Indeed, as explored by Stefan Goebel, the process of memorialisation, the crucial and carefully crafted projects to honour the fallen and offer the bereaved a site for their grief, often used references to medieval imagery and tropes.[123] This is further emblematic of a tendency to use familiar reference points when dealing with change, a theme which will become apparent throughout this thesis. A sense of stability and ongoing ideals may have made the outbreak of war all the more of a surprise for much of the population.

An Unexpected Turn of Events?

In addition to changing the world around it, the First World War was also a symptom of the political environment that preceded it. Yet, as noted in the previous section, it was still something of an unexpected event to different populations at the time. Its unexpectedness

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[121] Hanna, 'Representations of the First World War', p. 347.
[122] Ben Dowell, 'Have You Been Watching…Parade's End?', *The Guardian*, 20 September 2012 (online), https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/tvandradioblog/2012/sep/20/have-you-been-watching-parades-end [Accessed 14 May 2024].
[123] See Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory*, pp. 39–80.

formed the basis of a 1964 radio documentary on the BBC Third Programme, which featured

five historians discussing the situation in Britain, Germany, Russia, France, and a broader

European perspective. Again, this contrasts with the narrower view of *37 Days* (BBC Two,

2014), which concentrated primarily on political activity within London (with some

consideration of Germany) in the lead up to the outbreak of war. This sort of microhistory is

not unusual though, and arguably allows for a more in-depth consideration of a particular

country. There is some form of balance from a more global standpoint as well – *Sarajevo*

(2014) was a German-Austrian co-production which specifically followed events in those two

countries following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, a focus which undeniably

revealed greater insight into the short-term factors responsible for the conflict.

The opening episode of *1914: Moving Towards War* sees Arnold J. Toynbee describing

his impressions of the European situation from 1907–1914. Toynbee did not serve in the war

due to suffering from dysentery, but he did work in the Foreign Office intelligence department

from 1915, and as a delegate to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. Toynbee opens by

highlighting the importance of the First World War as a pivotal moment in European history,

noting that 'the catastrophe of that July and August formed a crossroads in History'.[124] This

echoes the sentiments of a tearing in time noted in *Parade's End*. Toynbee also offers insight

into why the pre-war world becomes less of a focal point as time passes:

[One] could never see it through the familiar pre-war spectacles again, or if he tried to,

he found the spectacles did not fit comfortably. On the other hand, to people, who are

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[124] BBC Written Archives Centre (hereafter BBC WAC), Radio Talks Scripts Pre 1970 NINE - NJO FILM T376, 'A
Personal Memory by Arnold J. Toynbee', 1964, p. i.

now the great majority, and who are too young to remember life before 1914, the pre-war world always seems somewhat unreal.[125]

Given that the war itself is beyond the living memory of the global population, it is understandable that if the pre-war world was considered an unfamiliar and disconnected time in 1964, it is even more so now. Similarly to the fictional setting of *Parade's End*, Toynbee also notes that his peers at Oxford held little interest in foreign affairs, nor in the credibility of a war with Germany. His opinion of Germany was that it stood for 'social reform and for pioneer scholarship', and it was only through his education that he became concerned that their intentions might be more 'sinister'.[126] He only began to gain an awareness of the shaking foundations of European stability when his mother asked him to return home from Paris during the Agadir crisis. 'Captivated, as I was, by the Sainte Chapelle and by the Louvre, I was quite unconscious of the political earthquake that was rocking Paris under my feet'.[127] He 'had no foreboding that, three years from now, my English contemporaries were going to be sent to join those unfortunate Italians in Moloch's burning fiery furnace'.[128]

It is worth reiterating here that this level of engagement with the fact that much of the British public were unaware of an impending war was largely devoid from the Centenary, yet may have proved fruitful in aiding an understanding of the factors and circumstances which moved Europe towards war, to help demonstrate why the assassination of the Archduke was a flashpoint in a muddled web of aging political alliances and rivalries. Indeed, in the spring of 1913, Toynbee and his peers laughed at news of the mobilisation of the Austrian and Russian armies, a response which created a bleak juxtaposition – 'within two years of that

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[125] Ibid., p. ii.
[126] Ibid., pp. 1–2.
[127] Ibid., p. 5.
[128] Ibid.

characteristically English laugh, half of the laughers were dead on grimly real battlefields'.[129]

The assassination of the Archduke did serve as something of an awakener; on a train bound

for Winchester, Toynbee agreed with another traveller that 'logically, the assassination seemed

bound to result in a European war – logically, but not really, for what was logical was not

credible when logic spelled out an act of suicidal folly'.[130] The war then became something that

could happen, but was still presumed not to. It is uncertain if Toynbee's choice of words in

'suicidal folly' were recounted from the time, or if it is an opinion conjured in retrospect. Yet

in *Parade's End*, Tietjens' character also noted that war with Germany would be economically

unviable.[131] Toynbee metaphorizes the building European tensions in meteorological terms,

describing the issuing of the ultimatum to Germany as having 'been in the lull before the storm,

and now the storm burst'.[132] Toynbee's bout of dysentery in Greece spared him from military

service, and he reflects that 'you can tell that I am still alive because you can hear my voice'.[133]

This statement feels particularly emblematic of the early broadcasting era. Today, thousands

of voice recordings of soldiers remain available to be listened to, stored digitally and accessed

by a wide audience. In the 60 years that have passed since his statement, oral testimony has

become more associated with oral history than with a sense of the orator being alive.

Similarly distinct to the digital era, there was no social media to glean public opinion

from in 1964, yet the BBC was also more active in collecting feedback about their

programming. The episode received an appreciation index of 71, which was 'above the average

for talks and discussions' during the first quarter of 1964, which was 62. The audience's main

takeaway was that 'History is about people', which may have given the corporation a useful

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[129] Ibid., p. 8.
[130] Ibid., p. 7
[131] 'Episode 2', *Parade's End*.
[132] BBC WAC, 'A Personal Memory by Arnold J. Toynbee', p. 9.
[133] Ibid., p. 10.

thematic foundation for the future, as there was a notable lean towards social and cultural history during the Centenary. Respondents felt that Toynbee 'was extremely informative about the "feel" of the period' and he 'brought a sense of reality for me to the cold facts'. Of the few detractors, criticisms concerned the lack of historical information in place of 'personal reminiscence'.[134] In 1964, as today, the BBC was still struggling to receive a fully balanced appreciation of the Reithian triptych to inform, educate, and entertain.

The series' consideration of Germany placed itself more in line with academic History, though with some elements of personal reflection, as the episode featured a paper written by Erich Eyck, a German historian and émigré who produced a considerable amount of work on Otto von Bismarck, Wilhelm II, and the Weimar Republic, yet it was read by his son Frank Eyck due to his father's ailing health—Erich Eyck passed away several days after the episode was aired. In its opening, it draws a commonality with the previous episode in its belief that in Germany too, war seemed an unlikely event. 'We had lived through so many international complications in the past decade and somehow they had all been resolved without the use of arms'.[135] He also centres the interactions between Austria-Hungary and Serbia as the pivotal point in averting war, noting that '[the German government] would have to do all in its power to avoid the Austro-Serbian quarrel developing into an international conflict'.[136] Much discussion has been given within historiography (and indeed in later episodes of this series) to the impact of centuries-old treaties and alliances on the move towards war.

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[134] BBC WAC, LR/64/1025, Audience Research Reports Sound, General, Chronological Reports, 'An Audience Research Report', June 1964.
[135] BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts Pre 1970 NINE - NJO FILM T376, 'The Crisis in Berlin 1914 by Dr Erich Eyck, Read by His Son, Mr Frank Eyck', 1964, p. 1.
[136] Ibid., p. 4.

Eyck highlights the difficulties in Germany of honouring their 1879 treaty with Austria in particular, alongside later attempts to secure an alliance with England, which he feels Wilhelm II abandoned. He expands on this issue by noting that in July 1914, Prince Lichnowsky was warning the Emperor against stirring Austrian militancy, as England was unlikely to be swayed against Serbia.[137] This begins to reveal the complicated web of alliances which backdropped the division of Europe and the wider world towards warfare, an element which saw considerably less exploration during the Centenary. Of course, Eyck also acknowledges one of the primary errors on Germany's part, namely the Schlieffen Plan to invade France through Belgium, as 'to the person who knew European history it was clear that Great Britain would not stand for this'.[138] Indeed, this is a more commonly highlighted element in the outbreak of war in more modern programming, perhaps because it is easier to explain (and thus requires less broadcasting time) than the more intricate nature of political alliances. Eyck ends on a contemplative note, asking if the present generation will 'live to see the day when the lights of peace shine, not only over Europe, but all over the world?'[139] There has not been another world war, but ancient rivalries are still igniting conflict across Eastern Europe and further afield to this day. It is thus understandable that such aspirations were not raised in Centenary programmes.

The episode scored an appreciation index of 70, falling behind the previous episode by one point. Criticisms can be explained in terms of the fact that Erich Eyck had essentially produced an academic paper – 'a minority in the audience had found it disappointingly dull. It had a dry "text-book" quality', and as such conveyed 'little of the "electric" atmosphere they

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137 Ibid., p. 6.
138 Ibid., p. 13.
139 Ibid.

felt must have prevailed in those times'.[140] This is a somewhat unfair criticism, and is representative of the dangers of allowing retrospect to cloud judgement of a historical situation. Much of this series notes that there was little in the ways of an anticipatory atmosphere towards war in 1914 – the populace was not electrified because they did not believe a conflict would happen. In contrast to the critique of the previous episode being too personal, one respondent claimed it 'was such a "formal paper" as to arouse little personal emotion', though the majority found it 'an intelligent summing-up […] free from emotion or bias'.[141] Once again, the difficulties of striking the right balance of educational and entertaining is an ongoing dilemma for the BBC.

It is noteworthy that overall, the corporation produces more First World War material of a dramatic nature in the modern era, and even documentaries are less rigidly in line with an academic paper. One can only speculate on the reasoning behind this, but it is possible that the introduction of visual stimuli through television necessitated a more entertainment-based approach for the medium. The notable exception to this is *They Shall Not Grow Old* (2018), but it is debatable how successful this use of archival footage would have been without colourisation and the introduction of sound. It is the epitome of using modern techniques to inform about the past. Moreover, the top 10 television charts in recent years have been dominated by coverage of national events, sports, soap operas and reality television. Even in 2018, where coverage of Centenary commemorations reached a peak, they did not reach the top 10; of these programmes, seven were World Cup football matches.[142]

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[140] BBC WAC, LR/64/1074, Audience Research Reports Sound, General, Chronological Reports, 'An Audience Research Report', June 1964.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Charts available at 'TV Since 1981', *British Audience Research Board* (2024), https://www.barb.co.uk/tv-since-1981/2023/top10/ [Accessed 19 September 2024].

Where the previous episodes had presented the war as something of a shared surprise among their respective populations, George F. Kennan, an American diplomat and historian, presents the situation in Russia as a little more contrasted, noting that the varied and heterogeneous nature of the Russian population in 1914 meant there was no clear-cut national response to the war. He also encourages caution about reading too much into contemporary memoirs expressing enthusiasm for the war, as the voices of the peasantry went unheard.[143] This is a particularly striking observation as it raises the fact that some Centenary programmes were based entirely around soldiers and their memoirs, and also mirrors concerns raised by historians about the primacy of First World War poetry in British cultural memory of the conflict, and how this highlights the experiences of the more literate officer classes over the average Tommy. Kennan also promotes a more long-term view of the causes for the conflict noting that it

> was the product not just of what happened in the final weeks and days before its outbreak; it was the product also of the entire course of international affairs on the European continent and elsewhere in the preceding years and decades.[144]

Following on from previous encouragements to consider broader, less considered factors, Kennan also lays a lot of the blame for the Tsar's poor leadership with his wife and Rasputin.[145] He also concludes in a reflective manner similar to Toynbee, though with a different emphasis, opining that 'like so many other people in the Europe of that day, they were still the prisoners of romantic notions of war and of national glory'.[146] This connects with notions of the war as

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[143] BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts Pre 1970 NINE - NJO FILM T376, 'As It Was in St Petersburg 1914 by George F. Kennan', 1964, pp. 1–3.
[144] Ibid., p. 4.
[145] Ibid., pp. 10–11.
[146] Ibid., p, 12.

a severing point for the traditions of the Edwardian era, enacting irrevocable changes on the world around it.

Once again, the appreciation index for this episode dipped by one point to 69. Unique to the rest of the episodes, however, the report draws a comparison with an earlier broadcast by Kennan, *Russia, the Atom and the West* (1959), which scored 75. This may be indicative of the closer proximity of the Second World War, and its larger presence in public memory. It appears that Kennan's attempts to portray the nuances of the Russia of 1914 were well received, '"clearly distilled from much detailed study" and had been conveyed with the utmost lucidity'. Yet some found the episode offered them nothing original, 'no new factual information and little original thinking'. In a particularly scathing review of Kennan's talk, a lecturer stated that 'it was hard to believe that the speaker is both diplomat and professor – at best he seemed to combine the worst features of both professions'. This was compounded by the observation that it was 'very sound of course, but with that boring obviousness which characterizes so many American intellectuals'.[147] Despite the harsher nature of these rebukes, it should still be noted that negative responses formed a minority of overall opinion. It is also worth noting the significance of an entire episode being dedicated to Russia, as the country's role and experiences with the war received no such dedication during the Centenary, primarily being referred to when explaining the outbreak of war.

Unsurprisingly, the episode on Great Britain was also presented by a renowned historian in the field, namely A.J.P. Taylor, a pioneering British historian on European diplomacy.[148] While others had foregrounded their talks by observing that war was not an

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[147] BBC WAC, LR/64/1123, Audience Research Reports Sound, General, Chronological Reports, 'An Audience Research Report', June 1964.

[148] For an overview of Taylor's life and work, see Kathleen Burke, *Troublemaker: The Life and History of A.J.P. Taylor* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

expectation for much of the leadup to it, Taylor notes that in July 1914, Britain was much more concerned about the potential of a civil war in Ireland than a world war.[149] Even the pivotal event of the assassination of the Archduke was deemed 'a remote Balkan quarrel'.[150] He outlines Britain's continued to reluctance to enter in to warfare, as on 30 July 1914, leading bankers told Lloyd George that 'Great Britain must keep out of war at almost any price'.[151] This was an element which was also given a nod through Tietjens's character in *Parade's End*, demonstrating at least a subtle aspect of economic considerations in the pre-war era which went generally unmentioned during the Centenary.

In another first for the series, and in true historian fashion, Taylor actually responds to the argument presented in the previous episode. He disagrees with assigning any major responsibility to Russia for the outbreak of war, noting Kennan's talk did not change his mind on the matter, though he accepts Kennan is an authoritative figure on the subject. Instead, Taylor apportions this blame towards Austria, and foreshadowing the next episode, 'what Monsieur Renouvin calls "The German policy of setting up Austria anew."' In a particularly prescient observation, in terms of the criticisms of earlier talks presenting nothing new, in summing up the work of the five historians Taylor notes that 'they are obvious familiar and valuable lessons, which remain extremely difficult to learn'. [152] This engagement between historians in First World War programmes has remained a rare element, though it does feature to some extent in Centenary programmes discussed in later chapters. Moreover, he includes this in his appraisal of the tone of commemoration,

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[149] BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts Pre 1970 NINE - NJO FILM T376, 'How War Came to Great Britain by A.J.P. Taylor', 1964, p. 1.
[150] Ibid., p. 3.
[151] Ibid., p. 6.
[152] Ibid., pp. 9–10.

> We celebrate war-declaration days and victory days and so on, but we never celebrate days when some bold stroke of statesmanship saved the world from such things. […] We never seem glad to be delivered from evil. It strikes us as unexciting and even dull, an anticlimax.[153]

Taylor's observation, while correct, in itself explains the reasoning behind this. That which is not deemed newsworthy is unlikely to be remembered, and thus will go uncelebrated. Of course, one of the ongoing messages of the First World War was that it should not have happened – its status as a futile waste of life is one of the most entrenched elements of cultural memory. Taylor's impetus towards considering the stumbling blocks towards war for the purposes of understanding where things went wrong is a commendable effort though, and one which by contrast featured considerably less in Centenary commemorations.

This episode bucked the trend of the waning appreciation index, scoring 73. The report notes that 'though his "anecdotal and lively way" of presenting facts and arguments at times led listeners to consider him more of a slick journalist than a reliable historian', the responses were still broadly positive about this 'valuable contribution to the series'. He was commended for having 'a knack of making history live and of taking the listener behind the scenes, so that he feels it is a privilege to listen'. A minority felt it was 'far too glib and "over-simplified" a version' of events, particularly in reference to Sir Edward Grey's role.[154]

The final historian breaks the mould in two key ways – firstly, the episode is delivered as a discussion rather than a paper; secondly, the majority of it is in French. While Christopher

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[153] Ibid., p. 11.
[154] BBC WAC, LR/64/1170, Audience Research Reports Sound, General, Chronological Reports, 'An Audience Research Report', July 1964.

Sykes poses his questions in English, 'sparing the listener from having to endure my French',[155] Pierre Renouvin provides his answers entirely in his native language. Renouvin was a leading French historian on the war, who had served in the war and suffered an injury at the Battle of the Chemin des Dames in 1917, resulting in the loss of his left arm.[156] Renouvin's responses herein are translated in to English.[157] The notion of a radio broadcast in a different language is largely unheard of today, and one cannot help but feel it would go less well received in post-Brexit Britain.

Renouvin also highlights the centrality of treaties in the outbreak of war, quoting from the 1892 military convention that 'if Russia is attacked by Germany or by Austria-Hungary supported by Germany, France will intervene'. As Renouvin explains, the French government was soon to find itself in a difficult situation following the Russian mobilisation. They faced two options – let Russia be crushed and find itself alone several months later, or express their dissatisfaction towards the mobilisation while still upholding the Franco-Russian alliance for the security of France, with the latter being the eventual course of action.[158] Thus, we can see some echoes of Russian responsibility as discussed in Kennan's paper. As with the Russian example, this consideration of the interplay between France and Russia in the period preceding the outbreak of war is absent from Centenary programmes.

Given this detailing of French reluctance towards military action, Sykes naturally queries if there was a particularly strong pro-war feeling in France at the time. Renouvin acknowledges a presence in certain circles of a nationalist excitement, citing the discussion of

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[155] BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts Pre 1970 NINE - NJO FILM T376, 'A French View by Professor Pierre Renouvin', 1964, p. 1.
[156] Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present,* 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 9.
[157] Renouvin's paper was translated using Google Translate.
[158] 'A French View', p. 3.

military service in 1913 in support of this, and the presence of several works favouring a war to end German quarrels. However, he notes that these excitements were minimal, and by spring 1914 they had completely disappeared.[159] The socialists and trade unionists were also in favour of peace, though they did not actively take measures to prevent war. Indeed, following the mobilisation order, they were in favour of it, though they would only openly acknowledge this in 1919, citing the spirit of the working class as their reasoning for not opposing it.[160] Thus, he ultimately details that while there was no particular fervour towards war in the period preceding it, the populace generally accepted it once preparations were underway.

While Taylor noted the significance of economic considerations in the approach to war in Britain, Renouvin views them as playing a much more subsidiary role. He recognizes the importance of this factor in Germany, with their reliance on world markets influencing policies towards expansion, yet also highlights that they were capable of doing so through diplomatic means. War would have closed markets off, and to this Renouvin applies Jules Cambon's words from 1913, '*qu'il fallait faire attention, ne pas vouloir boucher toutes les issues d'une chaudière parce qu'elle risquerait d'éclater*'.[161] Furthermore, Renouvin explains, Russia was Germany's best supplier, and Britain her best customer, so war with them would indeed seem illogical. This is similar to previous considerations of the war as an act of 'suicidal folly', yet when similar terms were applied to the war during the Centenary, it was not referring to economic suicide. Perhaps this is understandable, at least from a French perspective; in Renouvin's view, economic factors were minor, and generally applied in retrospect. Of far more significance in

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[159] Ibid., pp. 4–5.
[160] Ibid., pp. 7–8.
[161] Ibid., p. 9. 'Be careful not to block all the outlets of a boiler, because it might burst'.

Renouvin's view, was Germany's desire to prop up Austria-Hungary, as Taylor referred to in his earlier talk. The assassination was an opportunity for them to settle their issues with Serbia, and remove them as a political factor in the Balkans. Renouvin notes that this was not evidence of a desire for war, as both parties would have been satisfied with Russia letting Serbia be crushed by the ultimatum. Of course, this was not the case, and pursuing this course of action for Austria-Hungary led them to war. Thus, Renouvin concludes, political motives were the most significant factor for explaining the reasons behind the First World War.[162] With this conclusion, he finds himself in tandem with the views expressed in the BBC's Centenary docudrama *37 Days*, which explored the outbreak of war in political terms.

Perhaps, given the linguistic nature of the episode, it is not surprising that it scored 57, the lowest appreciation index of the entire series, with 12% of respondents giving it a C- and 15% a C. However, 35% gave it an A, and 15% an A+, so it was clearly something of a divisive decision. Unsurprisingly, the report opens noting that respondents' reports were 'mainly influenced by their proficiency in French. A small group were completely defeated; sometimes giving up half way through'. While some approved of broadcasting a talk in a foreign language, even if they did not understand it, others criticised the 'snob value' and lack of translation. Others blamed his 'irritatingly high-pitched voice and over-emphatic delivery' for making the broadcast difficult to listen to, and further argued that his eccentric manner further warranted a translation. However, half of the sample found the talk to be interesting. Despite language struggles among this group as well, they 'were delighted by the BBC's confidence in their ability to understand a talk in French'.[163]

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[162] Ibid., pp. 12–13.
[163] BBC WAC, LR/64/1193, Audience Research Reports Sound, General, Chronological Reports, 'An Audience Research Report', July 1964.

It was indeed a brave choice for the BBC to broadcast an entire episode in a foreign language, without the benefit of television allowing for the provision of subtitles. It may be that Renouvin was unable to carry out the discussion in English, given that his works were all published in French. It would have presumably been possible for him to produce a paper which could have been translated and read by someone else, but the BBC may have felt this would detract from the voice of authority leant by Renouvin himself. In Centenary programming, the use of foreign languages was minimal, and always translated. The translation is understandable, but the reluctance to allow the use of the relevant language for a given person arguably detracts from the sense of a global war the BBC was trying to convey. Given the wavering response and low score of the episode though, it is understandable that the BBC chose not to engage in this particular sort of experiment again.

The last entry in the series offered a 'summing up' of the previous talks by the presenter, Christopher Sykes. He opened by acknowledging the death of Erich Eyck on 23 June 1964, with the poignant note that the paper broadcast appears to have been his last historical work, which is a very unique accolade for a media broadcast. Sykes summates the overall attitude as seeing the 'outbreak of general war as an act of general suicide', noting the tendency of the German and Austrian governments to rush towards war.[164] Reflective of the discussions of the changing world views around the time, Sykes also highlights that war 'was less regarded as an obscene horror to be avoided like the plague, than as one of the facts of life, a stern one but not utterly repulsive'.[165] This is perhaps an aspect which Centenary commemorations have struggled to convey, with an understanding behind the reasons of the

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[164] BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts Pre 1970 NINE - NJO FILM T376, 'A Summing Up by Christopher Sykes', 1964, pp. 1–3.
[165] Ibid., p. 4.

outbreak of war still a considerably foggy aspect of cultural memory. It is possible this is another indicator of memory being influenced by its contemporary contexts; the Cold War presented the world with another threat of possible conflict during the 1960s. Thus, just as H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* (1898) can be viewed as a product of a world threatened by a sense of invasion, so too can our focal points on studies of the past be a consequence of modern dangers.

As Sykes highlights though, some aspects remain vague even to historians, as 'the definitive ultimate answer about Grey's conduct eludes historians, as Mr. Taylor does not hesitate to admit. Grey remains a subject for guesses'.[166] His conclusion is also quite the premonition for the tone of some Centenary broadcasting though, as '[King George V's] signature committed the people of the British Isles; committed the Dominions; committed the millions of coloured Africans in the Colonies, [*sic*] committed the many more millions of the Indian Empire'.[167] Highlighting the involvement of foreign troops in Britain's cause became a predominant factor in the Centenary, and will be considered in-depth in chapter two. It is a succinct observation of the ability of small acts to ripple out into widescale events that would forever change the world.

Of course, in addition to changing the world, the war also changed the people within it. This is explored in general terms in most broadcasting related to the conflict – a young man enlists for the war full of courage, encounters the horrors of war and the loss of his friends, and either returns home injured, shellshocked or otherwise transformed by events, or he dies, and the lives of his family and friends are forever changed. One pre-Centenary film explored

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[166] Ibid., p. 8.
[167] Ibid., p. 12.

this particular aspect in close focus. *My Boy Jack* (ITV1, 2007) examined the experiences of Rudyard Kipling and his family through his son John's journey enlisting for and going to war. The film is written by David Haig, based upon his 1997 play, and he stars as Rudyard Kipling, with Daniel Radcliffe portraying his son John. The title is drawn from Kipling's 1915 poem of the same name, which expresses his struggle to come to terms with not knowing his son's fate, and then having to come to terms with it. The reasoning for its particular selection for dramatization is unknown, though this could be a rare case of synchronicity between heritage institutions and television broadcasters—the IWM ran an exhibition about John 'Jack' Kipling's life from October 2007 to February 2008. Kipling also suggested 'Their name liveth for evermore' as an inscription for war memorials after joining the Imperial (now Commonwealth) War Graves Commission in 1917, cementing his place in remembrance of the war.[168]

In the opening scenes, John is trying to enlist in the Navy, but as he cannot read the eye chart without his glasses, he is refused. Upon hearing this news, Rudyard suggests he join the army instead. Indeed, John succeeds in enlisting for the army – he is allowed to move towards the eye chart to read it. His father is delighted, but his mother is concerned that his eyesight will put him in greater danger. Rudyard is told about large numbers of self-inflicted losses following a misidentified counterattack – in the well-established and emblematic display of concern, his hand trembles as he holds his glasses (similar to the scene with Frank Beck in *All the King's Men,* discussed later in this chapter). John's eyesight and need for glasses remains an issue at training, where he struggles to complete target practice in the rain; however, he is allowed to try again at night, and he attaches his glasses to his nose with putty to prevent them from moving. He is made second lieutenant, and despite his men's clear confusion about his

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[168] David Bradshaw, 'Kipling and War', in *The Cambridge Companion to Rudyard Kipling*, ed. by Howard J. Booth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 91.

glasses, John exceeds them in training. This consideration of the difficulties for some in enlisting is largely absent from Centenary programmes, and certainly did not form the backdrop for any of them, although *Home Front* does touch on this element.

Jack arrives in Loos and is met by the familiar (at least in modern times, cinematically) sights of war – it is pouring with rain, and a man is carried past him on a stretcher. The noise of the scenario is highlighted by a brief scene back at home, where the Kiplings can hear the guns across the Channel. Continuing the theme of creating parallels between the Western Front and Home Front, the noise in the trenches is contrasted with the silence and birdsong at home, albeit with an obviously concerned Kipling family, emphasising the different worlds that the different family members now inhabit in the same vein as *Parade's End*. As the men charge across No Man's Land, the cacophony of war is once again contrasted with the tranquillity at home.

Upon hearing that Jack is missing, Carrie is determined to find out what happened to her son, to the extent that she requests all 4000 photos of men who have been taken prisoner by the Germans and demands daily updates from the army. She and Rudyard go through the photos together at home, twice to make sure he is not among them. One of Jack's men visits the house, and recounts what happened – Jack was shot while storming a machine gun nest. Rudyard reflects to his wife that their son was brave, doing his part, and was lucky it was over quickly, though she sees no glory in it. In a later scene, Rudyard emotionally wonders aloud to Carrie, 'How could I condemn my son to oblivion?' The pain of losing a child is echoed in a conversation he has afterwards with the King, who asks 'Who'd have a son? Breaks your heart'.[169] This was a poignant conclusion to a detailed consideration of loss during the war, and

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[169] *My Boy Jack* (ITV1, 11 November 2007).

its airing on Remembrance Day with such themes was a likely reason for its popularity; it gained an audience of 5.7 million viewers.[170] Of course, it should be noted that there was an increase in the number of programmes aired around Remembrance Day each year of the Centenary, coinciding with increased interest, so this can arguably be explained in the same terms.

Death is a permanent feature in war-related television and film, but these more intimate portraits convey the emotions and experiences tied up with it in a more meaningful way than simply including them in casualty figures. While there was little in this biopic style during the Centenary, apart from Rupert Murdoch's account of his father's experiences at Gallipoli, the anniversary arguably grew on this by encouraging the public to research their own family's experience in the war, which may be more distant and less world-wrenching, but also gives poignancy to the understanding of our own histories. In tandem with the *1914* radio series also considered here, there appears to be a strong sense that in the decades before the Centenary, there was a great deal of focus on taking stories and knowledge about the First World War from those who lived through, and thus those who had an authority to speak on it. Naturally, this opportunity was lost with their passing, but so too was an embracing of the global aspect of the war, which cannot be explained in similar terms. Attempts to replace these 'authentic' voices will be considered in the next chapter; what is noteworthy here, is that these were not the only elements which went missing during the Centenary – certain parts of the war's chronology did too.

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[170] Chris Tryhorn, 'ITV War Drama Recruits 5.7m Viewers', *The Guardian* (12 November 2007), https://www.theguardian.com/media/2007/nov/12/tvratings.television?gusrc=rss&feed=media [Accessed 19 September 2024].

1915: The Missing Year

Consistent across broadcasting both before and during the Centenary is a lack of attention to 1915, with the pre-Centenary years only marginally giving it slightly more attention. Indeed, beyond broadcasting the year saw little attention during the Centenary in general, with 14-18 NOW focussing on the outbreak of the war, the Somme, and the Armistice.[171] The preceding years to the Centenary featured the broadcast of two films on television showing slightly different viewpoints of the battle at Gallipoli, contrasted with Centenary coverage which merely broadcast the memorial event and the Rupert Mudoch programme mentioned previously. In contemporary memory, Gallipoli is seen as a primarily Australian event, despite the involvement of the British, so it is unsurprising it found less time on television than other battles. The earliest of these is *All the King's Men* (BBC, 1999), based on the 1992 novel *The Vanished Battalion* by Nigel McCrery, and not to be confused with three other films which share the same name, but are adaptations of the titular 1946 novel by Robert Penn Warren set in the Southern USA during the Great Depression. The 1999 film focuses on the experiences of the 'Sandringham Company', a group of soldiers formed of men from the King's estate, part of the 5th Territorial Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment, and the mysterious circumstances in which they 'disappeared' at Gallipoli. The introduction to the broadcast also notes it is part of a series of First World War dramas, which is noteworthy in that 1999 does not lend itself to any war-related anniversaries.

The film opens by acknowledging that the story of the men 'has become legend', which may have been intended to subtly infer that the facts behind the men's disappearance are

[171] Sabine Sörgel, 'Poppies, Ropes and Shadow Play: Transcultural Memories of the First World War during Brexit', *New Theatre Quarterly,* 37.2 (2021), p. 174.

largely unknown. It does not state any specific timeframe from the start, but establishes itself as being early in the war when Frank Beck (portrayed by David Jason) sees a man with a walking cane and a broken arm, noting he must have been at Mons. Beck is a captain in the Territorial Force, suggesting that if you 'send in the territorials and the volunteers, it'll all be over before you can turn round', giving the obligatory nod to the fact that many were convinced the war would be over by Christmas 1914. This attitude is further established when Beck expresses regret at not going to war with his men; when he is reminded that they could be back in a few months, he retorts that they will be 'covered in glory, but not mine', another echo of *Parade's End*. This reference to the notion of glory in war that was felt at the start of the conflict is the second in a series of tick box sections setting the scene of the period, with the next one following swiftly afterwards. Beck meets a shell-shocked man in the pub, suffering with tremors, and deemed to be mute until his father explains they had asked him to stop talking about what he had seen based on how distressing it was. His father and Beck help him drink his pint, yet as the pub fills up, he is asked to leave. This is something of a stark divergence from Beck's ideas about war and glory expressed beforehand, giving light to the fact that glory meant returning home without disfiguring injuries or shell shock. It has also been noted that 'facially disfigured veterans seldom appear in wartime and interwar literature'.[172] This highlights that certain elements of the war have required the passage of time to be addressed, an element referred to earlier in this thesis when noting the emergency of 'transgressive' figures in broadcasting.

In tandem with the points made earlier about the war changing the world, there is also an acknowledgement that the war changed people as well. As the men prepare for war, Beck

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[172] Marjorie Gehrhardt, 'Losing Face, Finding Love? The Fate of Facially Disfigured Soldiers in Narratives of the First World War', *Litteraria Copernicana*, 10.2 (2018), p. 77.

reflects on the fact that Sandringham is all he and the men have ever known, and 'when the men come back they'll be different, and I'll be the same'. All of these concerns are evidently mounting to make Beck fear being left behind in a changing world and population, and when the royal family bestow a gift of a pocket watch to him for his service, he announces he is enlisting to serve overseas with his men. The men are then shown marching out of Sandringham. The overall peaceable nature of these scenes is uprooted as the scene cuts to the men struggling to get off their boat while under fire at Gallipoli. This is also reminiscent of the contrast between the chaos of the battlefields and the peace of the Home Front, and the first step in several designed to evoke the sense of a lack of coordination and leadership during the battle, with an officer explaining to Beck the lack of information and support they are receiving, and providing the ominous observation that he failed to keep people alive in a Boer concentration camp due to a lack of support. References to the Boer Wars are seldom seen in First World War television programmes, and this is perhaps emblematic of the fact the battle portrayed is early on in the war, preceding larger events such as the Somme which made references to earlier wars seem unwarranted.

The film quickly starts to establish the horrors of warfare, and the struggles of those involved to deal with them. A 14-year-old boy who enlisted with the Sandringham men is clipped by a bullet; he survives, but Beck is shown later wiping the boy's blood off his shoe, his hand shaking. Of course, the enemy were not the only source of death at Gallipoli, as Beck is told 'we have our first case of dysentery. So if the Turks don't get us, we could die in our own shit'. This harsh appraisal of the situation is mirrored slightly back at home, where it transpires that the injured man shown earlier (who Beck believed was at Mons), is in fact a conscientious objector, and was thrown out of a window at the hospital he worked in by soldiers. The legendary moment of the story then occurs, as the men charge in to battle,

disappearing on to a strange mist. This mist transforms into the steam from a train pulling into a station, and one of the Sandringham men, Sergeant Ted Grimes (Will Ash) is shown in a hospital, apparently the sole survivor of the event.

The timeline now shifts between the assumed events after the mist, and the attempts after the battle to determine what happened. Pierrepoint Edwards (Ian McDiarmid) goes to Gallipoli to trace the men's steps. Cutting back to the past, Beck has lost his hopeful attitude of protecting the men, telling them he cannot keep them safe and is not their father, but he is their brother. This is potentially indicative of the potential of war to make all men equals, regardless of prior status. Reinforcing the fact that this story is something of a legend, in that the true account of events is unknown, Sergeant Grimes recalls his memory of the men disappearing into the mist, and Reverend Edwards notes he has nothing else to add. In reflection of this, he returns Beck's pocket watch to Queen Mother Alexandra. She responds by asking, 'Do you think we may safely build our memorials now, Mr Pierrepoint Edwards?' This is a poignant observation of a desire to establish soldiers as dead rather than missing, before memorialising them as such, an observation that is noteworthy given that memorialisation in the modern age concentrates largely on the aspect of soldiers dying.

The film concludes by noting that 'no official explanation was ever given about what happened to the Sandringham Company'.[173] Indeed, despite one of the co-producers being the author of the book the film is based on, the film diverges from the book in various ways, presumably further reflective of the uncertain nature of what actually happened to the Sandringham men. It is perhaps worth noting here that although he received access to the Royal Archives while working on the book, Nigel McCrery is not a historian by trade – he is a

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[173] *All the King's Men* (BBC One, 14 November 1999).

screenwriter more commonly known for *Silent Witness* (BBC, 1996–present) and *New Tricks* (BBC, 2003–2015). The story bears similarities to other wartime myths, particularly the Angel of Mons, which is referred to both in the film and in the opening of McCrery's book. Furthermore, it is something of an academic fault to claim that the work 'solves' the mystery of the disappearance of the 1/5th Norfolks – McCrery himself admits that there are 'inconsistencies' in the source material, meaning he had to use his 'own judgement after examining the available evidence to explain what actually befell them'.[174] Historians are well aware of the necessity of determining facts based on the sources available, but filling in gaps can be a precarious expedition into the territory of speculation. Still, the film is presented as a drama, whereby such activities are expected, but it is reflective of the concerns about the impact of dramatization on understanding of the First World War.

In contrast to this British view of the conflict, the other film presents events from an Australian perspective. Peter Weir's *Gallipoli* (Paramount Pictures, 1981), whilst originally an Australian production, was also broadcast on Channel 4 in 2011, thus featuring twice in the pre-Centenary period (albeit once in the UK). The film had a much more positive reception in Australia, with British audiences struggling to connect with a message of Australian national identity.[175] The film was very much intended for its home audience, though, as 'Australia's egalitarian soldiers and society are contrasted with their class-ridden British counterparts'.[176] Indeed, so powerful was the sense of identity it conveyed, that it appeared to have a lasting impact on the memories of veterans—when Alistair Thomson interviewed former soldiers for

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[174] Nigel McCrery, *The Vanished Battalion: One of the Greatest Mysteries of the First World War Finally Solved* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), p. 2.
[175] Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Oxford University Press: Melbourne, 1994), p. 192.
[176] Ibid., p. 196.

his work, he noted that 'I felt like I was listening to the script of the film *Gallipoli'*.[177] Whereas *All the King's Men* focussed on a group of men, *Gallipoli* becomes more personalised by centring on the experiences of Archie Hamilton, a young Australian man. In a hurried attempt to jump on a train and get to Perth to enlist, Archie and his friend Frank end up in the outback with two weeks until the next one, so Archie decides they should simply walk. This allows for a period of reflection on the war and enlistment – Frank tells Archie he does not want to enlist. When Archie tells him he should because he's an athlete, Frank snaps back that 'it's not our bloody war […] it's an English war, it's got nothing to do with us'. This is prescient of an emergent theme in the Centenary to highlight the fact that the war is often viewed in the UK in British terms, and the resultant efforts to highlight those who were drawn in to the conflict alongside us.

The film then establishes the remote nature of the war for Australia – when Archie tells the man he's going to join the war, the man replies, 'Which war?' After Archie explains it's against the Germans, the man says he knew a German and asks what the war is about, which Archie admits he does not know, but knows it is Germany's fault. In addition to highlighting both the geographic and mental distance between the fighting fronts and Australia, this is also emblematic of the lack of awareness about the causes of the conflict which also continue among the British population up to, and arguably beyond, the Centenary. Perhaps less reflective of the distance is Archie's insistence that they have to stop the Germans in Turkey, so they do not end up in Australia; as the man surveys the desert around him, he announces that 'they're welcome to it'.

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[177] Ibid., pp. 7–8.

The two men arrive in Perth, where Frank sticks hair on Archie's lip to make him appear older and alters his birth certificate. Archie then passes his horse test with ease, but Frank cannot get his horse to move, so he fails. While Frank has succeeded in helping Archie get into the Light Horse regiment, he is resigned to joining the infantry – Frank enlists with his friends from before, helping a friend with bad teeth get in by noting that if he is not allowed to join, the other three will not enlist either. Thus, we see the sense of camaraderie between men being built up before they have been sent off, as well as a similar consideration of people who had difficulty enlisting as referred to earlier. The scene then shifts to an Australian training camp in Cairo, July 1915, where the men are shown playing football, presumably a nod to the famous photo of men doing the same in Salonika. They are warned against the potential disease which result from 'horizontal refreshment', though unlike the previous film, they are not warned about the upcoming risk of dysentery. In a further display of the idea that it is not their war, the Australians borrow some donkeys and mock the British officers on horseback. Archie meets Frank during a practice drill, and finally succeeds in getting him in to the Light Horse regiment.

Similar to the previous film, the men arrive at Gallipoli by boat, where the beach is under heavy bombardment. Further indicative of their supporting role, the officers then decide to draw the Turkish army's attention so the British can safely get ashore. The regiment needs a runner, and while Archie is selected for his athletic ability, he nominates Frank instead as he would rather fight and knows Frank is scared. While attempting to provide an update to senior officers, the telephone line dies, so Frank is sent off as runner. As he heads off, the camera pans across vast numbers of dead men on the battlefield – Frank is told the attack must continue. After returning, Frank is sent to General Gardiner, who tells him to inform the major they are reconsidering advancing as the British have arrived safely, once again

reinforcing the idea of the Australians suffering in an attempt to aid British success. The camera pans across a trench full of injured and dejected men. Meanwhile, the Major telephones the men in the trench and orders them to push on. Frank reaches the trench just as the whistle is blown, to which he screams in anger. The film closes on Archie being struck by machine gun fire.[178] The sense of a needless loss of Australian life as a result of British orders is reinforced by this film, a sentiment which finds itself expressed by Turkish tour guides around Gallipoli.[179]

In addition to their geographic setting, the two films share common elements of experiences of camaraderie and loss. They diverge in terms of their understanding of enlistment and approach to British attitudes. These are common tropes in war-related television broadcasts, and thus their exclusion from the Centenary schedule highlights a missed opportunity to reconsider these elements in a lesser-explored theatre of war. Naturally, the topic was not excluded entirely from Centenary programming, but as noted earlier, Gallipoli is more closely related to ANZAC memory than it is to British cultural memory.

The fifty years between the two major anniversaries of the First World War saw an immense amount of programming related to the conflict, each offering, sharing, and developing tropes which would lend themselves towards the development of future broadcasts. Many of the themes would recur during the Centenary, either to lesser or greater extents, notably those focussed on futility and mud, blood, and poetry. This aspect of media setting the tone for future productions has been identified by Richard Grusin as a form of 'premediation', whereby it essentially creates an idea of what will be important for future

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[178] *Gallipoli* (Paramount Pictures, 1981).
[179] Brad West, *Finding Gallipoli: Battlefield Remembrance and the Movement of Australian and Turkish History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), p. 143.

audiences.[180] With the Centenary viewed as the last great chance to inform and mould popular ideas about the war, the elements it chose to highlight would be critical. A push towards a broader understanding of the people involved in the conflict becomes more prominent.

Furthermore, unlike the preceding era of broadcasting, the dawn of social media would mean that broadcasts would be more open to public scrutiny and discussion than ever before. This morphs not only the responses broadcasters can receive about their work, but the very notion of how cultural memory evolves, and who directs that evolution. Moreover, a plethora of wars in the 21st century, in tandem with the proliferation of social media, have changed our understanding of war dramatically since the First World War. As Jay Winter reflected, 'media surrounding war and the victims of war today bears very little resemblance to those languages of memory which operated in 1914'.[181] As noted in the opening quote of this chapter, however, tearing into new and unfamiliar territory is generally not the way to go about exploring a well-known topic. There must be recognisable features, and an attachment to the history. It is the methods through which broadcasters sought to bridge the old world with the new to which we now turn.

[180] For an expansion on this idea, see Richard Grusin, 'Premediation', *Criticism,* 46.1 (2004), pp. 17–39.
[181] Winter, *War Beyond Words*, p. 206.

2   Verity Without Veterans: Authenticity in the Post-Witness Era

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'Public historians note the phenomenon that members of the public do not necessarily have the same view of what makes a given historical narrative or source authentic as an historian would'.[182]

Historians viewed the Centenary as a golden opportunity to improve and broaden the general public's understanding about the war, and to move cultural memory beyond the tone of 1960s historiography.[183] In tandem with any academic pursuit, an emphasis on source material and historiography was seen as a key method of achieving this, to ensure that the information presented was based on fact and not fiction. This chapter seeks to address the ways in which television programmes broadcast during the Centenary sought to inform the public about the war and, more crucially, the ways they attempted to present an authentic vision of the war when the most authentic source – the veterans – had long since passed.

As discussed in the introductory chapter, the process of conveying the war to successive generations has been an evolving process throughout the previous century. These methods of conveyance have been referred to as 'processes of intergenerational transmission', which is an apt description for understanding such processes in the broadcast

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[182] Haunton and Salzedo, 'A Duty, An Opportunity and a Pleasure', p. 44.
[183] See 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), pp. 1–11; Stephen Badsey, 'A Muddy Vision of the Great War', *History Today*, May 2015, pp. 46–48.

age.[184] In the spirit of recognising Public History as a distinct subsection of the field, it does not seek to overtly criticise the versions of history presented by the programmes discussed, though it will note discrepancies and problems where they are unavoidably apparent. Instead, the focus here is on what the broadcasters were trying to show as authentic and, where applicable, how these elements were combined with familiar emotive methods and rhetoric to amplify that message. In doing so, this chapter will demonstrate that the lines between academic history and Public History are becoming increasingly blurred in the digital age, the broader aspects of which will be explored in later chapters. Overall, the key issue becomes maintaining an increasingly strained 'thread' with the past as the temporal gap widens and various methods for strengthening it are adopted.

The veterans of the Great War had previously formed the bedrock of representations of the conflict, primarily through documentaries and commemorative events, and have continued to do so beyond their passing, albeit posthumously through their surviving records and accounts. A boom in the use of their testimony emerged in the 1960s, when a growing concern about the diminishing amount of time remaining to obtain their recollections resulted in the BBC undertaking interviews with survivors. This glut of testimony resulted from the production of the corporation's landmark series *The Great War* (1964). Indeed, it was this documentary which 'established the veteran eyewitness as an essential part of the modern television documentary', and the collection of their testimony was seen as an act of recording history in itself.[185] Since the passing of the last veteran, Harry Patch, in 2009, broadcasters have had to find alternative ways of presenting an authentic narrative of the conflict and maintaining a meaningful connection with the past. Of course, this did not imply abandoning

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[184] Brockmeier, 'After the Archive', p. 12.
[185] Hanna, *The Great War on the Small Screen*, pp. 70–71.

the use of the interview recordings. One of the simplest methods of maintaining a link with their experiences (and indeed an ongoing feature of the BBC's centenary programming) was to recycle the interviews collected for *The Great War* which had previously been used for broadcast, and additionally to utilise hitherto unreleased footage to broaden and novelise the narratives.

This latter approach formed the basis of the standalone documentary, *I Was There: The Great War Interviews* (BBC Two, 2014). Originally broadcast on 14 March 2014, this programme was illustrative of the corporation's occasional tendency to use the centenary as an opportunity to celebrate the 50th anniversary of their landmark series.[186] This is symptomatic of a media world in which much work is self-referential – it consistently borrows from and repurposes existing media in new ways.[187] The programme starts by showing the opening reel for *The Great War*, driving home the importance of its source material by noting that 'this is the closest we'll ever get to what it was really like for those who were there'. This notion that eye-witness testimony is the zenith of understanding the past and the truest form of history was manifested in the recurrent use of these interviews throughout the BBC's centenary programming, most prominently for the film *They Shall Not Grow Old* (2018).[188] Yet, if that is the closest we can hope to get, it implies that ongoing representations of the war which may shift away from this material will be inescapably more distant from the events depicted. It should also be noted that television producers view witnesses as real,

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[186] This is also reflected in the fact that *The Great War* was rebroadcast in its entirety in late 2014.

[187] For a deeper exploration of this on television, see Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999), pp. 184–194.

[188] The programme was broadcast again before this film was aired on the BBC, offering some rather direct foreshadowing.

unambiguous figures, whereas to cultural historians, they are as open to questions on bias and reliability as any archival source.

I Was There does shift away from this centrality of source material slightly by combining a blend of archive film, recreated footage, and colourised photographs, the latter of which stands in stark visual contrast to the black and white interview films. This combination of the real and the recreated can at first appear at odds with the programme's proclaimed intent of knowing 'what it was really like'. Colourisation is, after all, an act of interpretation, and recreation is an assumption of what might have happened. Of course, this criticism of the unproblematised amalgamation of actual and acted footage is the purview of academic historians; as highlighted by Maggie Andrews, 'those who produce public history in the BBC, museums and the heritage sector, like community groups, do not share academics' assumed hierarchies of knowledge, nor necessarily, their questioning scepticism towards many sources'.[189] So it is not likely to concern the average viewer, who is likely to be more responsive to a variety of visual techniques and the broader scope of footage such techniques can provide. Furthermore, the anxiety about recreated footage in historical films is more of a modern concern, reflective of our temporal distance from the event and resultant ability to analyse and research it. Even one of the original Great War films, *The Battle of the Somme* (1916), had sections of reconstructed footage. Yet, as Nicholas Reeves has highlighted, 'we concentrate on the extent of faking in the film; contemporaries were struck by its honesty, by its realism, by its truthfulness. And they saw the film like this because their wider cultural context was so dominated by dishonest, unrealistic, mendacious images of war'.[190]

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[189] Andrews, 'Tropes and Trench Cakes', p. 508.
[190] 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), p. 23.

Essentially, a *laissez-faire* attitude towards recreated footage can be forgiven when the ultimate aim of the production is to be reasonably accurate, and the recreation is not intended to mislead the viewer about events. Moreover, while some may prefer a distinction between the two forms, such interjections would likely be unwelcomed in programmes intended for popular broadcast. Similar stylistic choices were seen in *They Shall Not Grow Old*, including the use of onscreen text, and no additional oral narration or commentary, allowing the viewer to interpret the veterans' testimony for themselves. Despite the highlighted importance of the previously unseen nature of the interview footage, the recollections of the men are not particularly unusual compared to previous documentary content: a man signed up at 17; recollections of shelling and coping methods; the impact of seeing dead and wounded men; the inability of those at home to understand the war.[191] As one historian has noted, however, the reference to 'interviews' in the programme title is a little misleading, as the people involved were not interviewed in the formal sense, but rather were invited to share their recollections.[192] Yet it is still a fairly broad stratum of experience, albeit one limited in gender and geographical scope – these missing elements will be considered in more detail in the next chapter.

Ultimately, the key distinctiveness of *I Was There* is that it uses previously unseen footage as a counterpoint to the ever-familiar material which has repeatedly saturated previous wartime documentaries. Undeniably, it can be viewed as more of a commemoration of *The Great War* than of the Great War itself, although it could also be seen as one final memorial to the veterans who shared their experiences. This seems a more valid

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[191] *I Was There: The Great War Interviews* (BBC Two, 14 March 2014).
[192] Peter Busch, 'Television Through the Eyes of Ordinary Soldiers? The BBC's *The Great War* (1964) and Eyewitness Testimony', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 38.3 (2018), p. 665.

interpretation, as at the time of writing full-length videos of interviews with thirteen of the veterans are still available on the BBC iPlayer website.[193] This online immortalisation of previously televised footage can be viewed as the digital denouement of Emma Hanna's recognition of television as 'a small screen alternative to stone and bronze'.[194] What was once carved in stone, then beamed out through light and pixels, is now stored digitally as 1s and 0s. Of course, while oversaturation of repeated footage can help connect with established ideas that viewers have about the past, they do little to change those ideas, and through repetition the images eventually lose their impact; sacred as such footage may be to broadcasters, it has become necessary to seek alternative means of an authentic narrative.

What is Authenticity?

It is vital to stipulate what is meant here by the term 'authenticity' and its application to history-related programmes. At its root, the word 'authentic' is derived from the ancient Greek words *authentikós* and *authéntēs*, meaning 'genuine' and 'master' respectively. Therefore, when considering authenticity and history, the issue becomes what is genuine, and perhaps more indirectly, who the masters are. As explored earlier, the masters of genuineness in regard to the Great War have widely been viewed as the veterans. This is unsurprising, as it is broadly believed that the most reliable narrative of an event comes from those who witnessed it, even when allowing for the distortions to memory that occur over time. In the case of *The Great War*, the purest form of eye-witness testimony was sought, as 'veterans were expected to talk

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[193] 'The Great War Interviews', *BBC*, https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episodes/p01tbkqk/the-great-war-interviews [Accessed 15 June 2022].
[194] 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), pp. 89–111.

about what they saw and what they did. Interpretative statements were usually edited out and so were more general reflections'.[195]

Ostensibly, what is often sought through eye-witness testimony is facts; interpretation leans away from an authentic account of what happened. Objective details are prioritised over subjective ideas. It is worth highlighting, however, that even this supposed paradigm of truth offered by witnesses can be tenuous at best; as observed by Emma Hanna, for *The Great War*, interviews were collected fifty years after the conflict, when the veterans' recollections had been influenced by contemporary debates and representations.[196] This demonstrates the ability of representation to inform memory, as 'with the passage of time, our representations *become* reality in the sense that they compete with, insinuate themselves into, and eventually replace altogether the firsthand memories people have of the events through which they've lived'.[197] Yet, their testimony is still viewed as offering a real look into the experiences of a British Tommy. In broader epistemological terms, authenticity can thus be viewed as the truth to the best of our knowledge, devoid (as much as possible) of embellishment, proposition, and assumption. Narratives are thereby imbued with authenticity and viewed as genuine when they come from sources which are generally deemed to be reliable. The 'masters' of authenticity, in terms of the Great War, are primarily viewed as the veterans, who have provided first-hand accounts of their experiences. Since this pool of experience can no longer be accessed, other masters and sources of authenticity have been sought out. This has partly been achieved by considering mastery of the subject matter; in the case of Great War programmes, this means the inclusion of historians in production and content. This will be

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[195] Busch, 'Television Through the Eyes of Ordinary Soldiers?', pp. 651–652.
[196] Hanna, *The Great War on the Small Screen*, p. 65.
[197] John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 136.

explored later in this chapter, along with the accounts of descendants of the masters, that is relatives of the veterans, masters of the craft in the form of serving soldiers, and the last remaining authentic artefacts of the conflict.

For television programmes, the issue of authenticity is primarily associated with documentaries, although, as will be noted later, television dramas and literary adaptations often employ techniques to imbue an authenticity to the stories they tell and are conversely also subject to criticisms of their content on these grounds. Yet, even with documentaries, there is the ongoing issue that the recollections and records of serving soldiers are not without misrepresentation. When referring to the diaries of soldiers written at the time, there is an imbalance in the congruity of recollections, level of detail, and maintenance of timescale.[198] Either the individual utilising the source has to assume the account is accurate or cross-reference it with other contemporary accounts to verify its claims. Furthermore, the use of archival film and photographs in documentaries is not necessarily reliably authentic. As two historians have noted, 'nowadays critics and viewers alike are questioning authenticity more often in light of the digital opportunities to modify and falsify photos. In history documentaries, it is becoming a part of everyday practice to manipulate photos, to add elements, to combine several pictures and so forth'.[199] In this sense, even sources regarded as authentic can be questioned. Indeed, as noted earlier, in addition to recreated footage, modernising techniques such as colourisation have become increasingly prevalent in recent decades. Additionally, even the 'masters' of authenticity are vulnerable to criticism. It has been noted that where veterans have written memoirs, they will sometimes recite sections

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[198] Nancy Martin, '"And All Because It Is War!": First World War Diaries, Authenticity and Combatant Identity', *Textual Practice*, 29.7 (2015), p. 1248.

[199] Jouko Aaltonen and Jukka Kortti, 'From Evidence to Re-Enactment: History, Television and Documentary Film', *Journal of Media Practice*, 16.2 (2015), p. 117.

from them almost verbatim when recalling experiences, or it will be evident that their accounts take on a more literary quality.[200] The intent to tell a good story can thereby detract from the impetus to remain accurate and authentic. Essentially however, these issues can be returned to the original reflection on the nature of authenticity – it is the truth to the best of our knowledge, for the absolute truth is often unattainable or unknowable.

Authenticity and cultural memory, more generally, are contested terms. Cultural memory, by its nature of being an amorphous, intangible collection of ideas about an event, has little consideration for authenticity. Yet historians consistently seek to infuse it with knowledge and criticise elements which either stray too far from the truth or, conversely, attempt to inject a form of fictionalised truth. The controversial presence of myths in cultural memory of the war was outlined in the introduction. While applicable to dramatised televisual representations of the war, the issues with fictionalised truths also lie with activities involving re-enactment. At a broad level, re-enactment can be viewed as an attempt to present an authentic experience of a historical event to people who did not experience it – if you can't be there, you can encounter something as close to it as possible. Re-enactment in the modern age ranges from small-scale in-person community events to online roleplaying activities held on communal servers such as Discord, up to larger institutional initiatives such as the IWM's previous experiential exhibition, the Trench Experience.

In a broader sense, many televised fictional representations of the war can also be viewed as re-enactment. Staged re-enactment scenes are occasionally used to increase the emotion and sensation of that event.[201] However, some historians view re-enactment as a

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[200] Busch, 'Television Through the Eyes of Ordinary Soldiers?', p. 654.
[201] Ibid., p. 120.

much more dangerous phenomenon, more so even than the issue of digitally altering source material. Jay Winter argues that re-enactment

> is a dangerous and offensive form of both historical and commemorative activity. It is dangerous because it adds elements of excitement and adventure to contemporary notions of war. It is offensive because it lacks respect for the hardship, the suffering and the anguish of men in battle. It betrays the men who fought by sanitising war and turning combat into what we now call infotainment.[202]

This particular element of historical representation thus finds itself stuck between the purist perceptions of historians and the needs of broadcasters and members of the public to introduce the war experience to an audience unlikely to engage with historiography. Indeed, re-enactment can also be viewed as Public History in practice, as the public seek to engage with history devoid of institutional or academic input. Authenticity is thereby held in a sacred light by some historians; to digress from it is considered an act of profanity.

Broadcasters in particular have sought to maintain a proximity to authenticity, albeit with some deviations, and with a dearth of people to share their real experiences, other methods must be employed. Maintaining a proximity to authenticity protects broadcasters from criticisms of cheapening the past for the purposes of entertainment. Aside from these broader issues, the notion of authenticity has some inherent problems of its own. As Gabriel Fuentes has highlighted, 'under the assumption of 'authenticity,' history – the recollection and recontextualization of artifacts and events of the past *for* the present – presents not only

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[202] Jay Winter, 'Unfinished Business: Remembering the Great War Between Truth and Reenactment', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 30 (2020), p. 120.

ethical problems of honesty and truth but also aesthetic problems of representation and power'.[203] Essentially, the determination of what is authentic requires the application of a hierarchy to source material, a process which will unavoidably prioritise some artefacts and their related events over others. This has broader implications for the heritage industry rather than the media, as 'the construction of cultural heritage unfolds as a negotiation between narrated histories, collective memories, and contested authenticities often in contexts of power and national identity'.[204] As the heritage and archive industries are often relied on by broadcasters, however, the decisions they make ultimately impact the sources in programmes, and thus the issue of 'forgotten' stories becomes a wider dilemma.

The concept of 'forgotten' stories, and the related issue of who is and isn't included in 'authentic' narratives will be covered in more detail in the next chapter of this thesis; what will be considered here are the primary methods of presenting authentic narratives in centenary programming across documentaries and dramatised representations. This will be considered firstly through the exploration of genealogical and comparative experience connections to the war, through the use of descendants of veterans in documentaries; the seeking of input on the events of the past and the commemoration of it from currently serving military personnel; the employment of historians both appearing in documentaries and as advisors for programmes to lend professional expertise to the content; and, finally, the utilisation of artifacts and locations to present and maintain a physical connection with the war in an era of increasingly digital and intangible reference points. Ultimately, these themes demonstrate that the core

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[203] Gabriel Fuentes, 'Beyond History: The Aesthetics of Authenticity and the Politics of Heritage in Havana, Cuba', *Future Anterior: Journal of Historic Preservation, History Theory & Criticism*, 14.2 (2017), p. 47.
[204] Ibid., p. 48.

issue of authenticity is of maintaining a valid connection to the past, through personalisation, profession, physicality, and place.

The Human Connection

> What is the thread that links us to the Great World War whose centenary we
> mark this year? Can those of us born decades after it ended ever bridge the
> gulf of experience that separates us from those who lived through it?[205]

This question was posed by Allan Little while introducing a programme in which young authors recount the experiences of their great-grandparents and grandparents during the war. Broadcasters have had to find ways of maintaining a connection to the war in a post-witness era, to more interpersonally relate the experiences of those who lived through it. One of the most apparent ways to do this is by interviewing descendants of veterans and other key wartime figures. This maintains a relational link to the past and opens up opportunities for the discovery of previously untold stories, but it also ties in with the growing public interest in genealogy in recent decades, undoubtedly fuelled to a considerable extent by the popular television series *Who Do You Think You Are?* (BBC, 2004–Present), and also partly by the modern geographic spread of familial generations beyond a single home.[206] It also injects a form of communicative memory into commemoration; where people can no longer verbally share their experiences, the memoirs and anecdotes which remain can be shared by their relatives. Wider institutional initiatives such as the IWM's 'Lives of the First World War'[207] also

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[205] *I Don't Remember the War* (BBC World Service Radio, 27 July 2014).
[206] Noakes, ''My Husband Is Interested in War Generally', p. 613.
[207] See 'Lives of the First World War', *Imperial War Museums,* https://livesofthefirstworldwar.iwm.org.uk/ [Accessed 16 June 2022].

encouraged people to share the stories of their ancestors, reinforcing the trope of familial legacy evident throughout the Centenary. The ability of the public to explore their family history has been greatly improved in recent years through the development of websites dedicated to genealogical research purposes, such as Ancestry and Findmypast.[208]

Notably, however, exploring family histories of the war is not a novel feature of the digital era – sharing family histories through the generations is one of the oldest forms of oral history. In terms of the Great War, an interest in the involvement of our families in the conflict has extended from the renowned War Office poster in which two children ask their father, 'What did you do in the Great War, Daddy?', a statement designed to challenge those avoiding enlistment, up to more recent explorations by later generations into their family history. Studies into genealogy today are more exploratory than accusatory in nature, and while the opportunity for directly asking relatives about their part in the war passed along with them, mementos and diaries left behind can serve as useful reference points and avenues for opening up new narratives. Thus, certain centenary initiatives, and some programmes, encouraged the sharing of such stories.

In *I Don't Remember the War*, from which this section's preceding quotation is taken, six young writers (all in their late twenties to early thirties at the time of recording) recall anecdotes from their grandparents and great-grandparents. The stories involve diversity in both the nationality of the authors and the experiences of their ancestors. The geographical diversity element is particularly noteworthy, as Jay Winter has previously noted a primacy of European narratives in popular understanding of the war, which 'is hardly surprising, since cultural memory comes out of family stories, and the families who have been telling stories

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[208] Ancestry, www.ancestry.co.uk; Findmypast, www.findmypast.co.uk [Accessed 3 August 2022]

about the Great War are by and large European'.[209] Hence the Centenary sought to broaden the geographical scope of commemoration and representation. In this programme, half of the stories shared are from Europeans. The first story in the programme comes from Clemens Setz from Austria, who recalls stories told by his grandfather. He reflects on the generic nature of his grandfather's stories – of marching, wounds, and sleeping under the open sky. Notably, Setz observes that 'it is certainly possible that in the memory of the old man, both world wars blurred into one, but the official line was that he was speaking of the first'. This is reflective of concerns about the impact of retrospect on memory of the war, particularly the impact of the Second World War on impressions and recollections of the earlier conflict, as noted in criticisms of Fussell's work earlier in this thesis.

Considering the notion of a 'thread' leading us back in to history, other events leave knots which complicate the thread. The lasting impact of his grandfather's recollections for Setz was not so much the content, but rather the delivery – his grandfather spoke in *Windisch*, a German term for the Slovenian dialect spoken in Austria. He notes that 'as a child I thus thought that anyone who speaks of the wars automatically had to use an artificial, archaic, ceremonial, strange-sounding language'. This highlights the significance of how stories are told, an often-overlooked aspect of storytelling. Setz's own artistic literary skills are shown as he recounts reading German wartime poetry, stating that 'these poems seem like cities full of the war-marked and scarred, with sentences that lead like unfinished stairwells suddenly into nothingness. Piles of words are regrouped with puzzling haste, as if people were being herded from place to place'. He finishes by reciting a poem by August Stramm, first in the original German and then translated to English. The recital of the poem in its original language on a

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[209] Winter, 'Unfinished Business', p. 121.

show broadcast in English is noteworthy, because it highlights the existence of war poetry beyond the poets which those in the UK have become most familiar with, and reinforces the geographically diverse nature of the programme's content. It is also reminiscent of the BBC radio programme *1914: Moving Towards War* discussed in the previous chapter in broadcasting in a different language, albeit with the caveat of offering a translation afterwards.

This broader geographic scope continues with Ceridwen Dovey from South Africa, who opens by noting that 'my South African family history is completely silent on the subject of World War One. No memories or anecdotes have been passed down, not a shred of a letter written from the front, not even one good story about hardship out in the colonies has survived'. When contacting her relatives to ask about possible stories, she discovers that the reason for this is that none of her South African male ancestors enlisted in the war, and never had to due to the absence of conscription. This stands in stark contrast to common ideas about the war in Britain, where conscription meant the majority of families had some involvement in the war. She identifies the reasoning behind the reluctance to sign up in the Anglo-Boer War. Though some of her family memories from this war were 'touching in their simplicity' and recall some amicability between her family and some of the British soldiers in Bloemfontein, these are contrasted with the darker stories from the concentration camps. Though leaning into earlier conflicts, this is indicative of the murky nature of wartime memories which are not necessarily consistently light or dark. This story also highlights the precarious nature of oral history – stories can only be known and shared if the individual decided to divulge them.

From untold stories to stories being unavailable, Prajwal Parajuly recalls how his Indian grandfather regretted not having been born during the war, 'for a war can provide a man who

fancied himself as a storyteller with a lifetime of fodder'. This is similar to the complaints occasionally expressed from men frustrated at being too young or too old to fight during the war, although for those at the time the concern was generally more related to fulfilling what was seen as their duty more than the opportunity to talk about it later. Parajuly's grandfather's recollections are therefore based around more general ideas about the conflict – 'to him the war meant tanks, bombing and foreign places'. This demonstrates that while there is a primacy on the importance of accounts of people alive during the relevant time, not all of them can provide specific details about events. He recalls that his grandfather was rather fond of the notion of Great War tourism and told Parajuly and his sister about recruitment drives while he drove them around Takdah in Darjeeling, while the two children questioned whether he was old enough to know about it. After his grandfather passed, Parajuly returned to Takdah, where a tour guide offered him the sights of 'the best World War One tourism'; he leaves the similarity to his grandfather's ideas unstated, alongside the fact that his grandfather may have had little specific knowledge of the past but had an adept intuition about the future.

In further reflection of the difficulties some authors had in gaining stories from their own bloodline, Chibundu Onuzo from Nigeria recalls speaking to a long-term family friend about his grandfather's experiences in the war. This demonstrates that while the war had a vastly broad impact, it has not left everyone with family stories to share. This is in contrast with predominantly held ideas about the war affecting everyone, a notion which undeniably gains more traction in the UK and Europe as opposed to further abroad. Onuzo's friend, however, is clearly well versed in the activity of public storytelling — in a partial breaking of the fourth wall, upon asking the friend what the veterans said when they came back, he says 'Nothing, lies. Don't want to tell the BBC lies'. His grandfather took the King's shilling while

half-drunk, and when he got home, he realised he was frightened of being killed. The man is sent off to war, and soon after is left to cover the retreat of his squad with a machine gun. He places his head on the gun and prays to Ogun. He is captured by German forces and taken in to the forest, all the while chanting Ogun's name. The other men tell him they also worship Ogun and free him. He was placed in the kitchens for the rest of the war for his bravery – on returning home, he discovered his wife carried out the sacrifice every day. The connection between religion and the war as understood in Britain is of a primarily Christian nature, so this exposure of other religions broadens the concept of a global war. Thus, the connection between the two areas, albeit with the lack of sacrifice, can be seen as an enduring aspect in some regard from the war right up to the Centenary.

Some people have divisive family histories, even where their ancestors shared the same nationality. The Irish author Rob Doyle notes a rift in his family's experience with the war: his great-grandfather, Patrick O'Sullivan, went to fight alongside British forces, whereas Patrick's son-in-law (Rob's grandfather), Michael Doyle, stayed in Dublin to sabotage British rule while their attention was diverted. Doyle notes the limited source material for his recollections: 'All I have to go on is family anecdote and a few faded photographs'. His grandfather was a messenger boy during the war who agreed to smuggle documents out of Dublin Castle for the Irish Volunteers, though Rob does not know if any of them were of any use. His great-grandfather, in contrast, was a fitness instructor for the Royal Navy. When he returned, he feared being assassinated by nationalists for aiding the British during the war. O'Sullivan notes that for all of his exploration of these stories, he can't feel he knows much about either man, indicating the limited connection which can be forged through second-hand accounts. But he acquiesces that it does 'afford me a certain gratification to know that I have this connection to the war, that outbreak of unparalleled barbarism which split its century in

two', indicating that the important aspect is having a connection rather than having an emotional attachment to it. He adds that he struggles to see himself playing the dangerous role of his grandfather, but reflects that during war, in 'the crucible of history […] we would rise up, take some kind of a stand, act in a manner we would be glad to know would be remembered a hundred years later, on the anniversary of our vanished war'. This observation of the tendency of adversity to bring about extraordinary actions in ordinary people is a poignant conclusion. It is also highly reflective of the contentious nature of Irish cultural memory of the war and its own history, which has been reflected in disagreements about commemorative practices in communities and across the Irish border, with the anniversary of the Easter Rising in 2016 presenting itself as something of a political tinderbox.[210]

The documents and belongings that our ancestors leave behind can often serve as powerful, personal springboards for sharing stories. Indeed, a physical connection to the past was adopted throughout much centenary programming on the BBC, in varying ways to previous representations. Ned Beauman, an English author, finishes the episode by speaking about a telegram which was received by his grandfather, Eric Bentley Beauman, which his parents still have, appointing him as a probationary flight sublieutenant. Upon presenting himself for duty, despite informing the senior officer that he did not know how to fly a Caudron biplane or where Hendon was, he was still instructed to fly a Caudron biplane to Hendon. He was then ordered to defend London from air attack on his own without any observers or armaments. He later noted that fortunately no attacks arrived while he was responsible for defending the city – the first Zeppelin raid on London would not occur for another five months (in January 1915). Beauman reveals that he never heard this story directly from his

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[210] For an expansion on this, see Heather Jones, 'Commemorating the Rising: History, Democracy and Violence in Ireland', *Juncture*, 22.4 (2016), pp. 257–263.

grandfather, as he was too young when he died, and as such, 'in the past I've told various garbled and half-remembered versions of this story'. This is also indicative of the additional precarities of oral history – where stories are retold through the generations, they become subject to additions, omissions and embellishments.

Beauman then reflects on how the tone of stories told is so heavily dependent on whether or not the individual survived, and that previous and subsequent events can have a very different feel when the alternative is considered – we often tell stories which correspond to our mood and personal approach to war. He sums this up by stating that 'the apparent coherence of a war story – the inevitability, the moral shading – are all just packaging that we impose in retrospect'.[211] This final section encapsulates the broader issues from earlier accounts – stories are important, but the impact of retelling and retrospect should not go unheeded. In a further move to amplify these personal connections to the war, at the end of the programme the presenter notes that where possible, the authors sent photos of their respective relatives which are available for viewing on the BBC World Service website. This also thus highlights the ongoing interplay between television, radio, and the Internet during the Centenary. It also connects to online commemorative initiatives revolving around family history, which will be explored in later chapters. Moreover, it is a crucial separation from the previous longstanding reliance on veteran testimony and the rehearsed narratives that they are innately imbued with – it is people talking about a past which they have not experienced or written about, and thus is a glimpse into the sort of more casual, personal sharing of stories encouraged during the Centenary.

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[211] *I Don't Remember the War*.

Family accounts more commonly allowed an interpersonal injection to programmes, rather than being their core focus. In *Britain's Great War* (BBC One, 2014), Jeremy Paxman interviewed a number of descendants for a range of topics. The first of these was Lord Julian Kitchener-Fellowes, who is something of an anomaly in this regard as he is not actually a direct descendant of Lord Kitchener – his wife is Lord Kitchener's great-great-niece. Lord Kitchener-Fellowes reflects on the fact that Lord Kitchener was 'the only man who could hope to carry the public with him', before opining more broadly on his character and the nature of the war.[212] It is not explained why Lord Kitchener-Fellowes is interviewed instead of his wife. It may be indicative in a tendency, as outlined by Lucy Noakes, of men who have studied military history to hold 'a sense of expertise and a concurrent belief that their views bore more weight than those without such knowledge […] often absent from the replies of those who drew primarily on family histories'.[213] As will be discussed further later, giving the experiences of women during the First World War airtime, and indeed allowing women to speak about them, was one of the most noteworthy emergences in representations of the conflict during the Centenary, serving as a notable shift from the 1960s focus on men dying needlessly in the trenches.

In the second episode of the series, Paxman speaks to Viscount Tenby, Lloyd George's grandson, about his grandfather's ideas about the war. Viscount Tenby notes his father and uncle also served in the army and gave Lloyd George 'first-hand information about what things were like in the war'.[214] This is dually a demonstration of family stories being told across the generations and during the war itself. Yet sometimes no relatives to the individuals concerned

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[212] 'War Comes to Britain', *Britain's Great War* (BBC One, 29 January 2014).
[213] Noakes, 'My Husband is Interested in War Generally', p. 618.
[214] 'The War Machine', *Britain's Great War* (BBC One, 3 February 2014).

can be found, and so people with a shared experience, and thus an assumed sympathetic connection, can be interviewed instead. This applies to the use of military personnel which will be explored later, but in this series Paxman utilises such a connection when he talks to trade unionists about the strikes during the war. The unionists support their predecessors' right to strike; Paxman's disagreement with them is obvious, and is bluntly demonstrated when he asks them, 'You were difficult buggers, weren't you?', to which they agree. This is a protraction back towards the common primacy of men heroically sacrificing themself in the war as the main storyline, with regressive figures who pushed against it being shunned.

The familial connection returns later in the episode during a discussion about the treatment of conscientious objectors during the war. Paxman interviews Marjorie Gaudie, daughter-in-law of Norman Gaudie. Norman was a member of a group of conscientious objectors held at the castle in Richmond, and the interview is conducted in the cell he was held in. Marjorie notes that Norman objected to killing on religious grounds, even if that meant his country could be invaded. Again, Paxman adopts a provocative tone towards the notion of conscientious objection, which is made evidently clear when he later notes that 'the extreme conscientious objectors have always struck me as cranks'.[215] One media review of the episode revealed the backlash against this description from religious and pacifist groups, who instead highlighted the courage of men determined to stand up for their principles and beliefs.[216] Paxman is renowned for his aggressively interrogative approach to interviews, but evidently the public would have liked to see this issue approached with a little more tact, which is reflective of the broader sensitivity expressed towards the Great War in general. It is

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[215] Ibid.

[216] Nicola Methven, 'Jeremy Paxman Blasted for Calling World War One Conscientious Objectors 'Cranks', *Daily Mirror*, 4 February 2014, https://www.mirror.co.uk/tv/tv-news/jeremy-paxman-blasted-calling-world-3112291 [Accessed 22 March 2022].

also evident of a growing acceptance of those who transgressed against the norm being welcomed into commemoration, a trend which can arguably find its roots with the unveiling of the Shot At Dawn Memorial in 2001 at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire, and a campaign group of the same name which saw success in 2006 when soldiers executed during the war were finally posthumously pardoned.

For the BBC's commemorations of the anniversary of the Battle of the Somme in 2016, in addition to historians the panel also featured Baroness Shirley Williams, former cabinet minister and the daughter of Vera Brittain, who was presumably invited to offer reflections on the experiences of her parents and her resulting understanding of the conflict. Rather than focussing solely on her mother, Baroness Williams initially reflected on the fact her uncle, Edward Brittain, won a Victoria Cross on the first day of the Somme offensive. Of course, the loss of Vera's brother had an undeniable influence on her writing of *Testament of Youth* (1933). The impact of loss has also evidently shaped Baroness Williams's understanding of the war as well, as she notes 'a whole generation of young men wiped out'.[217] While the idea of a 'lost generation' has been disproven, it is broadly understood to be connected to the experience of loss shared by numerous people during the conflict, thus Baroness Williams's comment is understandable. It is also evidence of the lasting power of long-held ideas. The family connection continued during the remembrance ceremony for the first day of the Somme, descendants of soldiers from the war read their diary entries and share their reflections on the effect of having these records and being able to hold them.[218] This also highlights the

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[217] 'The Vigil', *The Centenary of the Battle of the Somme* (BBC Two, 30 June 2016).
[218] 'Thiepval', *The Centenary of the Battle of the Somme* (BBC One, 1 July 2016).

importance of the possession of artefacts from the conflict, which will be explored in more detail later in this chapter.

While familial connections hold a personal, emotive power, the experiential connection held by serving military personnel offers an alternative 'thread' to the past. No one alive today fought during the Great War, but soldiers who have fought in more recent conflicts can be deemed to have a relative understanding of the experiences of their military predecessors. This was reflected in the Centenary by their widespread involvement in commemoration ceremonies. During commemorations for the anniversary of the Somme offensive, military personnel took part in vigils in the Somme Museum, County Down; the Scottish National War Memorial, Edinburgh; the National Memorial Arboretum, Staffordshire; Llandaff Cathedral, Cardiff, and Westminster Abbey, London. At the Abbey, Dan Snow spoke to Staff Sergeant Delaney from the Royal Logistics Corps, a member of the vigil party, who was shown the tunnels under the battlefield by the La Boiselle Study Group.[219] This demonstrates an intent to show the soldiers of the present the experiences of soldiers of the past, so that they might learn how their lives compared and contrasted. It is also arguably a continuation of the idea that serving military men are the best equipped to discuss warfare.

Indeed, the following morning Dan Snow spoke to Rifleman Harvey Gibbs, who acknowledged the importance of trying to understand what the soldiers of the Great War experienced and reflected on the fact that some of the men would have been eager to see battle, a sentiment which he shared.[220] The stories from families and the fraternity of soldiers combined during the Remembrance Day commemorations in 2018 when, for the first time

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[219] 'The Vigil'.
[220] 'Zero Hour', *The Centenary of the Battle of the Somme* (BBC One, 1 July 2016).

since 1919, civilians joined military personnel in the march past the Cenotaph. Of course, while serving military personnel can share a reasonable experiential understanding with the soldiers of the Great War, this is often unaccompanied by any extensive research into the details of the soldiers' lives or broader aspects concerning the conflict. For these areas, professionals must be sought to maintain the 'thread'.

A Voice of Authority

The prime alternative to descendants of contemporaries and current armed forces personnel as a connection to the past is to engage with experts on the topic at hand – in this case, historians. Historians have been involved with broadcasts about the Great War throughout much of the BBC's existence, replacing the reliance on officers evident in the 1920s, and they continued to be a frequent source of expertise during the Centenary, both on-screen and behind the scenes. As noted earlier when considering the nature of authenticity, historians can be viewed as masters of their craft, and thus lend authenticity to programmes. They also offer a form of prosthetic memory, as defined by Alison Landsberg, whereby 'the person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live'.[221] This section will begin by addressing the interplay between historians and Public History, specifically in regard to televisual representations of the war. It will then consider their involvement in a variety of different programme formats, including presenting and appearing in documentaries, participating on panels for commemorative events, and several programmes centred around the historians

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[221] Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 2.

themselves. It will also consider the role of historian as consultant. It will ultimately demonstrate that the role of the historian in centenary television was to bring expertise, authority, and informed debate to explorations of the war.

It is vital to reaffirm here the difference between Public History and the use of historians by the media. Public History, as outlined in the introduction, is a general form of history primarily intended for consumption by the public, rather than by an academic audience. What is considered here is what John Tosh refers to as 'historians in public', which refers to 'the prevalent pattern of historians who work in academia but who intervene in public when they have something material to contribute to public understanding'.[222] They can therefore be a part of Public History, but their involvement is generally for the purpose of providing more specialist knowledge on the relevant subject. Moreover, historians often share a fractious relationship with Public History, largely resulting from disagreements over the importance of accuracy, particularly in regard to fictional representations of the conflict. The growth of social media in the digital age has also allowed historians to engage more directly with the public about history, but this area will be considered in the later chapters of this thesis.

As considered earlier in this chapter, one of the key concerns about representations of the Great War is authenticity, and this becomes a particularly strong area of contention when appraising televisual representations of the war. As highlighted by Jessica Meyer, 'questions of authority and authenticity remain as important to our understanding of contemporary televisual dramatisations of the war as they do to interpretations of historic texts'.[223]

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[222] Tosh, 'Public History', p. 211.
[223] Meyer, 'Matthew's Legs and Thomas's Hand', p. 80.

Undoubtedly, authority and authenticity can be viewed as burdens on creative licence and imaginative storytelling. Broadcasters find themselves trapped between authentically representing the past and presenting an engaging programme. Furthermore, some elements of the past can prove at best unpleasant and at worst offensive to the modern viewer. Here the broadcaster faces an additional dilemma 'of telling it like it was – or showing it as we'd like it to be'.[224] Representations of the Great War are equally susceptible to claims of sanitisation or glorification in this regard. These concerns are more broadly applicable to drama rather than documentary, as the latter tends to lend itself more readily to authoritative accounts of the past.

The issue over authentic interpretation of the conflict also converges with the desire in the Centenary to educate the public about broader aspects of the war. This aspiration can arguably be seen as the basis for the widespread use of historians on panels for documentaries, debates, and commemorative events. Indeed, the BBC outlined this aspect during its launch invent, during which Adrian Van Klaveren, then the World War One Centenary Controller, stated the corporation's intention to utilise 'today's most eminent historians'.[225] While the BBC's centenary schedule did feature a range of historians overall, key events tended to feature a select cache of historians, a behaviour which has previously been identified as habitually symptomatic of BBC programming.[226] However, this was mitigated somewhat by the inclusion of 'guest' historians from outside the usual cadre.

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[224] Mark Lawson, 'Not in this Day and Age: When will TV Stop Horrendously Airbrushing History?', *The Guardian*, 5 May 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2017/may/05/downton-abbey-jamestown-call-the-midwife-when-will-period-dramas-stop-horrendously-airbrushing-history [Accessed 30 August 2022].

[225] Adrian Van Klaveren, World War One Comms Launch, 16 October 2013.

[226] Charlotte Higgins, *This New Noise: The Extraordinary Birth and Troubled Life of the BBC* (London: Guardian Faber, 2015), p. 59.

Two programmes centred around prominent Great War historians aired early in the BBC's centenary programming schedule. They were broadcast in close proximity to each other, and with the two historians holding differing views on the meaning and legacy of the conflict, they served as a form of indirect debate for the viewing audience to consider alternating views, although one of the programmes actively featured discussion between historians. The first programme to air was *The Necessary War* (BBC Two, 2014), presented by Sir Max Hastings. Stylistically, the programme followed a familiar documentary format, with Hastings alternating between pieces-to-camera and discussions with other familiar Great War historians. The argument behind the programme, as outlined in the synopsis, is to acknowledge that while the Great War was tragic, it was not futile and was ultimately unavoidable. The historians he speaks to complement his views rather than challenge them. They highlight events before the outbreak of war which indicated its inevitability: the expansionist desires of the Kaiser and his generals; the 'blank cheque' to Vienna; Germany's decision not to demobilise once the Russians had mobilised their forces; Edward Grey's promises to the French; Germany's refusal to respect Belgian neutrality. The discussions highlight the complexity of the volatile situation in Europe beyond the more commonly highlighted element of the assassination of Franz Ferdinand. This transnational consideration of the outbreak of war is similar to that of *1914: Moving Towards War*, yet is a useful callback to previous attempts to broaden awareness of the situations of the various countries in early 1914.

In anticipation of the occasionally espoused notion that Britain should have remained neutral, the military historian Sir Michael Howard hypothesises that if Britain had stayed out of the conflict, there would have been an Anglo-German war in a matter of years, as the Germans, having succeeded in Europe, would have then turned against British naval

supremacy and its status as a world power. In terms of the war's conduct, Hastings admits that the British generals were generally unimaginative, but that they faced problems during the conflict which even the most inspiring generals would have struggled with. This is a direct challenge to the 'lions led by donkeys' narrative predominant in the 1960s. In terms of the war's legacy, Hastings believes the Treaty of Versailles is unfairly blamed for causing the Second World War, highlighting new issues which emerged during the interwar period. This observation reflects the wider undertones of the programme – easy simplifications have become commonplace over an attempt to present the more complex realities behind the war and its legacy.

Similarly, in acknowledgement of a prominent canon of war poets promoting a futile narrative of the war, Hastings notes that they never said how Britain should remove itself from the war, or what the consequences of this would be. This is a further disputation of ideas from the 1960s and beyond of the centrality of war poets in the 'mud, blood and poetry' narrative. In closing, British military historian Sir Hew Strachan notes that popular opinion around the acceptability of the Second World War largely rests on stopping the Holocaust, which was not the reason for Britain entering the conflict.[227] These observations are indicative of the impact of simplification, mediatisation and retrospect on the cultural memory of the Great War, and the programme itself appears to have been intended to challenge these ideas by using discussion between historians, rather than attacking the audience for their beliefs. There is a tendency among some in the historical profession to lament and lambast the lack of public understanding about the war – this attempt to gently challenge misconceptions is an approach more palatable to the qualities of Public History.

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[227] *The Necessary War* (BBC Two, 25 February 2014).

Broadcast three days later and arguing the alternative view of the futility of war was *The Pity of War* (BBC Two, 2014) presented by the British-American historian Niall Ferguson. In addition to its core argument, the style of this programme was also different to the previous one – it was shot in a studio with a public audience and a panel of historians, with Ferguson presenting his views before taking questions and comments from the panel and audience members. It felt more reminiscent of political debate programmes than of the familiar history documentary format, and also embodied the convergence of popular history publishing and popular history television. The programme title would have prepared those familiar with Ferguson's eponymous book for the arguments within.[228] Those unfamiliar with it were given a sense of the tone from the introduction's use of red barbed wire on a black background and the words 'The Pity of War: Why the Great War was a Great Mistake'.

Ferguson laments the overwhelming presence of violence in history, discredits arguments about the impact of German militarism, presents statistics showing greater losses for Britain and France month by month compared to Germany, ruined notions of an increasingly civilised world, and ends with the bizarre joke that 'Angela Merkel is a lot less scary than Kaiser Wilhelm II', which was met with a silent response of blank stares. The historians on the panel immediately criticise Ferguson's claims: Strachan challenges his description of the conflict as a 'limited continental war'; David Stevenson identifies Ferguson's opening point as a political one, not a moral or ethical one, and believes Ferguson's vision of a German victory is too benign. Evidently having failed to convince the panel of his views, Ferguson takes questions and comments from the audience, who have evidently been more swayed by the panel than by Ferguson. Indeed, one audience member criticises Ferguson's

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[228] Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London: Penguin Press, 1998).

'broad brush' approach to the topic in addition to the inaccuracies highlighted by the panel. Throughout, Ferguson either fails to respond to the counterarguments presented by the audience, or noticeably flounders while attempting to do so.

Members of the panel respond to audience questions with a greater sense of balance. They also offered a professional note to one question about where Britain would be if the war never happened, by highlighting that answering such a question is pure speculation, an element which Ferguson is criticised for throughout the programme. Having failed to find an audience member who agrees with him, Ferguson ends with the reflection that 'you can't learn from history through pious commemoration'.[229] This is an odd choice of finishing point, as it comes at the start of five years of commemoration centred around the monumentalised line, 'lest we forget'. Of course, Ferguson's point is not without validity – most historians would agree that little is actually learned on Remembrance Day. But it is arguably this awareness of the conflict which leads people to learn about the war, and it is thus unfair to discredit it in such a manner. Instead, it seems more prudent to recognise the importance of education and commemoration together, which was the general impetus of the Centenary, as highlighted in David Cameron's speech on plans for the anniversary where he argued that 'remembrance must be the hallmark of our commemorations […] and new support for educational initiatives'.[230] Despite the programme largely founding itself it the futility narrative of the 1960s, it does break the mould of familiar programming habits by engaging the general public in conversation with historians on television.

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[229] *The Pity of War* (BBC Two, 28 February 2014).
[230] 'Speech at Imperial War Museum'.

While Hastings's programme did not feature a form of public interaction or response, it appeared to be of more interest to the public – it achieved an audience of 1.74 million viewers, making it the ninth most watched programme on BBC Two in the week it was broadcast. In contrast, *The Pity of War* does not appear in the top 30 programmes for the week, indicating an audience of less than 1.1 million viewers.[231] While it is impossible to know the reasons behind this disparity without surveying the audience from the time, several contributing factors can be theorised on. Firstly, the familiar documentary format of *The Necessary War* was possibly more appealing to the average viewer than the debate format of *The Pity of War*. Secondly, *The Necessary War* aired at 9pm on a Tuesday, whereas *The Pity of War* aired at 9pm on a Friday where it had to compete for audience numbers with more popular primetime television and likely a smaller potential audience being at home. It is also possible that, having watched the previous programme, some chose to simply not tune in for another programme on a similar topic in the same week which, if true, would highlight concerns over the possibility of 'centenary fatigue'.

It is also of note that, a month before the programmes aired, the then Education Secretary Michael Gove had appeared in the press lamenting the peddling of 'myths' about the war and habit of 'depicting the war as a "misbegotten shambles"' by 'left-wing academics'.[232] Yet, here it was Ferguson, a right-wing historian, promoting exactly the sort of narratives about the war which had been criticised by Gove. This discord can, however, be reasonably explained by the fact that both Gove and Ferguson were arguably engaging in political point-scoring – Gove was performing the usual role of combatting alternative political

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[231] Figures from the British Audience Research Board, 'Weekly top 30 programmes on TV sets (July 1998 – Sept 2018)', https://www.barb.co.uk/viewing-data/weekly-top-30/ [Accessed 4 April 2022].
[232] Shipman, 'Michael Gove Blasts "Blackadder Myths"'.

viewpoints, and Ferguson's main criticisms in *The Pity of War* were mainly lodged against the Liberal government of the time, rather than the more commonplace remonstrations about the futility and losses of the war.

Beyond exculpations and condemnations on the merits and mishaps of the conflict were broader considerations of the war and its history. *Long Shadow* (BBC Two, 2014), presented by Cambridge historian David Reynolds, considered the aftermath of the war and its lasting impact across Europe. Ostensibly a televised form of Reynolds's book by the same title, across three episodes he explored remembrance of the war, the political divisions it wrought in the interwar period, and the rise of nationalism across Europe.[233] In the first episode of the trilogy, parenthetically the most directly relevant to this thesis, Reynolds details how the 'mud, blood and poetry' attitude towards the conflict developed over time. The episode opens at the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme, with Reynolds noting that 'the British entombed the unknown horrors in grand monuments graced with fine words like "honour" and "sacrifice." Memory was cloaked in remembrance'. This is reminiscent of activity around the Great War outside of the Centenary, where the event holds little presence in media broadcasts beyond Remembrance Day. He traces this process of memorialisation back to the construction of the Cenotaph in Whitehall, noting how the initially temporary monument was made permanent by public demand. He views military cemeteries as 'the survivors saying on a grand scale, sorry'. This is a more contemporary consideration of the sites, in contrast to the sheer emotive power endowed by the scale of some cemeteries today.

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[233] David Reynolds, *The Long Shadow: The Great War and the Twentieth Century* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2013).

Reynolds then turns to remembrance on a more general scale, particularly the significance of anniversaries, observing how 'the media then and now love anniversaries as a source of cheap and easy stories. But these often generate deeper discussion about the meaning of the past'. This seems a much more nuanced interpretation of the positive outcomes of remembrance to Ferguson's criticism of it. Reynolds notes that the anniversary of the end of the conflict in 1928 had this effect, with the play *Journey's End* generating a positive response and discussions about the war. He describes how it wasn't until the Second World War that the image of the earlier conflict changed, and how in 1948 when the British Government changed the nomenclature from 'Great War' to 'First World War' it reminded the public that the earlier war had failed to prevent a similar one from happening again. He outlines the further tone shifts in the 1960s, highlighting the ability of key works released at anniversaries to shift public understanding of the war, while reminding the viewer that anniversary anthologies are carefully edited collections to present a certain representation of war. This is a lucid acknowledgement of the power of anniversaries in shaping cultural memory, bringing to mind considerations of what shifts the Centenary might cause. He concludes by stating that our memory of the war has been moulded by what has happened since it ended, and that 'it's time to let go of the debt', before calling for a better understanding of the war's history.[234]

The remaining two episodes feel considerably heavier in tone, as Reynolds works to convey the political shifts in Europe in the interwar period, with the final episode specifically looking at the rise of nationalism. There appears to have been an attempt to lighten the weighty tone of the content matter, with a rather unusual re-enactment of a conversation

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[234] 'Remembering and Understanding', *Long Shadow* (BBC Two, 24 September 2014).

between Winston Churchill and Stanley Baldwin at a men's urinal.[235] It stands out stylistically in a series which has otherwise shied away from recreated footage. The final episode traces the rise of nationalism in Europe from the Easter Rising to the Scottish Referendum in 2014, ending with the now-dated statement, ''we were reluctant Europeans in 1914, and we remain so today'.[236] Perhaps symptomatically due to their heavier tone (and reflective of the use of a recreated scene in the second episode), these two episodes failed to reach the same audience as the first. While the first episode achieved an audience of 1.67 million viewers, the other two failed to rank in the top 30 programmes for the channel in their given weeks, indicating audiences below 1.12 million and 1.23 million respectively.[237]

In a similar vein of documentary-book tie-ins was *Britain's Great War*, presented by Jeremy Paxman, with Adrian Gregory serving as historical advisor. Although Paxman is more renowned for his work as a journalist and broadcaster, the series is based on his popular history book, and as a presenter he lends the documentary a certain gravitas associated with his fame. The four-part series charts a chronological view of the war beginning just before its outbreak in 1914. The introduction reel features a montage of sepia photos and straining strings similar to other BBC programmes during the Centenary. The archive footage used is familiar to Great War documentaries, as it is generally a selection of films canonised by *The Great War*. Paxman argues against the notion that the public was wholly enthusiastic about the war, noting there was also anxiety, particularly surrounding invasion fears at Dover. He considers the recruitment campaign, in which (as noted earlier) he interviews a descendant of Lord Kitchener. The episode continues through a range of topics based largely around the

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[235] 'Ballots and Bullets', *Long Shadow* (BBC Two, 1 October 2014).
[236] 'Us and Them', *Long Shadow* (BBC Two, 8 October 2014).
[237] British Audience Research Board, 'Weekly top 30 programmes on TV sets (July 1998 – Sept 2018)'.

Home Front including Pals Battalions, myths, atrocity stories, zeppelin raids and the shelling of Hartlepool, Whitby, and Scarborough. He concludes by noting that an awareness of the longevity of the war developed in 1915.[238]

It is evident that one of the most significant involvements of historians on television during the Centenary was the opportunity afforded to them to directly challenge previous ideas, such as 1960s narratives, and to offer the novel experience of the public being able to question them about the ideas about the war which they held. This is a prime example of television rising up to the call from historians to broaden awareness about the war, and to make some shifts in the entrenched foundations of old ideas.

Artefacts, Location and Statistics

Where narratives cannot be conveyed with any relevant human connection, stories are often told through objects and places. While locations often change over time, artefacts maintain a link to the past for as long as they can be preserved. As outlined at the beginning of this chapter, artefacts are the final bastions of authenticity in a post-witness era. While some more obscure items can require interpretation, other items such as diaries provide a more straightforward description of events and a usefully direct basis for a narrative. Crucially, objects and places occupy a central role in both public and private engagement with the past. The presentation of an item can provide a powerful connection for the viewer, as artefacts are the last tangible 'thread' to the past and can allow for visual understandings of how things were at the time. They have become a particularly useful element in the broadcast era, where

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[238] 'War Comes to Britain'.

their use can provide a visual aid in imagining a distant past, while simultaneously introducing the viewer to objects normally found in a museum. As David Glassberg has observed, 'while professional historians talk about having an interpretation of history, the public talks about having a sense of history, a perspective on the past at the core of who they are and the places they care about'.[239] In this regard, despite their status as extant sources, they also have the potential to provide an emotional connection with the past. Indeed, such objects have previously been identified as playing a part in the 'emotional transactions' we engage in with history.[240] If we consider the concept of authenticity as discussed earlier, possessing artifacts can provide someone with a genuine, authentic connection to the past.

Yet, just as authenticity can exclude some stories while emphasising others, so too can the objects people choose to keep. Outside of archives and other institutions, 'we are all engaged in the process of making and remaking history, and that the stories and histories we choose to remember via our personal possessions are always selective. In a constant and on-going process, some memories are lost while others are prioritized'.[241] Having previously considered the notion of a 'thread' which connects us to history, the physicality of diaries, medals, and various wartime ephemera, alongside landscapes which occasionally still bear the scars of the past, can be viewed not only as starting points, but physical reinforcements of an otherwise ethereal understanding of history. An otherwise broadly imaginary past is reified through these things, a notion which justifies the ubiquity of film footage and photographs in documentaries about the war. These media remove the need for the viewer to imagine and

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[239] Glassberg, 'A Sense of History', p. 70.
[240] Stephanie Downes, Sally Holloway, and Sarah Randles, 'A Feeling for Things, Past and Present', in *Feeling Things: Objects and Emotions Through History*, ed. by Stephanie Downes, Sally Holloway, and Sarah Randles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 9.
[241] Anna Woodham et al., 'We Are What We Keep: The "Family Archive", Identity and Public/Private Heritage', *Heritage & Society*, 10.3 (2017), p. 212.

instead show the realities of the narrative being portrayed. 'As the quintessential modern medium, photography has been endowed with particular kinds of cultural meanings – as a trace of the real, evidence of the past'.[242] Of course, the repeated use of a small group of photographs and film footage can result in a particular established visual memory of the war, such as the famous shot of a soldier gazing at the camera in the opening of *The Great War*, which quickly became iconic in popular ideas about the war.[243] This section will explore how objects and locations were utilised in centenary programming to not only help the viewer connect with the past, but also to utilise the emotive power of the battlefields of the Western Front. In some ways, this is an unavoidable return to exalting wartime experience over less told narratives through the collection of military ephemera, but it does bring the public to the fore again in previously unseen ways when offered the opportunity to present family heirlooms, which occasionally tell unfamiliar stories.

While archival documents may be epitomised as the ultimate primary sources, many artefacts of the Great War exist in people's homes, providing them with a personal connection to the past and, as covered earlier in this chapter, often serving as a useful starting point for exploring narratives about the conflict. These more personal mementos were explored in a special edition of *Antiques Roadshow* on BBC One, in which members of the public brought various items in their possession to the Somme battlefields. The scope of the objects presented was vast, ranging from trench art from renowned contemporary artists to medals and uniform parts to intensely personal items such as a baby's shoe carried by a soldier.[244] The show evidently struck a chord with the public, as 30,000 people applied to take part. Indeed,

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[242] Sturken, 'Memory, Consumerism and Media', p. 75.
[243] Hanna, *The Great War on the Small Screen,* p. 39.
[244] 'World War 1 Special', *Antiques Roadshow* (BBC One, 2 November 2014).

the popularity of the idea was reflected in the fact the BBC aired an additional special episode during the centenary Armistice commemorations, this time held in the Étaples military cemetery. Amongst a further diverse range of artefacts was one particularly suited to the occasion – a notice of the armistice itself.[245] Programmes such as this demonstrate that while historians may extol the importance of the archive in our methodological practices, innumerable further sources exist in homes across the country, and indeed the wider world, and often only find their place in public understanding of the war through public history. This also demonstrates the importance of appraising television programmes as legitimate sources of history, offering a broader scope of sources than might otherwise be available.

Many archival sources have moved beyond the archive to become an active part of cultural memory, as noted earlier with the famous still from *The Great War*, and this is made further evident through the repeated use of a certain corpus of film footage, such as the explosion of the mine at Hawthorn Ridge. Yet perhaps this analogy is unnecessary; archives themselves can undeniably be seen as vast reservoirs of historical memory. More specifically though, as observed by Jens Brockmeier, 'the archive is the metaphor most used (besides the wax tablet) to describe memory from Antiquity to modern experimental and neurocognitive psychology'.[246] It is thereby both a source of cultural memory, and a resource pool for the transmission of cultural memory. As a resource, it is regarded as a major bastion of history in practice – primary source research is the heart of academic history. Archival sources thus maintain a reverential air, and their use is occasionally highlighted as such in documentaries. Indeed, in *The Somme 1916 – From Both Sides of the Wire* (BBC Two, 2016), in addition to archival sources being shown on camera when the presenter refers to them, they feature in

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[245] 'World War 1 Special', *Antiques Roadshow* (BBC One, 4 November 2018).
[246] Brockmeier, 'After the Archive', p. 7.

the programme introduction – a large stack of folders are dropped on a desk, as decades of accumulated dust plume out of them. This visual presentation reinforces not only the weight of recorded material available, but also their status as original, historical documents. In the episodes themselves, presenter Peter Barton occasionally appears in a room with the documents before him, his hands adorned with white gloves to convey their reverence and fragility to the viewer, and potentially also inadvertently frustrate historians who view this as bad document handling practice. Nevertheless, this behaviour centralises the importance of archival sources in history documentaries, as a direct connection to the past and source of authentic knowledge.

The use of archival sources is often more subtle, as they are generally used to inform a narrative rather than to play a starring role in it. Diaries are one such example; they offer a personal account of history and can provide a readily formed narrative for a programme to be built around. This was the approach utilised in *Great War Diaries* (BBC Two, 2014) which, as the programme synopses note, is 'based on letters and journals, many of which have never been published before', indicating elements of dramatisation, while also highlighting the point of telling new stories during the Centenary. Moreover, as the introduction to the second episode notes, these are stories of war 'on an intensely personal, human level'.[247] These personalised stories can present more foundational ideas for the public about what life during the war was like, rather than the more generalised and unspecific notions reinforced by the annual remembrance services.

The programmes themselves feature a mixture of archive footage and acting, used to portray the stories of ten individuals across Europe in a range of roles throughout the duration

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[247] 'Episode 2', *Great War Diaries* (BBC Two, 9 August 2014).

of the war. The stories which form the core basis of the programme are complemented by diary entries from other soldiers throughout the globe. The international nature of the content is reflected in the production of the series itself, which states it used '25 broadcasters from around the world', making it 'television's global event for the centenary of World War I'. In addition to being personal accounts, the diaries chosen for the series also primarily offer views of wartime life beyond the trenches – while a few of the diaries belong to soldiers, the accounts are mainly focussed on people at home. The validity and authenticity of these stories is emphasized in the synopsis for the final episode, which notes that 'this documentary tells the story of 1914–18 solely through the eyes of those who lived through it'.[248] This point re-establishes eye-witness testimony as the most authentic way of understanding the war, suggesting that the optimum method for maintaining an authentic narrative of the conflict is to continue exploring diaries and letters to uncover new stories. While there are an inestimable number of diaries and letters related to the war, the stories they offer will undeniably soon fail to provide much in the ways of novel insights of life during the conflict. Plumbing the depths of wartime experience to uncover untold stories was a broad theme of the Centenary and continued across BBC programming with programmes such as *I Was There: The Great War Interviews*, covered earlier in this chapter. That said, the broadened geographical scope is a welcome shift from the predominance of British narratives in televisual representations of the war before the Centenary.

A powerful use of diaries for commemorative purposes is that they often provide dated, daily accounts of life in the past, allowing an audience to discover what was happening 100 years ago today. This forms part of a common trend in websites and apps to present On

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[248] 'Episode 3', *Great War Diaries* (BBC Two, 16 August 2014).

This Day facts about events from any number of years in the past. During the Centenary, the BBC adopted this style in the Radio 4 series *1914: Day by Day*. Despite the title, the series did not cover the whole year, but rather the period from 27 June to 8 August, encompassing the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand up to the first few days following Britain's entry to the war. The series synopsis notes the use of 'newspaper accounts, diplomatic correspondence and private journals', several of which are recited during the episodes.[249] The series is well suited to the radio format, delivering daily episodes five minutes long which would struggle to find their place in a television schedule. This trend of reporting information was also mirrored online, with Twitter accounts being utilised to feed snapshots of information about each day of the war – this online activity will be explored in more detail later in this thesis. Whereas national events primarily focussed around keystone anniversaries on major dates, such as the first day of the Battle of the Somme, or the Armistice, these micro-commemorations provided a breadcrumb trail through the more nuanced aspects of wartime life.

Providing a snapshot view of this was the core focus of *Home Front*, a radio drama broadcast on BBC Radio 4 from 2014 to 2018. As the title suggests, the series foregrounded the daily lives of people in several counties across England. Whilst the war still played an unavoidable role, it was ultimately a backdrop to the more personal triumphs and tribulations of the people of Folkestone, Tynemouth, Ashburton, and Devon. Ostensibly, this was ultimately *The Archers* set during the Great War, with the formats sharing much in common. Notably, the series also serves as potentially one of the longest lasting legacies of the Centenary, as the BBC has combined all of the episodes into a podcast which will be available

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[249] '1914: Day by Day', *BBC*, www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03th9qk [Accessed 18 July 2022].

'indefinitely'.[250] This relates to broader concerns about the uncertain digital legacy left by the Centenary, which will be explored later in this thesis. The series mentioned major events of the war primarily through the reading of newspaper articles, although the bombings which took place on the south-east coast featured more directly.

The nature of newspapers themselves as the primary source of information during the war is also touched upon – at breakfast with his wife, Councillor Gabriel Graham expresses his frustration about the lack of information in the newspapers, as it makes it hard to enlist men.[251] The series further takes the option to note the restrictions on what was published in newspapers during the war, offering a subtle observation of the reduced scope of the source. This is most evident when D. R. Walker complains about not being allowed to print a story on events at Elizabethville, a Belgian refugee camp, as the editor refuses to have anything in their paper which could be viewed as presenting Belgium or Belgians in a negative light.[252] This highlights the importance of newspapers as a historical source both for the purposes of producing historical television programmes, whilst simultaneously indicating the precarities of its potential for bias and omission.

The use of sources such as diaries extended even further beyond documentaries. While they play a more prominent role in the more factual format, they were also used as a basis for dramatised representations of the war. In *Our World War*, the first episode opens by noting it is based on the accounts of the Royal Fusiliers. This basis in primary source material is an important grounding point for what is an unusually modernised telling of a century-old conflict, the details of which will be explored in the next chapter. This factual foundation is

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[250] 'Podcast', *BBC Radio 4 Home Front*, www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b047qhc2/episodes/downloads [Accessed 25 July 2022].
[251] '27 August 1914', *Home Front* (BBC Radio 4, 27 August 2014).
[252] '29 December 1916', *Home Front* (BBC Radio 4, 29 December 2016).

bookended around the episode, as it also concludes by detailing the eventual fates of the soldiers in the episode, adding in an audio interview clip with Sid Godley recorded in 1954.[253] This founding of fictionalised narratives in primary sources is an important feature of Great War programming, noted for its ability to connect the viewer more personally with the story at hand. As noted by Lilie Chouliaraki, 'reconstructed historical narratives [...] blend fact with intervention in ways that establish particular forms of imaginary identification with the soldiers' narrated pasts'.[254] Moreover, the provision of a continuous narrative fills in the gaps between sources which are wrestled with by historians in archives; where primary sources provide fragmented glimpses of the past, a dramatised retelling can more easily convey a linear presentation of the conflict. As Anton Kaes has expressed, historical representations such as these 'do not show isolated pictures of accidental, contingent events, but rather select, narrativize, and thereby give shape to the random material of history'.[255] Dramatisation, with a foundation in primary sources, thereby serves a significant purpose in moving history beyond the realms of academia into the public history sphere.

Diaries may have formed the bedrock of much centenary programming, but they were often complemented by more visual connections to the past. This can often take the form of archival film footage, but another common feature was shooting on location on the former Western Front, the landscape of which still bears remnants and scars from a century before, as well as memorials and other locations relevant to the programme. In *Britain's Great War*, on location in Trafalgar Square, Jeremy Paxman explained how, following the Armistice, people tore down advertising boards for war bonds and burned them before Nelson's Column – the

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253 'The First Day', *Our World War* (BBC Three, 7 August 2014).
254 Lilie Chouliaraki, 'Authoring the Self: Media, Voice and Testimony in Soldiers' Memoirs', *Media, War & Conflict*, 9.1 (2016), p. 61.
255 Anton Kaes, 'History and Film: Public Memory in the Age of Electronic Dissemination', *History and Memory*, 2.1 (1990), p. 112.

programme showed how the stones still bear the cracks from the fire. The programme also touched on the widespread development of war memorials, with Paxman noting that the bishop of Salisbury reflected on the purpose of memorials as a warning to future generations, 'lest they forget'.[256] In addition to location, some other tangible features of the war remain to visualise televised narratives. In *The Machine Gun & Skye's Band of Brothers*, presenter Neil Oliver explores the development of the Maxim machine gun, and the devastation it wrought on a company of Cameron Highlanders. The programme uses modern techniques to demonstrate the power of an old weapon; the gun is fired through ballistics gel, which shows the path a bullet would take as it travels through the body. This allowed the documentary to powerfully demonstrate how machine gun bullets tumbled and tear through the body.[257]

Leaning in to the trend for statistics to understand the conflict, *The Great War in Numbers* (Yesterday, 2017) put figures at the heart of its programme. Every time a statistic was mentioned, it would be shown on the screen in bold print, which had the unusual side effect of making the series feel like revision material for an examination. The series clearly signposted the intended purpose of these numbers in the opening moments of the first episode, when the narrator described the conflict as 'a war fought by calculating generals for whom no cost is too high'. One could also argue that the series maintains this focus on death when the end of the programme provides a link to a website for finding details about local war memorials.[258] The series returns to centralising statistics over narrative purpose in the second episode, which opens with the claim, 'for the first time in history, everything is recorded in exacting detail'.[259] This claim feels out of touch with recent historiography which

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[256] 'At the Eleventh Hour', *Britain's Great War* (BBC One, 17 February 2014).
[257] *The Machine Gun & Skye's Band of Brothers* (BBC Two Scotland, 24 March 2014).
[258] 'The March to War', *The Great War in Numbers* (Yesterday, 4 October 2017).
[259] 'Weapons of War', *The Great War in Numbers* (Yesterday, 11 October 2017).

has sought to update the statistical understanding of casualties in the Great War, and grappled with the difficulty of determining exact numbers.[260]

Yet, this numerical approach is not without criticism; 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'.[261] Indeed, one could argue that reducing the conflict to a series of numbers detracts from the people involved and their personal stories and experiences. Such approaches may provide a considerable number of details about the war, but they do so with a broad brush, burying nuance and narrative in numerical oblivion. If the intention of the Centenary was to improve public understanding of the Great War, bombarding the public with statistics seems a limited way of achieving this goal. This is another example of centenary programming becoming mired in the habits of the past, by failing to expand understanding beyond that offered by a certain set of sources.

The 'threads' that connect us to the past in the modern age are therefore varied, and invariably they are seen to offer a sense of authenticity to programmes. Veterans have always been the original links and sources of authenticity, but since they have passed, the thread is followed through their descendants, who can continue to share their stories. As generations pass, however, that thread will become increasingly tenuous. Thus, other threads are found through military personnel, who cannot offer accounts of the Great War, but can relate to it through their experiences in modern theatres of war, and thus share a form of kinship with

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[260] Antoine Prost, 'The Dead', in *The Cambridge History of the First World War* vol. III, ed. by Jay Winter et al (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 563–567.

[261] 'End Game - End Spiel', *The Somme 1916: From Both Sides of the Wire* (BBC Two, 1 August 2016).

the original veterans. These are what Fussell referred to as 'true testifiers', in the belief that

only those who serve in war can truly understand it.[262] This thread is experiential rather than

temporal. The last temporal connection to the past is artefacts, and the locations of historic

events. They are the final literal 'thread' available, offering a tangible connection to an

increasingly intangible event. These 'threads' were employed as methods of an authentic

connection with the Great War frequently throughout the Centenary, across a range of

televisual and radio genres. They have not been without criticism, but they have widely been

viewed as the best options to connect a modern public with an ever more distant history.

While these threads have been considered here in their methodological terms, there

has been little engagement with the content they portray. As mentioned earlier, 'authentic'

narratives can occasionally exclude certain groups. The most popular accounts in cultural

memory of the Great War have long focussed on the experience of the average Tommy on the

Western Front. Yet this narrow archetype excludes a broad range of people and places

involved in the conflict. The hallowed interviews as shown in *I Was There*, while providing

valuable insights into the war, are primarily given by white men. The omission of women and

people of colour from the interviews carried out in the past cannot be rectified. Such examples

are thus redolent of previous norms in representations of the war. Yet, as the need to broaden

public understanding of the war was a key goal for the Centenary, alternative ways of sharing

their experiences had to be sought. The next chapter will consider how television and radio

programmes broadcast during the Centenary sought to share the experiences of these

previously excluded or 'forgotten' groups, and in doing so simultaneously attempted to bring

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[262] Susanna Rustin, 'Hello to All That', *The Guardian* (31 July 2004),
https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/jul/31/featuresreviews.guardianreview10 [Accessed 15 October 2024].

the history of the war to a wider audience. These more traditional methods of maintaining a 'thread' to the past form an essential groundwork of understanding, as we move towards the most progressive examples of shifts in cultural representations of the war during the Centenary.

3   Whose World War? Broadening Awareness and the

Audience

Our ambition is a truly national commemoration, worth [sic] of this historic

centenary. I want a commemoration that captures our national spirit, in

every corner of the country, from our schools to our workplaces, to our

town halls and local communities.[263]

David Cameron's speech at the IWM in October 2012 outlined the government's intention to facilitate a centenary which represented the breadth and depth of community across the United Kingdom. This desire was in tandem with an impetus across the media, and to a certain extent the academic community, to share 'forgotten' or 'hidden' histories of the war. These buzzwords appeared in programme and journal article titles throughout the centenary. Just as stereotypes and notions about racial superiority have shaped the past, so too do they shape how we remember it. As highlighted by Maggie Andrews, the Centenary was 'taking place against a backdrop of hotly contested debates about who exactly is entitled to see themselves as part of the nation'.[264] Indeed, as noted in the introduction to this thesis, politics has long held an intertwined and complicated relationship with cultural memory of the Great War. This relationship includes representations of the conflict across various media, including television.

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[263] 'Speech at Imperial War Museum on First World War Centenary Plans'.
[264] Maggie Andrews, 'Entitlement and the Shaping of First World War Commemorative Histories', *Cultural Trends*, 27.2 (2018), p. 63.

Before the Centenary had even begun, Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Education at the time, criticised the futile narratives of war presented in *Blackadder Goes Forth* (BBC One, 1989) and objected to it being shown in schools on the basis that it might instil such left-leaning sentiments in the younger population.[265] This example illustrates a major difficulty of the complicated relationship between political ideology and cultural memory; the drive to present a narrow view of the war belies the variety and nuances of wartime experience. It was not one thing to all people, and using it for the purpose of 'identity politics' risks warping public knowledge of the realities of the conflict.[266] However, politics can also serve to bring to the fore lesser-known narratives. In the troubled political landscape of the Centenary, with the Scottish and Brexit referenda threatening to fracture communal cohesion across the UK, it is perhaps unsurprising that there were notable elements of an attempt to represent the diverse demographics of the populace, and to include all of the nations. This latter motive was arguably intended as a remedy to the previous habit of 'Anglomyopia', whereby Britain is used as little more than a byword for England.[267] Yet, a focus on the national perspective also risks diminishing the contributions of other countries to the Allied war effort, and similarly reduces the representation of less familiar theatres of war. Of course, Cameron was referring to national commemorative events, and while these did occasionally have transnational involvement, the volume of content representing the wider war lay in the media.

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[265] 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 18 January 2023].

[266] Heather Jones, 'Goodbye to All That? Memory and Meaning in the Commemoration of the First World War', *Juncture*, 20.4 (2014), pp. 287–288.

[267] Andrew Mycock, 'The First World War Centenary in the UK: "A Truly National Commemoration"?', *The Round Table*, 103.2 (2014), p. 158.

This chapter will explore how the media sought to broaden understanding of these 'forgotten' elements of the conflict, both through specialised documentaries and as part of larger series. It will consider the representation of Indian and African soldiers, to demonstrate attempts to include ethnic minorities in national cultural memory. As the white Tommy has been a key centrepiece of that memory, so too has the Western Front. Thus, there will also be explorations of how the war beyond the Front was presented. Finally, it will delineate the methods used to connect with a younger audience, with particular attention to the use of visual styles not commonly associated with Great War programmes. It will ultimately demonstrate that this push towards lesser told histories on television and inclusion of a seemingly disconnected generation are significant steps, and the most notable shifts from 1960s ideas and narratives.

Remembering the Forgotten

One can optimistically assume that by 'national spirit', Cameron intended for the planned commemorations to represent the diverse population of the UK. This approach was adopted by television and radio broadcasters, particularly the BBC, who sought to cover experiences and histories of people from across the UK. They also endeavoured to rectify the unbalanced dominance of white histories of the Great War prevalent in pre-Centenary broadcasting. The foundation of cultural memory of the conflict has previously been understood as a vision of the Western Front as an exclusively white space. 'A white mythic space erases non-white elements from the pseudo-historical setting and transforms it into a racially homogenous

space that is perceived as an authentic representation of the past'.[268] The most apparent way to remedy this impression is to dedicate coverage to the presence and experiences of ethnic minority troops on the Western Front and other theatres of war, while acknowledging the difficulties they experienced as a result of racist concepts, which were contemporary to the wartime period yet are unacceptable to us today.

The clearest example of this initiative was *The World's War: Forgotten Soldiers of Empire* (BBC Two, 2014) presented by David Olusoga. In this two-part miniseries, Olusoga explores the experiences of African, Indian, and Asian troops on the Western Front and beyond. In the first episode, 'Martial Races', Olusoga highlights the presence and impact of African troops from the outset of the conflict, noting that the first Allied shot was fired by an African soldier, attacking a German colony in Togoland. Per titular indication of the episode, Olusoga presents a photograph in which a white officer appears to hold an air of superiority over the newly arrived Indians, with the likely cause being the racial superiority enforced over ideas about the so-called 'martial races'. Martial race theory also applied at the recruitment stage in the Indian Army, on the premise that 'only selected communities […] due to their biological and cultural superiority, were capable of bearing arms.[269]

Of course, a prominent part of the Centenary was covering how we remember the war. Congruently, Olusoga visited a Remembrance Day ceremony at the Menin Gate and spoke to the descendants of Indian soldiers in attendance. One of them notes that his grandfather refused to exchange his turban for a helmet. Such differences of the Indian Army, both religious and cultural, were explored in wildly unfavourable ways in a French policy called

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[268] Stefan Aguirre Quiroga, 'Race, *Battlefield 1* and the White Mythic Space of the First World War', *Alicante Journal of English Studies*, 31 (2018), p. 188.
[269] Kaushik Roy, 'Race and Recruitment in the Indian Army: 1880–1918', *Modern Asian Studies*, 47.4 (2013), pp. 1311-1312.

Force Noir, advocated in a book of the same name published in 1910 by Charles Mangin. Indeed, Olusoga expresses his own discomfort about the racialised ideas within as he reads it. Olusoga then notes that France liked to view itself as 'colourblind', but the war would tease out the reality behind this. Expanding on this, Olusoga speaks to the historian Alison Fell about the actual attitudes of the French towards African soldiers. Fell outlines the stereotype of a savage, highly sexed race, which resulted in a lot of nervousness. Olusoga notes that despite the deeds of these men, their names endure, but little else does. The end of the episode highlights an unusual exception to this point; Olusoga is shown the recording of a poem by a captured Indian man. His voice was recorded simply to obtain a sample of the Punjabi dialect, the poem an accidental by-product of this process. Consistent with the sense of 'forgotten soldiers', the man's fate is unknown, with his recorded voice being his only lasting legacy. In closing, Olusoga recalls the promise we make each Remembrance Day ('We will remember them') and how important this is when so many seem to have been forgotten.[270] Olusoga's initial exploration into forgotten soldiers reached a respectable audience of 1.09 million people, so one can assume his hopes of broadening awareness of them were at least partially achieved.[271]

In the second episode, 'Foreign Legions', Olusoga moves beyond the Western Front to consider the involvement of imperial troops in other theatres of war. In Eastern Europe, Olusoga notes that the Ottomans were preparing for what was presented as a Holy War against Britain. The Germans encouraged this perspective of the war, in the hope of expanding their own colonial interests. This attempt to encourage religious fervour towards the war was further reflected in the placement of Muslim prisoners of war (POWs) in the Half Moon Camp,

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[270] 'Martial Races', *The World's War: Forgotten Soldiers of Empire* (BBC Two, 6 August 2014).
[271] British Audience Research Board, 'Weekly top 30 programmes on TV sets (July 1998 – Sept 2018)'.

where attempts were made to persuade them to adopt the Jihad cause; however, this found little success as actual conversion could be counted in 10s – most prisoners were interested in surviving the war they were in, rather than fighting and potentially dying in a new one. The Germans had a number of troops in German East Africa, but the territory was surrounded by foreign imperial colonies. Victories of troops in the German colonies was thereby rewarded. After success at Tanga, the East African Army were sent personal commendations from the Kaiser, praising them as Teutonic heroes. Olusoga notes that this choice of words was undoubtedly intended to encourage a sense of cohesion between the colonised people and their conquerors. However, this amicable feeling was not applied to the colonial populations as a whole. Carrier regiments were treated badly, including when they were captured by the Germans, whereby they would be tied up and shot if they resisted. When the Germans plundered villages, it is believed they were responsible for the deaths of a third of a million Africans. Thus, well-meaning words were only extended to people in the colonies when doing so benefited the imperial power.

Returning to Europe, Olusoga notes that by 1917 the Western Front was the most culturally and ethnically diverse place on Earth. He demonstrates this by listing locations and the troops present: Nancy – Americans; Verdun – Algerians, Moroccans, and Tunisians; Chemin des Dames – Senegalese and Vietnamese; Cambrai – Inuit and Indians; Arras – Māori and Pacific Islanders; Vimy – Canadian Indians. West Indian, African and Egyptian labourers also resupplied Australians, New Zealanders, South Africans, and Canadians at Ypres. Clearly, this was now the world's war. Of course, this was a point raised by historians well before the Centenary, yet its discussion here is notable.[272] Philippe Gorczynski explains how the Chinese

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[272] See, for example, Dominiek Dendooven, *World War One: Five Continents in Flanders* (Tielt, Belgium: Lannoo, 2008).

Labour Corps and the tank were intertwined. The tanks were regularly over-exerted on the battlefield, and as such required constant repairs and maintenance, which was carried out by the Chinese Labour Corps. Olusoga suggests that "the Chinese labourers are probably the most forgotten of the forgotten." Indeed, this is also reflected in academic histories of the conflict, whereby the history of the Chinese Labour Corps remains one of the smaller research areas. Similarly, they received no dedicated attention from the media during the Centenary, even though the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) was working to identify and name the graves of Chinese labourers in French cemeteries.

Olusoga then visits the grave of Freddie Stowers, an American soldier whose headstone is slightly different to the others – he wore a French uniform and took orders from French officers because he was African American. Pershing had refused to lead black soldiers into battle, yet some managed to find their way to the battlefield. The French Army welcomed them and called them *Les Enfants Perdus* [the lost children].[273] Olusoga notes that these soldiers were surprised at how well-treated they were in France, highlighting the basis of this as he reads from a 1919 issue of *The Crisis*, the magazine by The National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People. It has a section with documents relating to the war, with one being requirements set out by the Americans of how the French should treat black American soldiers. French officers had more important concerns, so this directive was suppressed. In contrast to the lost legacy of other such troops, the fate of Freddie Stowers is known – he was killed on the battlefield while leading his men to capture a German trench. He was recommended for the Medal of Honor, but in reflection of racialised ideas, it would

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[273] The usage of the term here is questionable, as it is not commonly attributed to this aspect of history. The issues of race between the American and French armies is though; see Chris Kempshall, *British, French and American Relations on the Western Front, 1914-1918* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 186–188.

take 70 years for the recommendation to be processed – his sisters received it on his behalf in 1991.

The French did not share American reluctance to bestow medals on black troops, as many returned to the United States with French medals on their chests. Unfortunately, they were not as well received by their countrymen. Within a year of the end of the war, eight black veterans were hanged by lynch mobs, and two were burned alive. In one case, the only 'offence' was that the man refused to remove his uniform. Olusoga points out that during the war, 'the carefully constructed myth of white superiority had been dismembered in the carnage of the fighting'. But the war did not lead to the destruction of the myth, and colonial soldiers were sent home and largely treated as before. Through their post-war treatment, many went forgotten. Olusoga finishes by noting, 'now, a century later, we are just beginning, perhaps, to write them back in to the history of the First World War'.[274] This episode saw only a slight decrease in audience compared to the previous episode, achieving a viewership of 0.96 million viewers, indicating a reasonably maintained level of interest.[275] This is evidence that broadcasters can go beyond the norms of televisual representations of the First World War and still maintain viewership.

The television series was echoed by a radio series which has also been made available in podcast format. The content of Olusoga's docuseries was mirrored by another which also explored the concept of *Forgotten Heroes*, albeit in this case with a stronger focus on the experiences of the Indian Army. Across three episodes, Sarfraz Manzoor examined the experiences of Indian soldiers through letters written by them and their families. This more

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[274] 'Foreign Legions', *The World's War: Forgotten Soldiers of Empire* (BBC Two, 13 August 2014).
[275] British Audience Research Board, 'Weekly top 30 programmes on TV sets (July 1998 – Sept 2018)'.

intimate touch, combined with the letters being read out by Indians, gave a slightly more personalised experience to the narrative than that of Olusoga's series. It also underlines the scarcity of historiography about the Indian Army from the outset; the first episode opens with the line, 'More has been written on the four main British war poets than on the 1 million Indians'.[276] The episode also expands the temporal scope of Olusoga's series by considering Indian involvement with the British Army from the 1857 Indian Rebellion; indeed, the series frequently refers to the impact of impressions about the Empire on Indians and their desire (or lack of) to enlist, as well as their hopes for independence or greater political autonomy in reward for their assistance.

Olusoga produced a book of the same name as the television series (also published in 2014), so there was room for expansion of knowledge beyond the television screen for those seeking it.[277] However, this step requires the viewer to change medium, and actively pursue further information, rather than simply having it presented to them on their television. Indeed, an ongoing feature of the Centenary, particularly on the BBC, was to encourage the viewer to visit a website for further information about the programme's content. These websites will be explored in the latter chapters of this thesis, but it should be noted here that it is ultimately impossible to determine how many people viewed these websites as a result of watching the television programme. Nevertheless, attempts are clearly being made to rectify the underrepresentation of soldiers from across the Empire, albeit as part of a slow and recent process.

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[276] 'Episode 1', *Forgotten Heroes: The Indian Army in the Great War* (BBC Asian Network, 4 August 2014).
[277] See David Olusoga, *The World's War: Forgotten Soldiers of Empire* (London: Head of Zeus, 2014).

In tandem with *Forgotten Soldiers*, *Forgotten Heroes* also outlines the experiences of Indian soldiers beyond the Western Front, with particular attention to Gallipoli and Mesopotamia, and the resulting efforts of the Germans and Turks to dissuade the Indians from engaging their fellow Muslim brethren in battle. This episode also explored the nature of recruitment, with an Indian recruitment song being read and translated to display its message that everything would be better in the army, and contrasted this with the underlying fact that coercive methods were used to pressure men to enlist.[278] These clashes are expanded on in the final episode, when Manzoor examines the prevalence of (and opposition to) nationalism in India, with specific regard to attitudes towards the British Raj. In addition to language barriers, a lack of promotion for Indians in the army was also explained in terms of their impeded literacy levels. This is a crucial highlighting of how a lack of language comprehension has been understood to impede men from the colonies across the European armies; in the French Army, African soldiers were taught a simplified version of pidgin French which demeaned them to French and Belgian soldiers.[279] Yet, the Indian Army formed a considerable part of the British war effort, and one member of the programme expresses their frustration that this was still being questioned in 2014. Manzoor ends the series by reflecting on the damage this obscuration can cause:

> I grew up thinking that the First World War was basically the Somme and Wilfred Owen. If I had known the role my ancestors played in the war, it wouldn't have just made me proud of them, it would have made me feel

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[278] 'Episode 2', *Forgotten Heroes: The Indian Army in the Great War* (BBC Asian Network, 11 August 2014).
[279] Dominiek Dendooven, 'White … or Not Quite: The Representation of African Soldiers of the First World War', *Dutch Crossing*, 46.3 (2022), pp. 221–222.

> more comfortable with calling myself British, and that is why this is a history
>
> that must be heard.[280]

With these words, Manzoor highlights the true importance of expanding awareness of the First World War beyond the Western Front, the white Tommy, and the 'mud, blood and poetry' tropes which have dominated for so long; it is not simply to inform the more dominant demographics in war representations that others were part of the war, but to show people who might feel excluded by such narratives that they have a place in commemoration too.

Elsewhere, representations of race are rare, and in some cases feel like missed opportunities to add the voices of broader demographics to the narrative. In an episode of *The Crimson Field,* Colonel Ballard, commander of a Sikh regiment, is belligerent and causes trouble with the intention of being sent back to the front; the only real exploration of his character reveals he is concerned that his men have been left under the charge of a man who does not speak Punjabi.[281] In another episode, Private Shoemaker, a Jamaican soldier, is unable to speak. Richard Smith has argued that 'in this setting, Shoemaker becomes a one-dimensional character, part of a multicultural box-ticking exercise'.[282] Also, in *The Passing Bells*, in a brief scene where German prisoners are being guarded by British West Indians, one of the prisoners suggests that 'they don't seem so different from us'.[283] While a clear attempt to demonstrate a sense of racial parity, and a sense of shared humanity which underpins the series, it ultimately negates the discrimination experienced by West Indians. It is understandable that dramas with longer narratives cannot amplify every detail in their

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[280] 'Episode 3', *Forgotten Heroes: The Indian Army in the Great War* (BBC Asian Network, 18 August 2014).
[281] 'Episode 5', *The Crimson Field* (BBC One, 4 May 2014).
[282] Richard Smith, 'The Multicultural First World War: Memories of the West Indian Contribution in Contemporary Britain', *Journal of European Studies*, 45.4 (2015), p. 359.
[283] 'Episode 4', *The Passing Bells* (BBC One, 6 November 2014).

storylines, and it is reassuring to see such inclusions, but more could have been done to centralise ethnic minorities in such representations. In this respect, dramas earlier in the Centenary schedule which had the chance to set the tone from the outset missed the opportunity to cover these lesser-known narratives and histories in more depth.

Racial discrimination was more explicitly expressed in the BBC Radio 4 long-form drama series *Home Front*. Listeners received a warning ahead of several episodes that it contains views held in 1915 that today's listeners may find offensive. These episodes cover the Reverend Ralph Winwood's discovery that his wife Dorothea is secretly of Indian ancestry, after their baby is born with a dark skin tone. He ponders which is worse, 'to have a wife who is a liar, or a wife who is half-savage and a liar'.[284] In an episode three days later, he questions his wife's fidelity after an Indian soldier has been billeted with them, thus having to decide again which is worse, his wife being "a liar and a savage" or "a liar and a whore."[285] While there are some racist views espoused in the series before this, these are some of the most direct and shocking. Whereas Olusoga's documentary was an exploration of the contribution of different ethnicities to the war effort and attitudes towards them, the views expressed by Ralph in these episodes are more broadly reflective of racial ideas founded by Britain's imperial power. Of course, *Home Front* was less of an attempt to rectify stereotypical ideas about the war, and more intended to present the viewer with a glimpse of the past as it was 100 years ago to the day. Ralph's views, and arguably some of his broader attitudes towards his wife, are also emblematic of the sexism of the era. While the contributions of women to

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[284] '22 September 1915', *Home Front* (BBC Radio 4, 22 September 2015).
[285] '25 September 1915', *Home Front* (BBC Radio 4, 25 September 2015).

the war effort has seen greater attention in recent years,[286] there has been less consideration of this more domestic aspect of their lives.

As Olusoga sought to broaden awareness of non-European contributions to the war, Kate Adie sought to amplify the image of women in *Kate Adie's Women of World War One*. The standalone documentary was broadcast in between the two episodes of Olusoga's series, resulting in a week on BBC Two which evidently intended to break the mould of consistently representing the white British Tommy. Adie opens by setting the scene of what she calls 'a man's world', noting the controversy of Vesta Tilley appearing in public wearing trousers. Tilley was instrumental in encouraging men to enlist for the war, as reflected in an interview shown with Kitty Morter in 1964, where she recalls her husband signed up after seeing Tilley on stage. Adie notes that this was part of women's role as sources of morality – they should encourage men to do the right thing.

Beyond their role in encouraging men to go and fight, women were involved with the war effort themselves. Adie opens with the most well-known example of working in munitions. She notes that women enjoyed this welcome escape from the home and the opportunity for socialisation. Less welcome were the resultant dangers from TNT (Trinitrotoluene), namely turning women's skin yellow, resulting in them being nicknamed 'Canaries', and more darkly resulting in the death of 109 women from TNT poisoning. Adie explores other gaps left by men and filled by women during the war, such as football teams. She remarks that this was another breach of contemporary gender roles, and doctors were concerned over the potential damage to women's organs. Nonetheless, women formed teams

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[286] See Alison Fell, *Women as Veterans in Britain and France after the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

from their work groups, and games continued after the war until the Football Association banned women from playing on their grounds in 1921. Reflective of the earlier identification of women as moral compasses, Adie notes that women police forces were also put together under the Women's Police Service (WPS), but indicative of their reduced social status, they did not have powers of arrest. Unsurprisingly, they were also unpopular with the women they policed. They were also primarily classist organisations, 'associated with controlling the public and even the private behaviors [*sic*] of working and working-class women'.[287] Adie notes that the Metropolitan Police introduced paid women constables within weeks of the Armistice, yet the WPS were rejected as candidates, so the group was disbanded.

Women's contributions to the war effort expanded further in 1917, when the Women's Land Army was formed to produce food at home after attacks on merchant shipping. Their expanded duties throughout the workforce were not without controversy. Adie mentions that there were concerns over the potential feminisation of the workforce, as women were cheaper to employ. Thus, their employment was justified as being 'only for the duration'. Adie ends by discussing the experiences of Voluntary Aid Detachment nurses, noting that 'by 1918 more than 70,000 VADs had played a crucial role in the war effort'. Their role was also unproblematic, as they were deemed non-threatening to men and their traditional workplaces. After the war, women's lives largely went back to pre-war norms, although Adie notes the partial win for women's enfranchisement, stipulating it as a 'prize' not a 'right'.

Women were not pleased with this small concession, and 6000 marched on Parliament demanding guarantees about their future; yet, as Adie highlights, 'the phrase "only for the

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[287] Philippa Levine, '"Walking the Streets in a Way No Decent Woman Should": Women Police in World War I', *Journal of Modern History*, 66.1, p. 44.

duration" was coming home to roost'. Resultingly, women's employment returned to pre-war

levels (one third), and 'within a dozen years their wages were less than half those of men in

the same industries'. Women returned to the home. Adie concludes by noting that the

struggle for 'fairness and equality' would go on, a statement that would resonate with modern

women viewing the programme.[288] Adie's documentary achieved an audience of 1.64 million

viewers, slightly above those achieved by Olusoga's miniseries.[289] Stylistically, the

programmes were largely similar, featuring the presenters on-location, and the use of archival

footage and recorded accounts and interviews. This difference in viewership may indicate that

the subject of women's wartime work resonated with the available audience more than the

'forgotten' contribution of ethnic minorities. It may also be the result of more women tuning

in to a programme more directly associated with their gender's wartime experience, although

without demographic data for the audience, this is mere speculation. Nevertheless, the scope

of women's roles in this programme is arguably a drastic contrast to both pre-Centenary

programming and that within the anniversary itself, and as such it is an exemplar of change in

televisual representations of the First World War.

Adie's documentary featured a number of elements which were included in *Home

Front*. When Jessie Moore's mother is shocked to see her daughter on stage singing *The Army

of Today's Alright* wearing trousers, Jessie defends her outfit by noting that Vesta Tilley wears

them too.[290] The role of women in the workplace is covered at considerable length, and the

following are some noteworthy examples. When Geoffrey Marshall remarks that 'the factory

floor is no place for a lady', his wife Cressida retorts that she believes by the end of the war

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[288] *Kate Adie's Women of World War One* (BBC Two, 11 August 2014).
[289] British Audience Research Board, 'Weekly top 30 programmes on TV sets (July 1998 – Sept 2018)'.
[290] '17 December 1914', *Home Front* (BBC Radio 4, 17 December 2014).

women will be employed to do men's work, and will prove perfectly competent at it.[291] In response to the lower wages paid to women, Marion Wardle pretends to be her late husband Davy in order to earn a higher wage to support her children – once her identity is revealed, she is lowered to a women's wage.[292] Following safety shortcuts, an explosion at a munitions factory in Tynemouth results in the death of 26 women. The factory owners attempt to downplay the incident and refuse to claim accountability, with woman journalist D. R. Walker being refused the ability to print a story about it. The story only comes to public attention when Edie Chadwick reads out the names of the deceased women at a public event awarding her a medal for stopping a pickpocket gang.[293] The women's football team from the factory also sing a memorial song for the women before one of their matches.[294]

Indicative of the struggles to enfranchise women mentioned in Adie's documentary, while discussing the news of the vote being extended to serving men and women over 30 who own property, Isabel Graham notes this will exclude all women munitions workers.[295] Following the arrival in Folkestone of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, Gabriel Graham remarks to his wife Sylvia that 'the whole town is teeming with silly flighty girls,' and later adds to this by saying 'no wonder your sex had such a struggle to get the vote'.[296] Lastly, in one of the episodes, Maud Burnett makes a reference to the possibility of women police officers, on the basis that 'venereal disease is not something we can be complacent about'.[297] This is a small insight of the broader issues around gender roles covered in *Home Front*, but they are

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[291] '9 March 1915', *Home Front* (BBC Radio 4, 9 March 2015).
[292] '13 March 1915', *Home Front* (BBC Radio 4, 13 March 2015); '18 March 1915', *Home Front* (BBC Radio 4, 18 March 2015).
[293] '27 January 1917', *Home Front* (BBC Radio 4, 27 January 2017).
[294] '3 February 1917', *Home Front* (BBC Radio 4, 3 February 2017).
[295] '1 February 1917', *Home Front* (BBC Radio 4, 1 February 2017).
[296] '5 March 1918', *Home Front* (BBC Radio 4, 5 March 2018).
[297] '19 February 1915', *Home Front* (BBC Radio 4, 19 February 2015).

effective demonstrations of how the BBC created a homogenised and continuous narrative across documentaries and drama on different mediums during the Centenary.

The Centenary occurred during a period where the United Kingdom found itself at risk of becoming disunited. Several months before the Scottish Independence Referendum of 2014, whether out of coincidence or contrivance, the BBC broadcasted *Pipers of the Trenches*, a standalone documentary focussed on Scottish Pipers and their descendants. The programme opens with Katy Hall, a descendant of a Scottish Piper, who wants to go to the battlefields to better understand their experiences. This common theme of being able to understand events more clearly by being in the relevant location is mirrored by the similar notion that possessing artefacts from the event provides a connection with the individuals involved. Here, Hall presents some of her ancestor's medals. Peter Barton explains the role of Hall's ancestor to her at the former Somme battlefields. The restrictions on the instrumental theme of this programme are highlighted when the presenter notes that there are no known audio recordings of the Great War, so they have used research and new technology to recreate them. He also notes that while the piper would have most likely been drowned out by the noise of battle, the sight of him marching forward unarmed would have had a similarly positive effect on the men's morale.[298]

Of course, marching forth into battle unarmed met with sadly predictable consequences – of the 26 pipers of the Tyneside Scottish who went into battle, 20 were killed or wounded. Piper William Lawrie was one of these casualties, and his descendant plays a song on the bagpipes entitled *Battle of the Somme* in his memory. Piper McLennan's

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[298] There is an exploration on the impact of bandsmen on men's morale in Emma Hanna, *Sounds of War: Music in the British Armed Forces During the Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 62-63.

descendant is taken to where he served at Gallipoli, where he is told that McLennan marched forward until his bagpipes were destroyed by shrapnel, at which point he started taking the wounded back instead. As noted earlier in the programme, McLennan's descendant also highlights the importance of being able to stand in the place where his grandfather fought. This consistent attitude emphasises that while we have developed new ways to represent the past, and new technologies through which such representations can be made, the most effective connection to the past is still largely felt to be a physical one. In a world of increasingly large digital space, this amplification of the importance of physical space, and its proximity, is significant.

As with other programmes broadcast during the Centenary, the content of this documentary was also connected to the present through means other than descendants. The presenter notes that pipers are still used today to boost troop morale; in true modern fashion, they decide to test the idea that bagpipers could improve performance scientifically. Army cadets were put through a range of exercises, including strength tests. The results of the experiment demonstrated that bagpipe music increased grip strength to a statistically significant amount, although it was inconsistent. One reviewer took issue with this particular element of the programme, arguing that it was a 'moronic, irreverent break in mood, so pointlessly taking up time that could have been much better spent telling us more about the tradition from which the pipers sprang'.[299]

In closing, Barton remarks that there are Scottish-styled regiments around the world, including a Canadian regiment which came over under the name of the Highlanders. Finally,

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[299] Lucy Mangan, '*Pipers of the Trenches* Review – Poignant, Crass and Contemptuous', *The Guardian* (11 July 2014), https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2014/jul/11/pipers-of-the-trenches-review-poignant-crass-and-contemptuous [Accessed 15 October 2024].

the programme reveals that 2,500 pipers served in the war; 600 were wounded, and 500

killed.[300] This is another regular feature of BBC documentaries – reminding the viewer of the

cost of lives related to the programme's content. Viewing figures for the programme's original

broadcast on BBC Two Scotland are unavailable, but when it was rebroadcast on BBC Two

England it achieved a viewership of one million.[301] This demonstrates that despite the BBC

largely focussing local histories on their relevant regions, the histories of other nations can

still generate interest beyond their own borders.

Overall, one can see a reasonable attempt to increase the representation of commonly

underrepresented groups in cultural memory of the Great War. The BBC combined

documentary content with their long-form drama *Home Front* to present and reinforce a more

diverse understanding of wartime experience across factual and fictional narratives.

Unfortunately, even with such efforts, racialised ideas about the war and the soldiers on the

Western Front still abound – in 2020, the actor Laurence Fox had to offer an apology on Twitter

after he responded to the film *1917* by referring to its 'oddness in the casting'; specifically, Fox

was referring to the presence of Sikh soldiers, saying 'you're suddenly aware there were Sikhs

fighting in this war. And you're like "OK, you're now diverting me away from what the story

is".' Fox then apologised for being 'clumsy' in his choice of words.[302] Notably, Fox did not

apologise for his lack of awareness of the diversity of ethnicities present on the Western Front

during the war, nor for his inference that they did not hold a place in the story. Indeed, G. B.

Meredith noted of the incident that 'while partly motivated by his self-proclaimed "anti-woke"

agenda, Fox's reaction to seeking a Sikh soldier in the trenches is also symptomatic of the

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[300] *Pipers of the Trenches* (BBC Two Scotland, 16 June 2014).
[301] British Audience Research Board, 'Weekly top 30 programmes on TV sets (July 1998 – Sept 2018)'.
[302] 'Laurence Fox Apologises to Sikhs for 'Clumsy' 1917 Comments', *BBC* (24 January 2020),
https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-51233734 [Accessed 13 December 2022].

broader erasure of non-white, non-European experience from popular cultural memory'.[303]

Thus, Fox presumably acted under the notion that he was only saying what he believed others were thinking. Evidently, attempts to shift beyond narratives focussing on white men must now face the additional complication of being drawn into politicised culture wars.

The matter of what and who we 'forget' in cultural memory, either willingly or otherwise, deserves further attention both academically and publicly. The usage of 'forgotten' in tandem with 'voices' is a recurring feature in the naming of television programmes and academic works. Yet, as noted by Stefan Goebel and Mark Connelly, 'the culture of forgetting has long remained the poor relation of memory studies'.[304] This is a particular issue in regard to ethnic minorities, where the contributions of soldiers have struggled to find their place in academic study. As outlined by Dominiek Dendooven, 'they have left no trace in the commemorative landscape of Flanders Fields or are relegated to a footnote in the extensive historiographical literature devoted to the First World War'.[305] Moreover, the act of forgetting can be politically motivated; 'memory is political: what is forgotten is as important, says as much, as what is remembered'.[306] Conversely, there is also political significance to the act of including previously 'forgotten' narratives, as reflective of centenary initiatives to represent a more diverse demographic. Television also plays a substantial part here, as it 'can play a role in re-remembering and eliciting emotional engagement and empathy for those often forgotten'.[307] Beyond demographical imbalances, there was also an impetus during the

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[303] G. B. Meredith, '"Dominant" First World War Memory: Race, Nation and the Occlusion of Empire', *First World War Studies*, 12.2 (2022), p. 89.

[304] Mark Connelly and Stefan Goebel, 'Forgetting the Great War? The Langemarck Myth between Cultural Oblivion and Critical Memory in (West) Germany, 1945–2014', *The Journal of Modern History*, 94.1 (2022), p. 5.

[305] Dominiek Dendooven, 'White … or Not Quite', p. 223.

[306] Nick Webber and Paul Long, 'The Last Post: British Press Representations of Veterans of the Great War', *Media, War & Conflict*, 7.3 (2014), p. 275.

[307] Maggie Andrews, 'Mediating Remembrance: Personalization and Celebrity in Television's Domestic Remembrance', *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, 4.3 (2011), p. 362.

Centenary to tell a broader geographical story about the Great War – to move away from the white British Tommy, the Western Front, and the Somme, a trifecta so prominent in media representations and heavily entrenched in memory that presenting anything outside of it is deemed radical.

It is also worth noting, that while exploration of the contributions to and experiences of the war for colonial troops allows for a discussion of alternative theatres of war, the importance of these battlefields should be acknowledged to illustrate the significance of their involvement. As highlighted by Anna Maguire, 'the fighting in Egypt and Palestine was often viewed both at the time and in collective memories of the war as secondary to the industrialised warfare of the Western Front, a notion that those who served there had to contend with'.[308] As previously shown, the BBC also produced programmes about the individual nations in the UK to heighten awareness of their own contributions, providing a geographically broader understanding of the war. It also sought to widen this scope in internationally wider geographical and temporal terms.

The Greater War

Expanding cultural memory of the war beyond an understanding of it as taking place on the Western Front and consisting mostly of the Battle of the Somme and the Battle of Passchendaele required the representation of a larger geographical and chronological scope. In tandem with the 'forgotten' people of the war was an impetus to cover forgotten or lesser-known battles and theatres of war. The BBC sought to extend chronological awareness of

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[308] Anna Maguire, '"I Felt Like a Man": West Indian Troops under Fire during the First World War', *Slavery & Abolition*, 39.3 (2018), p. 615.

events by looking at events in Europe in the period just before the outbreak of war, in contrast to a development in academic research to pay more attention to the time after it.[309]

This took the form of the BBC Two docudrama *37 Days*. The series sought to demonstrate how the escalation towards war took place behind closed doors in the corridors of power in England, Germany, and Russia. It opens by noting that 'on 28th June 1914, Europe was enjoying a prosperous peace. 37 Days later the nations were at war. In that time only a handful of people knew what was happening'. A young Civil Service clerk in the Foreign Office named Alec retrospectively recounts his flawed dismissal of the relevance of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand:

> I should be honest with you, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand murdered in
>
> Sarajevo? Interesting, sure, over breakfast, but forgotten by teatime. Or so I
>
> thought, as did everyone else I spoke to. But it was not forgotten. And I think
>
> it never will be.

Here, the narrator, a distinctly literary element in a docudrama, alludes to the fact that many people are aware that the assassination was the touchpaper for the events that followed, but this series is a consideration of the events which took place between the assassination of the Archduke and the declaration of war. So, the episode returns to the present moment, as the Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey muses over the motives for the assassination with his Under Secretary. Later, Grey's wife Margot asks if she should be worried about the assassination, which he tells her not to be. The narrator then provides an overview of the assassination and Gavrilo Princip's motives – it should be noted here that the account given is not entirely complete, as it does not mention the initial failed bombing attempt, or the reason the

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[309] As evident in *The Greater War* series for Oxford University Press, edited by Robert Gerwath.

Archduke's car took a different route. It is possible the producers felt these details were ultimately unimportant to the narrative, but omitting them obscures the haphazard circumstances under which the assassination occurred.

The episode switches to the narrator in Germany, Jens, who depicts the fractured state of Germany by noting that he works for a Prussian institution, not a German one. At a meeting with Kaiser Wilhelm II, the Kaiser expresses his enthusiasm for the Austrians to retaliate. The Austrian ambassador takes the Kaiser's letter to Vienna, noting there was no response. Meanwhile in England, Sir Edward Grey is discussing the potential involvement of Germany in Austrian retaliation with the senior clerk Eyre Crowe. At a cricket match, Prince Max Lichnowsky speaks with Grey about the probability of England and France responding if Russia asks for help protecting Serbia. Germany continues to pressure Austria to act, yet when Austria issues its ultimatum, they feel it is too much. Grey raises concerns with the Austrian ambassador Count Albert von Mensdorff-Pouilly-Dietrichstein about their demands, who is also concerned about a possible British response to conflict – 'A little Balkan war will not remain a little Balkan war forever'. The episode ends with Grey walking home on an idyllic summer's evening, and the note appears on screen: '22nd July. 13 days to war'.[310] The episode was viewed by 2.89 million people.[311]

The second episode opens with Sir Edward Grey calling forth Mensdorff, who notes that despite Serbia acceding to the demands of the ultimatum, Austria remains unsatisfied. Grey is unconvinced that Germany knows about Austria's intentions, but still questions Prince Lichnowsky about it. Upon his return from his holiday, the Kaiser is unhappy with Austria's

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[310] 'One Month in Summer', *37 Days* (BBC Two, 6 March 2014).
[311] British Audience Research Board, 'Weekly top 30 programmes on TV sets (July 1998 – Sept 2018)'.

delay in acting – the 'delay' being that the army had only mobilised in the past two days. Grey speaks to the Russian Ambassador Alexander von Benckendorff, who reminds Grey of the tenuous position of the two countries with their respective empires in Asia, which is ultimately the bedrock of their allyship. This is an unfortunately brief glimpse into the importance of the imperial element of allyship and tensions in Europe before the war, but it is understandable that due to the docudrama format the programme cannot adequately explore every detail.

Meanwhile, Grey warns Lichnowsky that if France is drawn in to support Russia, it would be difficult for England to remain neutral. Tsar Nicholas II and the Kaiser exchange letters discussing the situation, demonstrating their familial connection by colloquially referring to each other by their nicknames (which lend themselves to the common name for this correspondence, the Willy-Nicky telegrams). Russia moves to full mobilisation, so Germany advises Austria to do the same. The programme notes that there are now only five days to war. Grey speaks to the French ambassador Paul Cambon about France's potential involvement in the mounting conflict – Cambon notes it is easy for Britain to be relaxed about Germany, due to the protection from invasion offered by the Channel. With four days left before the war, Grey tells Lichnowsky that England and France will stay out of the conflict if Germany does not attack France. However, Germany mobilises its army before the telegram about England's terms is received. When the Kaiser receives it, he and his men are delighted, although Moltke is concerned that they have already mobilised towards the French border. On 1 August, a detachment of German soldiers enters Luxembourg, where they receive a telegram advising of the British peace offering. The programme notes that there are now only

three days until the war.[312] This episode saw a slight decrease in viewership, as is the norm for many television series, to 2.14 million viewers.[313]

The conclusion of the miniseries opens with the Kaiser being informed by telegram that there was a 'misunderstanding' about French neutrality in the conversation between Grey and Lichnowsky – he is outraged. Grey is allowed to inform the French that they will honour their agreement – MP John Burns resigns in protest. Lord John Morley offers a foresightful warning that a European war would be calamitous, last several years, and result in no victors. Grey retorts that not helping their allies would avoid British casualties, but it would not necessarily lead to a better overall outcome for Europe. Lord Morley offers his resignation in response to the increased move towards hostilities, and Asquith remarks that this is the fourth resignation from his cabinet. Lichnowsky tells Grey that Germany will declare war on France that afternoon. Grey then dictates his famed 'the lamps are going out all over Europe' quote, while watching a man extinguish a lamp in the street outside.

On 4 August, Belgian and German troops engage in battle. David Lloyd George warns that the country will face bankruptcy if they engage in war with Germany, echoing previous examples in televisual representations of the war being viewed as economic suicide. He also suggests that some members of the cabinet are too keen for war, while looking at Churchill. Yet, he accepts that Germany's invasion of Belgium has changed things, so he suggests they send Germany an ultimatum. Grey raises the possibility of consulting the Dominions before acting, but Asquith says there is no constitutional need – this is a poignant nod from the programme towards the countries about to be thrown into war without a choice. Lloyd George

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[312] 'One Week in July', *37 Days* (BBC Two, 7 March 2014).
[313] British Audience Research Board, 'Weekly top 30 programmes on TV sets (July 1998 – Sept 2018)'.

tells Grey that none of them will survive the war politically. The British government then issues its ultimatum, demanding the withdrawal of German troops from Belgium by midnight (11pm GMT). The Kaiser believes England is threatened by the notion of Germany equalling her power, once again raising the importance of imperial tensions behind ongoing events. Narrator Jens reflects that in those 37 days, Germany was missing someone to speak sense to madness. As the programme builds towards the upcoming war, Asquith, Grey, and Churchill are gathered in a room as the ultimatum deadline approaches. They muse on what the upcoming war will be like, with Grey reflecting that this war 'will be a little different'. This is a rarely seen acknowledgement on television of the emergence of the conflict as the first experience of total war, and thus the greater sense of upheaval it brought compared to previous wars.

As Big Ben chimes out 11pm, narrator Alec notes that the first trenches were dug in the Marne at the end of August 1914, and remarks on the resulting 'murderous and terrifying stalemate'. Jens underlines how far the war spread, with four empires left in ruins. The image fades to black and white as he finishes, setting events into the colour palette of the past. Alec recounts the losses of 10 million – "too many for the mind to conceive." During the credits, the programme lists the political outfall after the outbreak of war. After the programme, a link is provided to the BBC website to find out more about the attempts made to avoid war in 1914.[314] There was another slight drop in viewership to 1.84 million.[315]

As one of the BBC's earlier Centenary offerings, the series proved considerably popular. Despite the drop in viewership across the episodes, all three were in the top ten programmes

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[314] 'One Long Weekend', *37 Days* (BBC Two, 8 March 2014).
[315] British Audience Research Board, 'Weekly top 30 programmes on TV sets (July 1998 – Sept 2018)'.

viewed on BBC Two for that week.[316] The ability to maintain a large audience may have been helped by the decision to broadcast the miniseries across three days, rather than across three weeks, increasing the likelihood of viewers remaining engaged and remembering to tune in. It is also possibly indicative of the preference of the docudrama format, which can relay historical events in a more entertaining manner than a traditional documentary. The series goes some way to combat old ideas about the war, such as the notion of nations sleepwalking in to it, and to present a glimpse of the complicated political machinations that resulted in its outbreak. This is arguably beneficial, as informing the public about the reasons behind the conflict helps them understand why the renowned image of a Tommy in a muddy trench was there in the first place.

A common observation about the Centenary is how, after a flurry of activity in 2014, there was very little in 2015. This is reflective of a notion in cultural memory that not much happened between the outbreak of war in 1914 and the Battle of the Somme in 1916. Indeed, as noted in the introduction, 2015 saw the lowest number of broadcasting hours on the BBC across the four years. This has been reflected in previous anniversaries of the conflict; as noted by Chandrika Kaul, 'media response in the past has likewise been limited to the odd editorial in the press and a television documentary or two'.[317] The only events in 2015 which gained any real attention were the televised ceremonies commemorating the Gallipoli Campaign.

The BBC covered the remembrance events for this, and also broadcast *Gallipoli: When Murdoch went to War*. This standalone documentary covered Keith Murdoch's journey to Gallipoli in 1915 and the resulting 'Gallipoli Letter' which helped launch his career. This story

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[316] Ibid.
[317] Chandrika Kaul, 'Gallipoli, Media and Commemorations During 2015: Select Perspectives', *Media History*, 24.1 (2018), p. 124.

was also covered during the centenary in newspapers owned by Rupert Murdoch.[318] The programme is framed around the familiar notion of the Gallipoli campaign as a disaster, with the broadcast introduction to the programme noting it is '100 years on from the disastrous Dardanelles campaign'. The programme itself opens with the epitomised quote of truth being the first casualty of war, expanding on this by noting that 'during the First World War, the truth died every day alongside soldiers whose suffering was obscured by big words like "honour" and "civilization", and big lies like "this was the war to end all wars"'. The initial tone is one which suggests that Keith Murdoch's condemnation of the campaign was a truth in a sea of lies, with Rupert Murdoch offering his thoughts on his father's actions throughout. However, this is contrasted with the views of a plethora of historians who present a more critical idea of events, with Stephen Badsey noting that 'the idea that Murdoch's letter ended the Gallipoli campaign and saved thousands of lives is the kind of story reporters tell each other over a quiet drink'.

The programme's timeline starts after the campaign, with Keith Murdoch answering to the Dardanelles Commission in 1917. It then switches back to outline his struggles to gain a career in journalism, a struggle in which his greatest aid was his father's social status, and his greatest shortcoming was his stammer. An overview of the launch of the campaign is then provided, noting that the Australians who enlisted believed they were being sent to England, only to be told a week before arrival that they were stopping in Egypt. A montage of archive photographs of ships and modern photographs of the guns on the coastline is used to illustrate the opening of the battle and failure of the Allied naval forces to gain a foothold. It then presents the figure of Sir Ian Hamilton as a novelty in military leadership as a 'thinking general',

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[318] Ibid., p. 125.

presenting him as a contrast to the 'donkeys' of 1960s historiography, and yet affirming the existence of such characters at the same time. This unusuality in character is followed up by that of war correspondent Ellis Ashmead Bartlett, who was known for appearing outside his tent in the morning wearing a silk dressing gown and calling for breakfast from his Parisian chef. The programme notes that despite a cautious, if not negative, attitude towards journalism exhibited by Britain during the war, Hamilton welcomed journalists, in the hope that being hospitable towards them would result in them presenting him in a favourable light. Nonetheless, their work was still censored, although historian Sir Max Hastings explains that modern journalists have different, negative ideas about censorship, whereas he believes in the importance of taking a positive view of events. For the wartime era, after all, 'the people had to be steeled for further sacrifices, and this could not be done if the full story of what was happening on the Western Front was known'.[319] Yet, Hastings also notes this would have been hard if there was evidence of failings from the generals, to which the programme now turns.

Despite his prominence in this subject, it is revealed that Keith Murdoch missed most of the campaign, arriving in Gallipoli at the end of the August offensive, when events were at their most disastrous. Indeed, Murdoch notes to the Commission that he was only there for a few days, but in that time he gained the impression that the campaign was a failure. Rupert Murdoch notes his father's intense emotional response to events, which he has himself shared following visits to the Gallipoli battlefields, and suggests this response is largely exclusive to Australians. Hastings notes the 'military hubris' of the interception in France of a letter to the Prime Minister carried by Murdoch, suggesting Hamilton should have been shot for it. The letter was from Ashmead-Bartlett, which the Commission questions Murdoch on as

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[319] Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq*, 5th edn. (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), p. 84.

contravening the declaration of the war correspondent. Murdoch disputes this on the basis that it was a private letter to a minister of state, which is not prohibited in the declaration.

Hastings argues that attempting to privately raise concerns with the Prime Minister was indeed the correct course of action, but that once this had been blocked, 'all bets are off'. When Murdoch resultingly wrote his own letter, it was of significantly different content to the one originally penned by Ashmead-Bartlett. Beyond the previous concerns of mail arrangements, Murdoch relied on his discussions with soldiers, which one historian on the programme notes as foolish on the basis that taking every word a soldier says seriously obscures the fact that much of it is 'banter'. Murdoch is also critical of the generals overall, decrying them for having lived 'for their appearance and social distinction', apparently without any sense of irony that his own career was sought for similar reasons. Indeed, Rupert Murdoch comments on his father's disapproval of the class system, specifically of people achieving status without talent. He offers no comment on the fact his own socioeconomic position is partially a result of his family's class standing.

Approaching its conclusion, the programme notes that while it was not published, Murdoch's letter was well-timed to fuel Lloyd George's arguments against Asquith's suitability as Prime Minister. Badsey notes that Hamilton believed Murdoch's letter was responsible for him being recalled, but that it was actually part of a larger picture. Nonetheless, Gallipoli was the end of Hamilton's career, and Rupert Murdoch highlights that his father had no 'moment of conscience' about what he did – he was proud of it. Gallipoli was evacuated a month later, in contrastingly efficient manner to the campaign itself. This is accompanied by a montage of photos of soldiers, then a pile of skulls and bones which fades to a present-day image of a grave. Jenny Macleod highlights that the campaign is not referred to as a defeat, but as a

'glorious failure'. Hastings remarks that Rupert Murdoch's approach to life and journalism has probably been largely influenced by his father, who was extraordinarily effective. Yet, he acknowledges that built into both men is a similar feeling upon meeting a Brit, a feeling demonstrated by him raising two fingers towards the interviewer. Rupert Murdoch reflects that his father might not have approved of everything he's done, 'but times change'. The programme ends by outlining Murdoch's future career, and revealing that the Gallipoli Letter was only made public 25 years after his death. During the credits, links to online information of further details about the disaster of Gallipoli are provided.[320]

While the programme can at first appear as an unsubtle effort to promote and positivise the growth of the Murdoch media empire, this impression is quickly subdued in the presence of critical analysis by historians. The use of academics in this manner is demonstrative of the blurring of boundaries between academic and public historians, whereby they bring critical analysis to television programmes. It was one of the more notable increased trends in the Centenary schedule, in comparison to their more common use in the past as advisors. Yet, it is disappointing that this documentary stands in the middle of a rather bleak commemorative landscape for Gallipoli in 2015. Despite the programme noting that the campaign resulted in losses of British troops in addition to Anzac ones, the dearth of programming reinforced the popular notion that Gallipoli is a preserve of Australian commemoration. Additionally, whereas international commemorations of the campaign saw 'widespread acknowledgement of the role of Gurkhas, Sikhs and Muslims', the lack of content produced for television omitted this in British commemorations.[321] However, this is something of a commemorative anomaly; inclusivity was a prominent presence during the Centenary, as

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[320] *Gallipoli: When Murdoch Went to War* (BBC Two, 25 April 2015).
[321] Kaul, 'Gallipoli, Media and Commemorations', p. 117.

has been outlined in this chapter. Indeed, a report examining the impact of centenary activity discovered an increased awareness of the involvement of Commonwealth troops by the anniversary's conclusion. For instance, in 2012, 44% of respondents were aware of there being more than 1,000 Indian soldiers in the war; by 2018 this had risen to 71%.[322] Evidently, broadcasting and other activity during the Centenary had some success of raising awareness towards a 'greater war', even if more in geographic than chronological terms. This is a significant demonstration of the ability of the Centenary to have a lasting impact. However, in order to fully achieve this, all generations must be included in this impact, and they are not equally likely to engage with the same content.

Mind the Generation Gap

One of the key motivations behind the Centenary was to engage the younger generations with an event which was becoming increasingly distant to them. As Cameron put it in his speech, the government intended 'to put young people front and centre in our commemoration and to ensure that the sacrifice and service of a hundred years ago is still remembered in a hundred years' time'.[323] This commitment was partially embodied by the First World War Battlefield Tours Programme, which sought to send approximately 10,000 pupils and teachers from each state-funded secondary school in England to the former Western Front battlefields.[324] This drive was also reflected by the BBC in a slightly different way; they produced programmes using audio and videography techniques to specifically engage a

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[322] Lucy Buckerfield and Steve Ballinger, *The People's Centenary: Tracking Public Attitudes to the First World War Centenary 2013-2018* (London: British Future, 2019), p. 16.

[323] 'Speech at Imperial War Museum on First World War Centenary Plans'

[324] See Pennell, 'Taught to Remember', pp. 83–98.

younger audience as their target demographic. Yet, for the youngest generation, the requirements are harder still – speaking about war without any direct references to the death or suffering incurred in it. Broadcasters thus had to adapt the mould of war representation to accommodate different age groups. These initiatives are evidence of further attempts of the BBC to push representations of the war beyond the norms of previous decades, where the large majority of programming was aimed at older audiences.

The BBC produced several programmes about the Great War aimed at children during the Centenary. For the youngest members of its television audience, the corporation broadcasted a special episode of *My Story* on CBeebies in 2014 about life 100 years ago. The channel's target audience is children under the age of six, so unsurprisingly the content is based around life on the Home Front.[325] The programme also fixes its lexicon in familial terms, such as by noting that 'many daddies joined the war'. The episode follows Sylvie and her mother Jade as they experience life at school and home as it was a century ago. At school, Sylvie plays old playground games such as marbles and hoop and stick. At home, her mother tells her how people used to have to live on rations, and they go to an allotment to dig up potatoes. As the two prepare the potatoes, Sylvie remarks that it would have been harder living 100 years ago.[326] For its target audience, the programme presents a comfortable glimpse into life at home during the conflict, and presents simple ideas to young children about aspects of life which they are already familiar with i.e., home and school.

Moving up the age range slightly, the BBC also produced two programmes on CBBC for its target audience of six- to twelve-year-olds.[327] Also broadcast on the anniversary of the

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[325] Age range as defined in 'The BBC's Services in the UK', *BBC*, https://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/whatwedo/publicservices [Accessed 15 December 2022].
[326] 'Childhood 100 Years Ago', *My Story* (CBeebies, 4 August 2014).
[327] 'The BBC's Services in the UK'

declaration of war was a special episode of *Horrible Histories*. Again, the programme uses terminology and references appropriate for the target audience; for instance, by explaining the outbreak of war in comical terms as friends sticking up for each other, but it does also allude to the more complex nature of the situation by showing a note on screen stating, 'it really was that complicated!' The comedic tone resumes in the trenches, as a soldier advises a new recruit not to use the toilet in the morning, as the Germans tend to shell that position then (with a note highlighting this did happen). The light-hearted atmosphere continues as a Mary Poppins lookalike appears to dictate the very un-Poppins rules laid out in the Defence Of the Realm Act: Don't fly a kite, don't feed the ducks, don't whistle for a taxi, and don't write anything negative about the war. Other comedic features include soldiers singing songs to the tune of *It's a Long Way to Tipperary* which mock progress in the war and sanitation, and two commentators observing a Christmas Truce football match.

Framing things in other references appropriate to the demographic, the programme also shows the training and brief life of a pilot through means of a video game. It also features the Red Baron (Manfred von Richthofen), albeit with the slight blooper that the plane shown on the poster behind him is a single wing plane, and not Richthofen's Fokker Triplane. Of course, historical inaccuracy is not a concern for the target audience. As the timeline reaches 1916, the programme drops its humorous tone as it covers the Somme, noting that the war was not going well but ultimately leaving the question of whether or not it was worth it to the viewer. This is reflective of previous BBC programming on the conflict, such as the famed comedic take in *Blackadder Goes Forth* (BBC One, 1989) which also chose to fade to black rather than cover the realities of the Somme battlefields. Some elements of comedy return as the episode features a historical version of *Masterchef* looking at food from the period, and also mocks the amount of poetry. The chronology continues through 1917, the 1918 Spring

164

Offensive, and the Armistice, highlighting that fighting occurred right up until the ceasefire. A teacher-type figure outlines the impact of the Treaty of Versailles on interwar Europe, and the rise of Hitler. The last song in the show covers the actions of the suffragettes.[328]

For a programme aimed at children, this showed a considerable level of scope in content and nuance in approaching complex issues. The humour was less subtle than *Blackadder Goes Forth*, but not to the extent of being obtuse or offensive. The tone is clearly intended to make the programme engaging for the audience, and songs are a useful means of presenting content in a memorable manner. The slight increase in age allows some coverage of life on the Western Front, in contrast to the CBeebies programme, albeit in lighter terms than a programme aimed at an adult audience. The intent of *Horrible Histories* to maintain a grounding in History was well-demonstrated by notes on screen reminding the viewer that genuine facts are included amongst the amusing scenes, which is likely a result of the involvement of the historian Greg Jenner in the programme's production. In tandem with its school-age based audience, it also advertises that related teaching materials are available for purchase online (though these are for English rather than History).[329]

Maintaining the light-hearted delivery of historical content was a dedicated episode of *Operation Ouch!* In this episode, Dr Xand (Alexander van Tulleken) and Dr Chris (Christoffer van Tulleken) explore medicine during the Great War. As this is a historically focussed episode, the presenters open with a *Doctor Who* related joke about going back in time. The programme features non-violent archive footage of the trenches, before the presenters demonstrate the scant resources available at a Regimental Aid Post. The pair outline the progress of medical

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[328] 'Frightful First World War Special', *Horrible Histories* (CBBC, 4 August 2014).
[329] 'Horrible Histories Frightful First World War Non-Chronological Report English Unit', *TES* (2022), https://www.tes.com/teaching-resource/horrible-histories-frightful-first-world-war-non-chronological-report-english-unit-12667934 [Accessed 15 December 2022].

interventions over the course of the war, by highlighting that at the start of the conflict 8 out of 10 men died of a broken leg, which had reduced to 1 in 10 by the end. As a device for repairing a broken leg is demonstrated, Dr Xand reveals he's used a modern version, subtly illustrating how modern medicine has its roots in the conflict. They then discuss trench foot, demonstrating the use of maggots on an infected foot injury, and show how the conditions of trench life lowered soldiers' immune systems and made them prone to infection. This issue is highlighted by the resulting statistic that 41,000 men lost an arm or a leg. In an illuminating contrast between past and present, a paralympic athlete tries out a 1914 prosthetic, noting how much more convenient modern prosthetics are. The show ends with an investigation of the impact of the noise of war on soldiers' ears – explosions were capable of deafening soldiers nearby by bursting their eardrums.[330]

While this programme remained light in tone, its content leaned towards more of a factual presentation style than *Horrible Histories*. The comparison of historic and modern medical devices was a crucial step in demonstrating why an awareness of history continues to be important, and that the knowledge provided by it can help us understand how recent technological developments originated. Despite being aimed at young children, all of these programmes had relevant informative material and were thus a respectable attempt to present the war to the generation furthest removed from it, and also cover a respectable amount of material unusual to televisual representations of the war in comparison to earlier decades, such as medical history. Unfortunately, viewing data is not collected for CBeebies or CBBC, so we cannot determine the numbers these programmes reached. Yet, we can gain some idea of the programmes' popularity from the Internet. On the Internet Movie Database

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[330] 'Goes Back in Time', *Operation Ouch!* (CBBC, 8 August 2014).

website, the *Horrible Histories* episode has received a review rating of 8.6/10, and while the target demographic has not rated the episode, the programme is rated higher by younger age groups.[331] Of course, just as appropriate tone and references have been used for child-based audiences, the references must be changed again to engage older age groups.

One of the most prominent examples of this is the BBC Three miniseries, *Our World War* (2014), which uses a modern soundtrack and video game styled visuals to engage its target audience (16–34-year-olds).[332] Inspired by the corporation's BAFTA-winning series *Our War*, the series takes the action from twenty-first century Afghanistan to twentieth-century Europe. Rather than a strict chronological consideration of the war, the series takes three thematic points – the first day of war, Pals Battalions, and the tank – to consider different elements and experiences of the war. While it is based on real events, the content is largely dramatised. The first episode considers the first day of war, focusing on the experiences of the Royal Fusiliers. On 21 August 1914, a group of soldiers are walking through a wood near Mons – one is told to stop whistling (the tune is *It's a Long Way to Tipperary* – one of the few contemporaneous music features of the series). The men capture a German scout, who tells them they are not ready for what is coming. Some children bring the soldiers croissants (which they haven't seen before). This is shortly followed by a shot of the basket of croissants rolling on the muddy ground – this image seems to symbolise the ending of peaceful pleasantries. A runner arrives with news of the German advance at the same time as the Germans

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[331] 'Horrible Histories Frightful First World War User Ratings', *IMDB*, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3915118/ratings/?ref_=tt_ov_rt [Accessed 15 December 2022].
[332] Age range stated in 'Commissioning', *BBC*, https://www.bbc.co.uk/commissioning/bbc-three/#:~:text=We%20produce%20content%20aimed%20at,in%20an%20on%2Ddemand%20world [Accessed 18 January 2023].

themselves. Large numbers of Germans are mown down by machine gun fire, and the programme notes that estimated German casualties in the first two minutes were 500.

The programme begins to demonstrate here the difficulty of relying on runners to relay information during the heat of battle. At 2pm, the runner receives a message ordering the tactical withdrawal of all British forces, which he now needs to return to the soldiers. Upon receiving the order, the lieutenant expresses his intent to hold the bridge while the rest of the army withdraws. Private Godley covers the bridge with machine gun fire while the rest of the men fall back; he is shot in the head while watching another bridge being detonated. At the end, the programme notes that 'Mons was a humiliation for the British Army'. It also reveals the fates of the men involved, notably that Godley survived the shot and was captured as a POW until he returned home in 1918, whereupon he was awarded a Victoria Cross. The episode closes on a clip of the Royal Fusilier Museum in 2014, with Godley giving his recollections about the battle as recorded in 1954.[333]

The second instalment looks at a Pals Battalion, namely the experiences of members of the Manchester Pals Battalion. The episode presents a striking contrast between the boisterous and enthusiastic Kennedy at home, and the man who has become disillusioned by war. Paddy's mood is particularly darkened when he is enlisted for a firing squad. The episode alternates between events which led up to the requirement for a firing squad, and Paddy speaking to the chaplain on the night before. His first remark encapsulates the unfolding drama behind the episode – he suggests that soldiers being part of firing squads damages the bond of Pals battalions. Returning to previous events, the Pals have had a successful first day at the Somme. Flash forward to the night before the firing squad, and after the chaplain

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[333] 'The First Day'.

attempts to comfort Paddy by noting they only put a live round in one of the guns, Paddy

retorts that a soldier can tell the difference between a blank and a live round as a blank does

not cause recoil. He also challenges the chaplain's faith in the Bible, remarking that 'It's not

the guns that keep you awake at night, is it Father?' In Trones Wood, while looking for water

Paddy and Andy encounter Private William Hunt, who claims he has become separated from

his battalion. The men part ways and Paddy and Andy are captured by Germans, although they

are soon rescued when their captors are engaged by British soldiers. Paddy goes to a field

hospital, where he is shocked to learn of the losses at the Somme. On their return, they find

that Private Hunt has been accused of desertion and is sentenced to death by firing squad.

The end of the episode displays archive footage from the Somme, noting that the battle lasted

five months and caused 310,000 casualties. It also notes that Private Hunt was one of 306

British and Commonwealth soldiers killed by firing squad, who were then posthumously

pardoned by the government in 2006, another tie-in with the Shot at Dawn campaign. Paddy

survived the war, and a recording of him from 1976 is played in which he recalls the shared

sense of reliance in Pals Battalions, evoking his words earlier in the episode about

camaraderie.[334]

The conclusion of the series considers the arrival of tanks on the battlefield, and their

initial unreliability due to their tendency to break down. It also demonstrates tensions

between older and newer members of the army. The episode is centred on the crew of HMLS

Niveleur, a Mark V tank, as they take part in the 1918 offensive at Amiens in an attempt to

break the ongoing stalemate. The tensions between the men are amplified in the confines of

the tank, and on one occasion when they go outside, they all find themselves unable to shoot

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[334] 'Pals', *Our World War* (BBC Three, 14 August 2014).

a young German soldier who wants to surrender. The end of the programme notes that 'the

Battle of Amiens lasted only 4 days but broke the German Army. Only 38 of the 420 tanks

survived. Within 100 days the war was over. 9 million British and Commonwealth soldiers

fought in World War One. 1 million never returned'. Like previous episodes, it also notes the

fates of the actual soldiers: Fred Firth survived and made it home for his son's birthday; Chas

delivers the photo and final letter he found on a dying soldier to his fiancée. It closes on a

photo of the actual crew of the Niveleur.[335] Due to the constrained locality of the episode, it

lacks the broader impressions of war and narrative developments provided by the previous

series instalments, but is nonetheless a revealing glimpse into the relationships between

soldiers under fire. The subject matter would have been familiar to war-related video game

fans in the targeted demographic – tank missions have been featured in nine *Call of Duty*

games alone, and exist in other video game series and as standalones. Thus, we can assume a

level of audience awareness in the choice of the narratives presented.[336]

Content aside, all three episodes used modern music and videographic techniques

familiar to the generation the series was aimed at. Whereas televisual representations of the

conflict have traditionally used contemporary music to immerse the viewer in the period, *Our*

World War clearly dispensed with this from the start, with the opening theme being *Invaders*

Must Die by electronic dance music group The Prodigy, released on their titular album in 2009.

It is worth highlighting here that this choice of audio style was echoed two years later, when

the *Battlefield 1* launch trailer was accompanied by an EDM remix of Seven Nation Army by

The Glitch Mob. While this comparison can only be made retrospectively, the series also

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[335] 'War Machine', *Our World War* (BBC Three, 21 August 2014).
[336] For a history of representations of the war in video games, see Chris Kempshall, *The First World War in Computer Games* (London: Palgrave, 2015).

adopted visual styles from games which many of its intended audience members would have been familiar with. During the episodes, the camera is occasionally placed on the barrel of a soldier's rifle or aimed over their shoulder; these are camera angles which are commonly used in video games (See Figure 3). Similarly, the first episode uses thermal imaging shots to depict the positions of soldiers from above. This is a particularly noticeable detraction from its content, given that thermal imaging would only be developed at a basic level several decades after the First World War. These elements are levels of creative licence and lack of concern for historicity which are likely to upset some historians, but the intention here is to present familiar visuals to younger viewers. The darker colour palette of the series also borrows from common aesthetic tropes in the design of promotional media materials, which strike a chord of familiarity with the viewer without having an explicit reference point. The use of blue and orange in particular has seen increased usage in promotional materials in recent years, with the two colours providing a strong visual contrast, and as such presenting contrasting themes such as good and evil. They are also commonly found on posters for movies which are aimed

at younger audiences. This utilisation of modern stylistic choices demonstrates how the ways we depict things in the present are being used to depict events from the past.
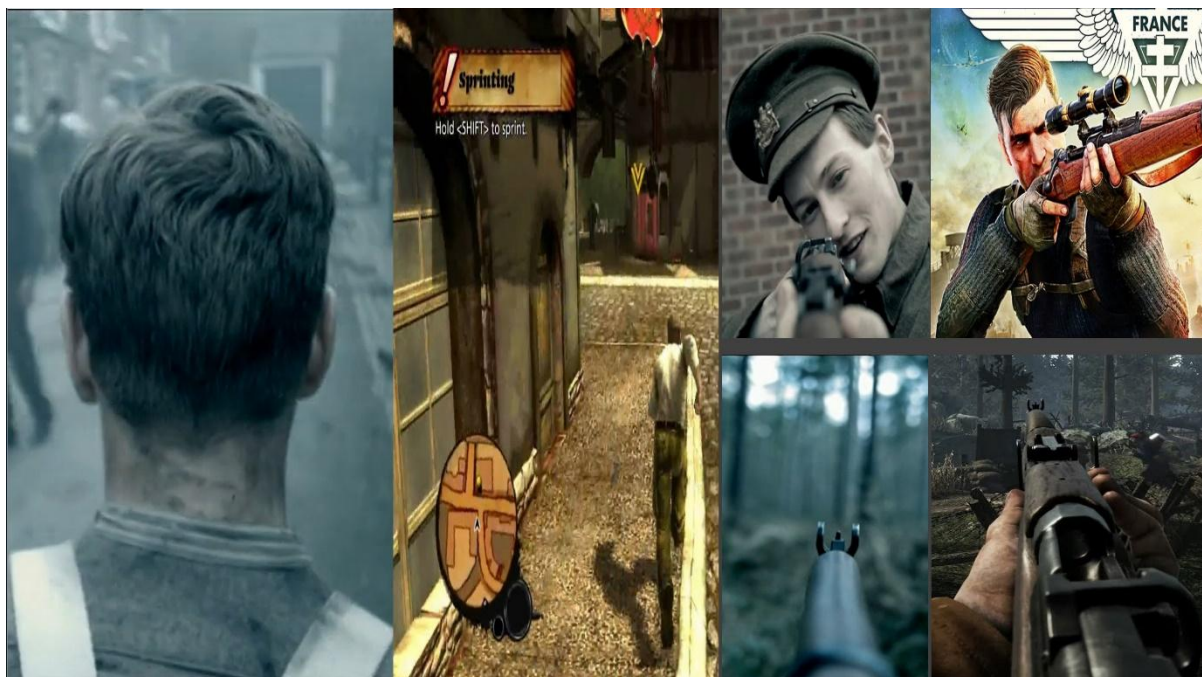

Figure 3 - Comparison of visuals between the series (the left) and video games (the right).

Viewing figures for all three episodes were too low to be recorded on BARB, though the data available indicates an audience of below 0.73 million. However, this is unsurprising for a channel that received such a small amount of live viewing that it was moved to being an online-only channel in February 2016, on the basis that younger people mostly watched content online, and it would help the corporation save money.[337] The shift towards more online content is a widespread phenomenon which has increased in line with the growth of the Internet over the past two decades. As people spend more time online, broadcasters have provided episodes and additional related content on their websites. Indeed, for *Our World War*, an interactive episode was made available on the BBC's website. The producer of the episode, Dan Tucker, noted that the episode is more like a drama which allows for some elements of control rather than an actual game, with the overall intention being 'a historically

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[337] 'BBC Three to be Axed as On-Air Channel', *BBC* (5 March 2014), https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-26447089 [Accessed 14 December 2022].

accurate experience that also tells you how good a leader you are'.[338] The elements of control

given were moments during the episode where the user had to choose an action in a short

amount of time. Ultimately, the user can only achieve one of two endings, as the producers

did not want to veer too far from historical accuracy. Upon completion, the user unlocks back-

stories of the soldiers involved, furthering the immersion and adding to its claims of historicity.

This is an illuminating demonstration of the BBC using the Internet to further their televisual

content, particularly in regard to engaging a younger audience.

These are significant examples of attempts to reach a broad stretch of the younger

generations during the Centenary, a hitherto broadly neglected audience in previous

representations of the First World War. Where a young person's usual engagement with the

First World War occurs in the classroom, televisual and online sources can expand on this and

present information in more entertaining and engaging ways than the average homework

assignment. Yet, lower age groups remain the hardest to be convinced of the significance of

the conflict. In 2018 the British Future report asked respondents if they felt the war was

relevant to them and grouped responses by age. While the categories for those aged 25 and

over all exceeded 53% in agreement with the statement, the age range of 18-24 had only 36%

agreement.[339] It should be noted, however, that an understanding of relevance is not the only

indicator of awareness, knowledge, or engagement. Younger people may struggle to identify

the impact of an event which occurred in a century outside their living memory. Furthermore,

they have grown up during a period with regular warfare; the war in Afghanistan (2001–2021)

and the Iraq War (2003–2011) being particularly prominent examples. This does not mean

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[338] 'BBC Taster – Our World War', *BBC*, https://www.bbc.co.uk/taster/pilots/our-world-war [Accessed 16 December 2022].
[339] Buckerfield and Ballinger, *The People's Centenary*, p. 18.

that young people are necessarily disinterested in the Great War, though. An understanding of the impact and relevance of the war can also arguably require a greater consideration of the events which occurred after 1918, and this is a topic which received scarce consideration during the Centenary. Younger generations are much more likely to approach the programmes and video games they interact with as topics for discussion, which can then lead to consideration of the subject matter itself. This is evidenced by widespread discussion of Centenary content online during the anniversary and the years that followed, which will be considered in the next chapter.

We can see evidence of clear and significant attempts to present a broader narrative of the war across various forms of media during the Centenary. The cornerstones of cultural memory in white experience and the Western Front have been reinforced for decades though, so reworking them will require more than a handful of television and radio programmes. Yet, new foundations have been laid, as evidenced by the report noting an increased awareness of Indian involvement in the war by the end of the Centenary. This has also lent itself to a broader geographical understanding of the war, with notable explorations of the war in places such as Gallipoli and Mesopotamia. Overall, it is a useful start, and it is worth remembering that the Centenary was intended to create a legacy of remembrance, not serve as a standalone event. In combination with the ongoing trend of genealogical research among the population, reminding a broader demographic that they are part of the narrative will arguably encourage them to find their own place in the story as well. Likewise, representing the war in ways appealing to younger audiences can help maintain an increasingly distant and fragile generational link.

This blend of televisual and online material begins to demonstrate the concept of a transmedia cultural memory. Yet, the availability of information online extends beyond broadcasters, and a much higher level of detail is available on dedicated websites, and discussions around both broadcaster and website content can be found across social media websites. Indeed, discussions about *Our World War* can be found on the website Reddit under the subcategory for the *Battlefield 1* (DICE/Electronic Arts, 2016) game.[340] Yet, these online fora have also revealed incongruities with attempts to broaden popular understanding of the war. Pertinently, one consideration of online discussions around *Battlefield 1* has found high levels of disapproval towards the inclusion of African-American soldiers in the game. This began with the cover art for the game, and "the reactions to the game's cover art that depicts an African-American soldier would set the pattern for the rejection of the inclusion of soldiers of color [*sic*] as the game was released."[341] Social media and discussion forums can be easily accessible venues for lively debate on an inconceivable scope of topics. They are one of the most prominent examples of an ongoing legacy for cultural memory. Yet, they are not without their pitfalls; free of the restrictions and rigour of academic settings or carefully edited television and radio content, they can also become echo chambers for opinions and arguments without sound evidential basis. These elements of interactivity and debate introduce elements to cultural memory hitherto unexplored by historians. Thus, it is these online spheres of interactional engagement to which we now turn.

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[340] See u/BenjiSalami, 'BBC: Our World War- I watched this on Netflix the other day. Only 3 episodes but pretty good quick watch on what it was like in WW1. Especially as a Landship crew member and what they dealt with', *Reddit* (19 May 2017) www.reddit.com/r/battlefield_one/comments/6c22lq/bbc_our_world_war_i_watched_this_on_netflix_the/ [Accessed 5 January 2023].

[341] Quiroga, 'Race, *Battlefield 1*', p. 189.

4   World War 1.0: Debating the Great War Online

> '[At] the going down of the sun, and in the morning, we will use the
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> centenary of the Armistice to make cheap political points on [T]witter'.[342]

Despite the prevalence of research into cultural memory of the Great War, and increasingly on memory in the digital age, the two strands remain largely separated. This lacuna means that cultural memory of the war has not been considered in terms of the impact of modern technology on our understanding and experience of a historical event. Use of the Internet as a source of research material remains something of a novelty for historians outside of the Digital Humanities, with the physical archive continuing to be held as the gold-standard of historical research. It is, however, the focus of the emerging field of History Communication, which seeks to examine precisely how history is presented to the public both online and offline. One of the scholars working in this field notes that

> how we understand, learn and communicate history has been completely disrupted by technology, historical information now a fragmented and atomized part of the news feed, intertwined with the onslaught of information that re-shapes our perceptions of reality each day.[343]

Communicating History online also forms the basis of the spread of cultural memory, and it does so with greater public involvement than academic and heritage institutions. The Internet

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[342] Jane Heybroek (@0Calamity), Tweet, *Twitter* (11 November 2018) https://twitter.com/0Calamity/status/1061605678450647045 [Accessed 16 February 2023].

[343] Steinhauer, *History Disrupted*, p. 3.

continues to amass a wealth of resources for the consideration of cultural memory from a bottom-up perspective; it allows researchers to see what members of the general public are saying about the Great War and its representations. Furthermore, online communities can also be viewed in terms of their participation in Public History, where history is co-produced *by* the public, rather than *for* them.

It should be noted that the majority of material in this chapter will be drawn from Reddit and Twitter. Websites such as these, and other open public social media sites such as Instagram, are often the focus of such research. While Facebook is a renowned cornerstone of the social media landscape, it is largely closed off to public observance. Access to much of its material is restricted to those who have an account or are a member of groups where content is posted. It is thus difficult to use as its references would be obscured to those who do not have accounts, and its closed nature also divides it from its more public competitors in terms of sharing content. As this section of the thesis is primarily concerned with the sharing and discussion of the representations of the war in media and centenary plans, and congruently the digital dissemination of cultural memory, open-access sites are the most relevant.

It should also be acknowledged here that the anonymity offered by the Internet often leads debate beyond the norms and standards expected in more academic settings. In 1969, the American psychologist Philip Zimbardo conducted an experiment which revealed that when given the anonymity of a mask, participants were more likely to issue an electric shock to another person when told to do so. The 'mask' of social media now allows people to engage in a more metaphorical form of shock, and the deindividuation provided by large collectives on such websites furthers their sense of anonymity. Furthermore, this issue also makes it

difficult to ascertain the nationality of users posting online. For this reason, this section of the thesis cannot claim to represent British cultural memory, but it does offer a glimpse of the ways cultural memory is being disseminated and discussed on the Internet.

This chapter will consider discussions about the conflict and its representations during the Centenary across several social media sites. It will open with some theoretical background consideration of the changing nature of traditional elements of cultural memory, such as space and statistics, noting that these aspects have taken on new meanings in the digital age. It will then consider certain categories of discussion during the Centenary; namely, engagement with Public History online, discussions and attitudes towards different forms of commemoration, the political implications of commemoration and poppies, and the benefits and complications of using modern technology to represent a historical event. It will ultimately demonstrate that these exchanges provide instances of public interaction with the past which are vital for understanding how cultural memory of the Great War is moulded and reinforced in the digital age, but that the ways we talk about the past have also been irrevocably altered by modern methods of communication. It will conclude by noting that an awareness of the impact of the new on understanding of the old is vital, and will also balance the question of whether such sources actually demonstrate the democratising power afforded by the Internet.

Spatial Awareness: Physical *versus* Digital Sites of Memory

One of the defining aspects of the Internet as a source of Public History activity is its existence outside the realm of academic and institutional history. While such organisations have a presence online, much discussion takes place in alternative areas. Such communities provide

critical insights into cultural memory in the digital age, and its metamorphosis outside of the academy. As Maggie Andrews has highlighted, 'historians have to recognize and reconcile themselves to the existence of multiple forms of knowledge about the past, and to the excitement and possibilities of the histories that lie beyond the academy'.[344] While historians have remained concerned with how representations of the war on media such as television are impacting public understanding of the war, the public themselves are conducting their own discussions and producing individual representations online. As will be noted later in this chapter, initiatives to engage the public with history, such as the AskHistorians subreddit on Reddit, are placing the responsibility of informing the public outside academic institutions. These developments mean that 'historians are forced to confront issues of shared authority and public engagement because the past can, and is, being created, accessed and restored without them through digital mediums'.[345] The ability of the public to not merely discuss the war online, but also to produce their own materials on and representations of it, is one of the most defining aspects of the Internet as a Public History space.

Of course, for any activity, the Internet has its own peculiarities when considering its spatial nature. Considering the production of materials and memorials in the physical world comes with its own set of analytical and methodological practices, such as the traditional understandings of place and cultural memory explored in the introduction. Digital materials, conversely, have their own idiosyncrasies which require them to be appraised in different ways. For example, while the physical world presents obvious and measurable forms of scale, distance, and position, 'digital media has contributed to a sense of collapsing of distances and

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[344] Andrews, 'Tropes and Trench Cakes', p. 509.
[345] Meg Foster, 'Online and Plugged in? Public History and Historians in the Digital Age', *Public History Review*, 21.0 (2014), p. 4.

ultimately of space'.[346] Indeed, there is no real sense of distance on the Internet. Spaces may be divided into websites, wherein there is little sense of distance beyond different pages, yet even across individual websites, the ease and speed of transitioning between them can have the effect of blurring these digital boundaries. Furthermore, '*e*-history is fragmentary, not confined to the linear chronology or epistemic authority of a textbook, lecture, syllabus or museum exhibit'.[347] Websites have little sense of geographical location beyond the indications of domain names or server locations. In this manner, 'the non-space of the World Wide Web allows forms of remembrance that are distinctly located in the place where the projects are produced'.[348] Thus, online memorials have no real location; even when they are memorialising a particular event, such as the Turkish-Australian Gallipoli digital commemorations to which Cevik-Compiegne is referring here, they are not specifically located in Turkey or Australia. The use of maps can offer a sense of the location, but its reproduction in digital form removes the tangible nature of a physical space. This 'non-space' thus means that the audiences for online memorials are also naturally broader than those for physical memorials, as they are available to anyone with Internet access. Simultaneously, this blurring of boundaries also somewhat nullifies a national sense of cultural memory, whereby it is reformed among different online communities.

Yet the line between the physical and digital worlds can also become distorted when the physical world is represented online. While much of the content available (and considered in this chapter) is born-digital, i.e., originally created digitally, there is an increasing amount of content which is digitised and then shared online. Digitisation of physical objects and artefacts

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[346] Burcu Cevik-Compiegne, '"As Long as the Internet Lasts": Harnessing the Digital Turn in Turkish-Australian Gallipoli Centenary Commemorations', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 43.3 (2022), p. 320.
[347] Steinhauer, *History Disrupted,* p. 16.
[348] Ibid.

by heritage institutions will be considered more closely in the next chapter. What is relevant here, is the sharing of the physical world in digital spaces, most notably through photographs of memorial sites shared on websites such as Instagram and Flickr. When physical objects are digitised and uploaded online, their sense of physicality and location is diminished, yet the potential audience is increased. One such initiative to this end was the Europeana project, which collected artefacts from members of the public to be digitised, yet ceased to exist in December 2014.[349] While it is difficult to accurately convey the scale and locality of memorials online, the act of sharing them is usually more closely connected to the individual sharing it than the site itself. Often, the individual wishes to share some sense of their experience of the site, or its impact, thereby bringing the emotional experiences evoked by a physical space online.

> Taking pictures of a memorial, contextualising them with captions and sharing them on social media, can constitute a process of enacting the emotional affordances of digital media. When this process is successful, the enacting of place through digital media becomes a practice of presencing [*sic*] the past through emotions.[350]

Thus, the process of digitisation allows the individual to simultaneously share images of the site alongside their emotional experiences with a wider audience, an act which is much harder to reproduce in the physical realm. Cultural memory of the First World War is often an emotive and sensitive subject in particular, as will be shown when considering online responses to Centenary activity.

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[349] Europeana 1914-1918 (2023), https://pro.europeana.eu/project/europeana1914-1918 [Accessed 15 October 2024].
[350] Bareither, 'Capture the Feeling', p. 583.

Just as sharing personal stories was an apparent trend of the Centenary, sharing experiences is a central principle in the purposes of social media. In addition to the more mundane daily updates, social media also sees a repeated boon of activity on observed anniversaries such as Remembrance Day. Historically, this event has traditionally been observed through ceremonies in churches and at war memorials, with the Last Post being performed on a bugle before the gathered crowd shares the two-minute Silence. Since the broadcast era, these services have been aired on television channels, combining public commemoration with private commemoration in the viewer's home. As Steven Brown has noted, 'this closing of the commemorative circle through broadcast technology seems to push the object of recollection out of the silence itself. We are silent watching ourselves being silent'.[351] Thus, the broadcast of a memorial event combines senses of personal and collective cultural memory.

Such acts are now also mirrored by the practice of observing the Silence online. In the minutes before 11am on 11 November, websites such as Facebook and Twitter will see a plethora of posts offered in commemoration, typically the famous words from Laurence Binyon's *For the Fallen* ('At the going down of the sun and in the morning. We will remember them'). It is generally deemed bad form to post anything in the following two minutes. This demonstrates how 'silence' is viewed online – it is the absence of content. This is understandable, given that if one ignores audio sources such as videos and adverts, much of the Internet is silent. Social media posts, however, still represent utterances from individuals, an ongoing stream of people speaking into the digital void, and as thus constitute 'noise'. So, by posting a message signalling the beginning of the Silence, the individual shares their

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[351] Steven D. Brown, 'Two Minutes of Silence: Social Technologies of Public Commemoration', *Theory & Psychology*, 22.2 (2012), p. 245.

moment of commemoration across the Internet, and simultaneously signals their participation.

The latter point here signals why someone would choose to post a message at all. The Silence is generally viewed as a public activity at war memorials, yet is has also been privately observed by individuals without any statement of doing so to others, at least since the middle of the 20th century. This act is likely a result of another factor of engagement with social media – social pressure. In tandem with failing to wear a poppy, not observing the Silence can be viewed by some as a social *faux pas* likely to result in disapproval from others. Indeed, the Poppy Watch *Twitter* account discussed during this chapter noted that a user with their name set as 'Lest We Forget' posted during the Silence, noting 'I guess you forgot'.[352] Therefore, by posting words of commemoration online before the Silence, and by not posting during the Silence, individuals are signalling to others that they are privately partaking in the public event. Of course, posts to social media are also often made with another motive – attracting 'likes', which results in a dopamine hit for the user, and conversely results in negative effects when this is not achieved.[353] Thus, the Internet has also introduced an increased sense of obligation to upholding remembrance of the First World War, to an extent not seen prior to the broadcast age.

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[352] Poppy® Watch (@giantpoppywatch), Tweet, *Twitter* (11 November 2017), https://twitter.com/giantpoppywatch/status/929309579372122112 [Accessed 23 March 2023].
[353] Hae Yeon Lee et al, 'Getting Fewer "Likes" than Others on Social Media Elicits Emotional Distress Among Victimized Adolescents', *Child Development*, 91.6 (2020), pp. 2141–2159.

Quantifying Memories

Some may argue that a focus around the emotive connections of posts is a rather optimistic view of the utilisation of social media. These online collectives are commonly associated with a drive for 'likes' (on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram), or similar forms of interest signifiers such as retweets/shares (Twitter/Facebook) or upvotes (Reddit and YouTube), and the resulting quantification of experience can ultimately inform what is shared. This drive for interaction can also result in a co-dependent relationship between the individual sharing the post and their experience of the related place or event. A study into the impact of the number of 'likes' on an individual's Facebook post revealed that there was a correlation between the number of likes the post received and how positive the individual retrospectively felt about the connected event. Therefore, 'even a seemingly crude metric such as the number of Facebook likes can change how memories are understood and felt in everyday life'.[354]

Clearly, this observation relates to a more immediate notion of memory than the one at the core of this thesis. Yet, if a drive for likes impacts an individual's decision to create a post, it will similarly impact their decision to share posts of memorials and heritage sites, or indeed to offer opinions on cultural memory and its representations which might be deemed unpopular. Furthermore, the likelihood of others to see a post is impacted by the website's algorithms, which are largely centred around promoting popular content. 'What is determined to be the most optimal result by the algorithm is based on what is measurable'.[355] While some photos of memorials and heritage sites do appear online, these algorithms (alongside the variety of hashtags used to label them) can often make it difficult to locate them, particularly

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[354] Benjamin N. Jacobsen and David Beer, 'Quantified Nostalgia: Social Media, Metrics, and Memory', *Social Media + Society*, 7.2 (2021), p. 4.
[355] Steinhauer, *History Disrupted,* p. 12.

when attempting to focus on a certain time period. Thus, digitised images of memorial sites are a minimal element of this chapter. However, a number of institutions and memorials maintain their own social media pages, including Instagram, so these will be considered in the next chapter when larger scale online presences become the focus.

Of course, quantification also holds a role in the posting of textual content, as do the related algorithms. One of the central ideas behind Twitter is to post content which will result in likes and retweets (other users resharing the content), intending to generate the largest impact and engagement level possible. The issue with the research matter at hand here, is that the production of (or engagement with) posts relating to commemoration of the war is not inherently about memorialisation, but also as a performative act to generate engagement. The sculptors of contemporary war memorials probably wanted people to admire their work, but the impetus was undeniably to create a memorial, not to produce the most popular sculpture in the world. Thus, all posts online must be considered with their intent to be popular, alongside the potential for reinforcing or changing cultural memory of the war. Furthermore, website users will sometimes intuit the authenticity of a post based on the number of likes it has received. In this manner, the public are appraising information online in different ways to researchers. To some, this may appear a poor substitute for rigorous source analysis, yet the public will generally work with the information immediately available to them.

> Although counting on heuristic cues (e.g., the number of likes) while ignoring
>
> more substantial information (e.g., argument quality) may signal cursory
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> information processing, if only heuristic cues are available, and if those cues

generally work in most situations, utilizing such cues may reflect a more

effortful cognitive process than turning a blind eye to them'.[356]

As explored earlier in this thesis, a traditional sense of historical authenticity is gained in vastly

different ways to how it is understood here. Indeed, an academic historian would be deeply

uncomfortable in appraising a source based on something as arbitrary as an engagement-

signifying number attached to it.

Yet, this is how much of the public engages with social media posts, and such numbers

are thereby worthwhile paying attention to when considering engagement with such sources.

It should also be noted that quantification approval of content works slightly differently across

social media sites. Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter all have similar versions of 'liking' and

sharing a post, although Facebook also has a variety of 'react' options allowing users to express

a more specific emotional response to a post (love, care, laugh, surprise, sadness, and anger).

Reddit features the ability to both upvote (i.e., like) and downvote (i.e., dislike) posts, and thus

has a broader numerical scale representing popular response to a post or comment. There are

few examples of posts with a negative vote count in this thesis, as comments and posts

attracting downvotes are more commonly found in more popular subreddits exploring more

controversial issues. Public History rarely attracts the level of ire and controversy found in

subreddits of a more political or personal nature, allowing discussions of cultural memory in

some cases to avoid becoming mired in controversy.

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[356] Lee, 'Authenticity Model of (Mass-Oriented) Computer-Mediated Communication', p. 65.

Public History: Reddit and Beyond

Of all the websites considered in this thesis, none have made as dedicated an effort towards Public History as Reddit, a social news and discussion forum website. Founded in June 2005, the site receives approximately 50 million daily active users, nearly half of which are in the United States. The site is divided into 'subreddits', which are separate forums dedicated to the discussion of a particular topic. These subreddits are identified on the website (and in this thesis) through their position after the 'r/' in the web address. While the concentration of American users makes it impossible to appraise the site as a source of cultural memory in Britain, it is nonetheless a vital source of Public History activity. This is partly because among its 2.8 million subreddits are numerous fora dedicated to discussing different aspects of history, whereby discussions about the history of the First World War can feed into cultural memory in a more casual space.

Most prominent among these is the r/AskHistorians subreddit. Created in August 2011 and, at the time of writing, consisting of 2.1 million members (or 'Readers', as the subreddit refers to them), it prides itself on being an open and free source of Public History. Its creators champion its ability to reach a wide audience, noting that it 'receives 2 million unique visitors each month – more visitors than any single public heritage site or institution in the United Kingdom'.[357] While it's reasonable for them to champion their popularity, it does rather ignore the fact that it is easier to access a website than to go and visit a building in a specific place, and the latter activity generally results in a longer time spent in that space. Moreover, the focus is on knowledge sharing rather than status or reputation boosting, and this was similarly

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[357] Fraser Raeburn, Lisa Baer-Tsarfati, and Viktoria Porter, 'Out of the Ivory Tower, into the Digital World? Democratising Scholarly Exchange', *History*, 107.375 (2022), p. 288.

achieved through a virtual conference held by the subreddit in 2020, albeit something of a forced choice due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

> Our aim in adopting this model was to both give speakers an opportunity to reach an audience much larger than would be possible at an in-person event, and to ensure that these conversations would be enriched and transformed by the inclusion of minoritised voices.[358]

The aspect of anonymity makes AskHistorians highly unusual as a discussion ground for History. While debates also take place on social media sites such as Twitter, it is less usual for Twitter users to claim anonymity, with many academics using their real names and displaying their institutional affiliations in their 'bios' (personal descriptions). Academic history is largely centred around this perception of experience and authority. As noted by Jason Steinhauer, 'professional history must uphold expectations of accuracy, seriousness, rigor and sophistication, and gate-keeping ensures that only those with the proper qualifications and deference to prior scholarship assume central positions of power'.[359] One could assume that AskHistorians would nevertheless consist largely of academics debating under the cover of anonymised names, yet this is not the case. The creators carried out a survey of their user base and discovered that 'fewer than 10 per cent of our subscribers either work in a historical field (academia or the wider heritage sector) or are undertaking postgraduate study in a historical discipline'.[360] Therefore, AskHistorians represents Public History in its entirety, from those who ask the questions to those who give the answers, while also disseminating any sense of distance between academic historians, Public History and cultural memory.

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[358] Ibid., p. 289.
[359] Steinhauer, *History Disrupted,* p. 9.
[360] Raeburn, Baer-Tsarfati, and Porter, 'Out of the Ivory Tower', p. 299.

It is worth noting, however, that the forum is not devoid of the influences of academic History. There are rules which apply to the questions asked and, more relevantly, the answers given. The rules state that answers to questions 'should be in-depth, comprehensive, accurate, and based off of good quality sources […] in line with the existing Historiography on the topic, and written in a manner respecting the Historical Method'.[361] Such rigorous attitudes towards responses is something of an anomaly for such a website, where comment sections are open to opining on matters without regard to reason or evidence; though other subreddits formed around the basis of offering help on certain matters tend to be slightly more restrictive about engagement, they are not as restrained as AskHistorians.

There are other subreddits related to the Great War where users are free to engage with each other without the limitations of rules (beyond the website's own terms of service). One of these is r/wwi. With a userbase of 27,000 as of September 2024, it is far smaller than AskHistorians, and it is also narrower in content. The 'About Community' section defines the subreddit as being 'dedicated to the discussion of the history, art, culture and commemoration of World War One (1914–1918)'.[362] There are similar variations on the name (such as r/ww1), but as r/wwi featured more discussion around the Centenary, posts from that subreddit feature in this thesis. Considering both the AskHistorians and r/wwi subreddits thus offers the opportunity to observe the dissemination of cultural memory in slightly different contexts.

In addition to considering representations of the conflict during the Centenary, the AskHistorians subreddit also frequently offered opportunities for readers to expand their

[361] 'AskHistorians', _Reddit_ (2023), https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/wiki/rules/ [Accessed 2 March 2023].

[362] 'WWI: The Great War in History, Art and Culture', _Reddit_ (2023), https://www.reddit.com/r/wwi/ [Accessed 14 March 2023].

knowledge about the war itself through AMA (Ask Me Anything) posts, wherein a topic would be provided, and users could ask questions related to the topic(s) which either the proposed panel or other users would answer. This is more directly connected to the notion that the Centenary was 'a once in a hundred years opportunity for education about 1914–18'.[363] It is also an unusual one, because it is not relying purely on academics to provide the education.

Unsurprisingly, one of the first AMAs to occur in 2014 was focused on the shooting of Franz Ferdinand. It was posted on the hundredth anniversary of his assassination, and though the shooting was the focal point, it also allowed for broader questions. A panel of users were introduced to respond to the questions, but only their research areas were provided. The questions and responses which followed offer valuable insight into what the public (albeit one actively engaged with learning about history through membership of such a subreddit) wanted to learn about the war. One user inquired about the 'starting position' for each of the powers, i.e., their military strength.[364] Having received answers comparing the naval power of Britain and Germany, the contrast in their imperial obligations, and an in-depth analysis of militarism in France, they responded gratefully, noting that 'this is a fascinating, yet intimidating, area of study. Thank you for making the subject more approachable!'[365] This is perhaps reflective of the fact that it can feel easier for someone to obtain information about History in an anonymised setting, rather than at a more formal academic event.

Others asked about the usefulness of the cavalry in the face of modern war and weaponry, the personal hygiene of soldiers in the trenches, and if attitudes towards Germany

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[363] Sheffield, 'A Once in a Century Opportunity?', p. 2.
[364] Comment by u/anthropology_nerd on 'Centenary AMA: Shooting of Franz Ferdinand and WWI', *Reddit* (28 June 2014), https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/29bsz6/comment/cijfztw/ [Accessed 27 March 2023].
[365] Ibid.

were as negative as they were during the Second World War.[366] It is worth noting, however, that the majority of the questions posted in the comment thread went unanswered. This is perhaps symptomatic of the more informal format, and the knowledge base of those contributing to the AMA – some of the questions veered considerably from the original topic, or asked questions which could only be responded to with speculation which, even in the less formal setting of AskHistorians, people are often uncomfortable offering. Even with a lack of responses, however, the range of questions asked demonstrates a broad interest in the war among the public at the start of the Centenary, beyond the more common topics of discussion in the 'mud, blood and poetry' style associated with the 1960s.

In addition to details about the war, the AMAs also considered popular representations of the conflict, to allow the public to better understand why the war is portrayed through such cultural means in the modern era. One of these was posted on 1 July 2016, the 100th anniversary of the first day of the Battle of the Somme. The post acknowledged the events of that day, and the intention to break the ongoing stalemate on the Western Front, while also noting that the battle 'has come to be a byword for the war itself, at least as far as the Western Front is concerned'. The scope of the AMA was again broader than indicated – 'Readers are welcome to ask questions about any aspect of the war they wish – from the opening days of 1914 to the many post-Armistice problems that endured into the 1920s', and noted that questions about art, literature, and games were also welcome.[367]

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[366] See thread 'Centenary AMA: Shooting of Franz Ferdinand and WWI', *Reddit* (28 June 2014), https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/29bsz6/centenary_ama_shooting_of_franz_ferdinand_and_wwi/ [Accessed 27 March 20230.

[367] u/NMW, 'AMA – World War One in History, Art, and Games', *Reddit* (1 July 2016), https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/4qrum0/ama_world_war_one_in_history_art_and_games/ [Accessed 1 February 2023].

One of the questions struck right at the heart of a key consideration in this thesis – how the war is represented and the accuracy of such efforts.

> Representation of history is always difficult for media; war is either romanticized or demonized, correct in technicalities or correct in spirit, or used as a vehicle to explore larger issues and concepts. While this is how media portrays warfare and specific events in war, how does WWI stack? Is there a particular piece of WWI in media that you find absolutely appalling? Is there one that you find is a go to for everyone?[368]

One response criticises footage released of *Battlefield 1*, arguing that developers should 'include words like "alternate" or "interpretation" when you're going to be marketing a very loose depiction of a serious historical event to children. Make no mistake, over 50% of that game's audience will be under age'[369] There are two issues to be addressed here. Firstly, it is not the fault of developers or publishers if people below the age certification play the game – they produce content for the intended audience. Secondly, all video games created about the war have to take at least some artistic licence with regard to accuracy, as the war included a lot of mundane activity which would not engage a playing audience.

Furthermore, it seems unfair to assume that the entire audience will view the portrayal as an accurate representation of war, or that they do not understand the seriousness of the related event. Indeed, prior to the 2018 anniversary of the Armistice, the community in the *Battlefield 1* subreddit were sharing ideas on how to commemorate the

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[368] Comment by u/DonaldFDraper on 'AMA – World War One in History, Art, and Games'.
[369] Comment by u/Othais on 'AMA – World War One in History, Art, and Games'.

event, such as having a ceasefire.[370] Moreover, the user acknowledges that 'it will drive more interest in history so I can't say it is a net-negative. The only real trouble is how many people, once they "learn" something from a favorite [*sic*] game or TV show, will double down on false information'. They then go on to note that *Verdun* (M2H/Blackmill Games, 2015) makes a respectable effort to reflect the realities of the conflict which, while not exact, is close enough.[371] This was responded to by another user, who suggested that 'if EA/Dice found a way to communicate some kind of context or background throughout the game, I'd probably be more comfortable with it', going on to note that their own interest in the Second World War was inspired by playing *Medal of Honor* (Dreamworks Interactive/Electronic Arts, 1999).[372] This demonstrates the sense of importance towards authentic representations of the war on television transferring to a similar consideration for more modern forms of media and cultural representations.

This argument is also somewhat reflective of the difference between older and more modern video games. Many first-person shooter (FPS) games released today are largely geared towards multiplayer content, with single-player campaigns often receiving less attention. A few decades ago, when Internet access was less widespread, and only available at much slower speeds, single-player experiences took the fore. Thus, it is rare for such games to explore in-depth the history which inspired them. Nonetheless, as noted here, they do still

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[370] See u/godsdead, 'First World War Centenary', *Reddit* (16 October 2018), https://www.reddit.com/r/battlefield_one/comments/9omw4t/first_world_war_centenary/ [Accessed 31 January 2023]; u/lightningbadger, 'During this years [*sic*] minute of silence, we shouldn't be able to harm each other', *Reddit* (13 October 2018), https://www.reddit.com/r/battlefield_one/comments/9nxr66/during_this_years_minute_of_silence_we_sho uldnt/ [Accessed 31 January 2023]; u/TsarBomba88, 'After Battlefield V's delay, Dice now has a chance to mark the centenary of the end of the war on 11th November in Battlefield 1', *Reddit* (31 August 2018), https://www.reddit.com/r/battlefield_one/comments/9brgql/after_battlefield_vs_delay_dice_now_has_a_ch ance/ [Accessed 31 January 2023].
[371] Comment by u/Othais on 'AMA – World War One in History, Art, and Games'.
[372] Ibid., u/coinsinmyrocket.

encourage the players to think about the events being represented. It should also be noted that even where cultural representations of the war can perpetuate inaccurate stereotypes, it is possible for people to later have such perceptions challenged and altered. An additional commenter in the thread noted that in their youth they were greatly fond of *Blackadder Goes Forth* (BBC One, 1989), viewing it as 'sharp, funny, well-produced, and (to my mind at the time) extremely daring in its approach to something that I viewed as an unutterably stupid event'. Yet, having learned in greater detail about the conflict, 'the more and more I read of it, the less and less impressed I've become with every element of Blackadder's approach to it'.[373] This again raises the question of whether or not cultural representations of the war should hold responsibility for teaching their audiences about it as accurately as possible. Producers of popular media want their products to be well-received, thus they are generally more concerned with being entertaining. If such representations are at least providing opportunities for engagement with the war, there remains some hope that others will come to have their misconceptions corrected through other avenues. It is also demonstrative of people reforming their opinions on cultural representations of the First World War based on expanded learning, indicating an amalgamation of the different sources which feed and shape cultural memory. In the meantime, however, what is popular often remains at odds with what is proper.

In a more direct attempt to engage with cultural representations of the war, the commenter whose views on *Blackadder* were just noted posted a separate post offering answers to queries about First World War literature. Breaking with the anonymity of Reddit, they noted that they are 'a part-time professor in the English department of a large Canadian

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[373] Ibid., u/NMW.

university', and that their 'area of expertise is how it tends to be presented in art'. They acknowledge the role of the media in being responsible for what much of the general public understands about the conflict, and also note that their familiarity lies in British examples. The post received 96 upvotes, suggesting it was a popular topic with the subreddit users.[374]

In terms of modern interpretations, one query (which is now notably outdated) questions why 'there is not a German film version of *All Quiet on the Western Front* [my italics]. Is there a particular cultural reason for this?'[375] NMW notes that while the novel was internationally popular, the situation in Germany was more complicated, originating with difficulties in getting the story published, compounded by the Nazis disrupting screenings of the 1930 film.[376] Of course, a German version of the film has since been released, yet it has still been less positively received in its home country, albeit for reasons more closely related to its loose adherence to the original story than to the political ramifications of its anti-war message. Nevertheless, this demonstrates the importance of cultural memory, and in particular the role of broadcasting in shaping it, to encourage people to think beyond their own borders and consider the experiences of other nations in the conflict.

One user was curious about contemporary representations of the conflict, asking 'what kind of footage of the war tended to be used in early films of the time?'[377] The author notes that 'after the war, the films that were made about it tended to rely heavily on stock footage obtained by filmmakers like those above to flesh out their battle sequences', as well as the use of staged footage.[378] This is another useful nod towards the fact that concerns

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[374] u/NMW, '(AMA) – World War One in History and Literature (and other things!)', *Reddit* (1 May 2013), https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/1dhg0h/ama_world_war_one_in_history_and_literature_and/ [Accessed 2 February 2023].

[375] Comment by u/TRB1783 on '(AMA) – World War One in History and Literature'.

[376] Comment by u/NMW on '(AMA) – World War One in History and Literature'.

[377] Comment by u/IAMAVelociraptorAMA on '(AMA) – World War One in History and Literature'.

[378] Comment by u/NMW on '(AMA) – World War One in History and Literature'.

over authenticity have been in question from the earliest representations of the conflict. Emblematic of a common tendency to view the First World War in comparison with the Second World War, someone noted that 'it seems that to Americans, WWII was the big war of the century, yet it seems that in Europe, WWI was the "Great War." Regarding cultural memory, is WWI or WWII a greater cultural memory point in Europe?'[379] In response, NMW noted that this is something which academics still argue about, which were likely 'only going to get worse over the next five years as all other historical commemoration is pushed to the side by the need to remember the ever-rolling centenary of a 1,500-day event'. In an attempt to precis a complicated topic, they suggest that 'the First World War created the modern age, and the Second then came to define it', with the caveat that this is not a definitive answer.[380] This is illustrative not simply because it demonstrates a curiosity towards the public's tendency to view the two wars in different ways (and the basis of this), but because it also exposes the fact that while websites such as Reddit can make valuable attempts to bring Public History to a broad audience, it is difficult to use it to convey detailed arguments and reasoning. This is reflected in the fact that many of the questions posted in the comment thread again went unanswered. The answer given here was couched in terms establishing that it was not a comprehensive response, and thus it gives the querier an idea from which they would need to seek further details themselves. In this manner, Public History online can be very similar to television, which presents a brief account serving as a possible springboard for further investigation, rather than offering detailed analysis and arguments.

Aside from dedicated AMAs, readers of AskHistorians also asked their own questions during the Centenary. One of these sought to discover what the Germans hoped to gain by

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[379] Comment by u/frolfking on '(AMA) – World War One in History and Literature'.
[380] Comment by u/NMW on '(AMA) – World War One in History and Literature'.

entering into the war. They note that they 'have never seen a satisfying explanation for Germany's motivations, especially given its role in escalating the conflict'. They could see the potential geographical gains for other countries, but not Germany, and thus questioned what their goals were.[381] This has been an area of considerable discussion since the conflict, and indeed the response provided highlights that it 'was actually a pretty controversial subject for a lot of people because the Fischer Thesis tackles this directly -- and Fischer happened to be a German historian in post-WW2 Europe'. Somewhat disappointingly, the answer remains focused on this specific aspect, rather than providing a breadth of considerations, though it does note the popularity of the considerations of 'expansionist gains'.[382] Therefore, it does little to broaden the questioner's knowledge beyond notions of expansionism and imperialist ambitions. One would hope that programmes such as *37 Days* would have helped increase understanding for the reasons behind the outbreak of war in other countries; yet, it could be argued that for this purpose, older programmes such as *1914: Moving Towards War* were broader in their geographical scope when considering the origins of the First World War.

There have been considerations of the relationship between Public History and academics in other areas of the World Wide Web. In 2015, historian Jonathan Boff noted that 'Historians give media flak for lack of innovation #ww1 centenary. But what new interpretations hv [*sic*] we produced recently? Tooze tried. Others?'[383] This raises interesting questions. Have historians expected the media to do more than they themselves necessarily achieved during the Centenary? There was a widespread desire to increase public

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[381] u/delighted_donkey, 'What did Germany Hope to Gain from Entry into WWI?', *Reddit* (22 August 2014), https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/2eam38/what_did_germany_hope_to_gain_from_entry_into_wwi/ [Accessed 2 February 2023].
[382] Comment by u/[deleted] on 'What did Germany Hope to Gain From Entry into WWI?'.
[383] Jonathan Boff (@JonathanBoff), Tweet, *Twitter* (23 March 2015), https://twitter.com/JonathanBoff/status/580117830114385920 [Accessed 14 February 2023].

understanding of the conflict, yet there was an apparent disconnect between how the fields were going to achieve that. Boff adds to this by clarifying that 'I don't mean to say some v good books haven't been written, BTW [by the way]. Just that no-one's tried to change Big Picture of #ww1 #fww'.[384] The caveat here being that there was, of course, a commendable amount of research published during the Centenary. Yet, there were also commendable outputs from the media. This demonstrates the fact that each medium may need to be appraised on its own merits, rather than in comparison to the other. Indeed, historian Jessica Meyer responded questioning if 'books have to be Big Picture to be innovative?' Boff noted that they don't, but that 'if we're to hold ourselves to same standard of impact as we do the media, scale is important I think'.[385] This is an interesting point, because the argument commonly raised by historians about the media is that they do not seem to hold themselves to the same standards of academic rigour, whereas this suggests that there are arguments to be made regarding the ways in which academics present their research.

Debates over the relationship and interaction between the media and historians were considered in the introduction, with both parties being partial to frustration at the other not meeting their requirements. The answer cannot be for each side to simply stay in their lane, as they need to work together, but perhaps a better understanding of their unique roles is important. Indeed, historian Chris Kempshall, while commenting on a talk by Mark Connelly at a launch event for Kempshall's book, noted that Connelly 'says that the centenary reinforced the idea that it might not be the job of academic historians to come in and tell the public things. Especially when the public are already informed on matters'.[386] Historians

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[384] Jonathan Boff (@JonathanBoff), Tweet, *Twitter* (23 March 2015), https://twitter.com/JonathanBoff/status/580244148676071424 [Accessed 14 February 2023].
[385] Ibid.
[386] Chris Kempshall (@ChrisKempshall), Tweet, *Twitter* (28 November 2018), https://twitter.com/ChrisKempshall/status/1067828244391620610 [Accessed 14 February 2023].

understandably feel that their job is unpacking and interpreting the past. Yet, the output

largely remains the interest of other academics. With much academic research locked behind

paywalled journals and budget-stretching book prices, it is not of easy access for the general

public either. Yet, this also raises the possibility for historians to engage with the public in

alternative ways, such as through various outreach methods. Such initiatives will be

considered in the next chapter, but the point to be highlighted here is that even with the

growth of the Internet, the relationship between academics, the media, and the public,

remains a complicated one. As noted earlier though, there are opportunities for the fields to

combine and share in the opportunity to shape and broaden cultural memory of the conflict.

Commemoration and Controversy

There was much discussion relating to the Centenary across Reddit. Posts discussing the

anniversary of the conflict appeared before it had even begun. At the end of 2013, user NMW

shared a *Daily Mail* article in which German academics had expressed their dissatisfaction at

the country's lack of plans for the Centenary.[387] Commenters on the subreddit post were

generally more sympathetic to the reasons behind this than the tone of the *Mail* article. One

user noted that 'Considering that WWI and the interwar turmoil fueled [*sic*] the rise of what

was arguably the worst regime of the 20th century with all the death and atrocities that came

with it, I can see why Germany is a bit reluctant to participate'.[388] An understanding of the

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[387] Gerri Peev, 'Germany Shuns 1914 Centenary', *Daily Mail* (30 December 2013),
https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2530907/Germany-shuns-1914-First-World-War-centenary-Academics-say-country-adopted-stupid-inappropriate-reluctance-commemorate-start-war.html [Accessed 14 March 2023].
[388] Comment by u/LOLBaltSS on 'Controversy | German Academics Condemn German Government's Reluctance to Commit to Centenary Plans', *Reddit* (31 December 2013),
https://www.reddit.com/r/wwi/comments/1u18k4/controversy_german_academics_condemn_german/
[Accessed 14 March 2023].

difficulties behind the issue was shared by the post's author, who reflected that 'the *Mail* is the *Mail*, but this does seem to be a rather complicated situation that's brewing. I'm not sure what I'd expect from the German government on this given the very different shape that the war must take in popular German memory'.[389] These comments show a refreshing appreciation of the variation and complexities in cultural memory of the war across international borders. In tandem with the notion of 'forgotten' histories discussed in the previous chapter, they highlight the fact that sometimes a lack of remembrance can be slightly more intentional. Germany by no means ignored the Centenary of the conflict, but it holds less of an emotional connection with the war than nations such as Britain, France, and Australia.

Of course, not everyone is capable of realising the nuances behind contentious topics. One user argued that Germany should not commemorate the war, 'nor should any other country. The entire war was a disaster that accomplished nothing for these nations, Britain is just using it as a glamorous excuse to splash money and pretend they were on the right side of history'. They also noted the lack of commemoration for Britain's involvement in the Iraq war. [390] They were downvoted for their comment, and the author, in their capacity as a moderator of the subreddit, asked them to 'stop using this subreddit as a soapbox for your reductive editorializing'.[391] This is both an espousal of 1960s ideas towards the conflict, yet the negative reaction towards it also indicates something of a shift away from such ideas. The user's comment arguably demonstrates what happens when wars are viewed as an amalgam,

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[389] Comment by u/NMW on 'Controversy | German Academics Condemn German Government's Reluctance to Commit to Centenary Plans'.

[390] Comment by u/CUNTBERT_RAPINGTON on 'Controversy | German Academics Condemn German Government's Reluctance to Commit to Centenary Plans'.

[391] Comment by u/NMW on 'Controversy | German Academics Condemn German Government's Reluctance to Commit to Centenary Plans'.

rather than individual events with their own causes and consequences. Cultural memory of one war is not cultural memory of all wars (even if the cultural memory of the First World War is distorted through retrospect by the Second World War). An understanding of the conflict is thus important to ensure the public understand why particular historical events are commemorated more than others.

In reflection of this, at the end of the Centenary, a user posted in the Europe subreddit asking why the UK did not participate in the ceremony held in France to commemorate the anniversary of the Armistice. They balanced the query by noting that it should be 'read as a sincere question, there was no intention to blame Brits for their choice'.[392] One respondent highlighted that 'Britain was represented at the ceremony by a government minister and the PM [Theresa May] paid her respects in France earlier this week. It's a tradition to have the service of remembrance at the cenotaph'.[393] A large argument followed in which the members debated whether it was right for the UK to hold its usual Remembrance Day service or if they should have attended the one in France instead, displaying tensions about unity versus tradition. Evidently, attempts at creating a sense of international cohesion during the Centenary struggled against notions that cultural memory and remembrance should primarily concern their own nations.

In tandem with a hope of European connectedness, another pre-Centenary post shared an article from *Spiegel International*, which noted hopes in Germany to move towards a shared, transnational tone of remembrance, rather than the normal nationally separated

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[392] u/blackjacket10, 'Why Great Britain didn't participate to [*sic*] the WW1 centenary in France and decide to make its own remembrance day?', *Reddit* (11 November 2018), https://www.reddit.com/r/europe/comments/9w8dp3/why_great_britain_didnt_participate_to_the_ww1/ [Accessed 31 January 2023].
[393] Comment by u/TidyTimechecks on 'Why Great Britain didn't [*sic*] participate to the WW1 centenary in France'.

events.[394] One user opened with a comment reflective of the tone of some historians at the start of the Centenary – that 'the war will be remembered for more than just futility. The criticism heaped on military commanders is largely unjustified, and my hope is that more balanced and progressive views will receive greater attention'.[395] The response the comment received is perhaps indicative of a very UK-centric view of the war. The respondent argued that 'if the commanders were to be free from criticism then both sides would have sat in the trenches for 5 years and drank coffee. This is the correct strategic move since attacking the other trench is an absurd idea'.[396] The user has a flair[397] attached to their name indicating that they live in Wales. Once again, we find evidence of 1960s ideas about futility enduring during the Centenary, indicating that access to a wide range of information does not always result in a changing of ideas.

Such views are often associated with the UK, because it is unlikely that the French would have been happy to have their country partially occupied by an opposing force until one side gave up. Indeed, another user responded to the previous comment highlighting that 'the German army was only 70 miles from Paris for most of the war, no politician or army commander could let that stand'.[398] This is another illuminating aspect of discussions about the war online. Discussions which occur offline between individuals (outside of academic settings) will often involve people with shared national biases, and thus likely embody a

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[394] u/davidreiss666, 'Remembering WWI: German Hopes for Centenary May Be Dashed - Germany sees the World War I centenary as a chance to promote European integration and arrive at a shared remembrance of the disaster', *Reddit* (30 October 2013), https://www.reddit.com/r/europe/comments/1pj5pf/remembering_wwi_german_hopes_for_centenary_may_be/ [Accessed 19 April 2023]. Article shared is David Crossland, 'German Hopes for Centenary May Be Dashed', *Spiegel International* (29 October 2013), https://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/europe-prepares-for-100th-anniversary-of-world-war-i-a-930655.html [Accessed 19 April 2023].
[395] Comment by u/ChrisQF on 'Remembering WWI'.
[396] Comment by u/G_Morgan on 'Remembering WWI'.
[397] Flairs are labels shown underneath usernames on posts in subreddits. They apply solely to the subreddit the post is made in, thus in r/Europe flairs are used to indicate information such as which country a user lives in.
[398] Comment by u/SuperSonic4 on 'Remembering WWI'.

myopic cultural memory of the conflict. However, on the Internet, international boundaries are less clearly delineated, and thus engagement between individuals of differing nationalities can result in a clash of understanding. While this should offer the opportunity to broaden understanding, as shown here, it can also result in a protraction of preestablished ideals and sentiments.

The discussion also revealed the binary that seems to exist in cultural memory of the war – the war is either viewed as futile, or else it is being glorified. Dualistic representation of the war and its battlegrounds is not a new development; while the Ypres salient has been viewed as a 'holy ground' to which people undertook pilgrimages in the war's aftermath, the battles it hosted, in particular the Third Battles of Ypres (Passchendaele), became a byword for futility.[399] This attitude is epitomised by a respondent to the primary comment about remembering more than just futility, who said, "Why? I think it's good that it isn't glorified and really shows how terrible war can be'.[400] For all of the hopes for the Centenary to broaden public knowledge and understanding, one of the frequent obstacles such intentions encounter is the entrenched sense of futility, and that any attempt to understand the meanings and reasons behind the outbreak of war and its conduct is in breach of this and tantamount to glorification. It is of no contention that the conflict saw staggering levels of casualties and tragic loss. However, obscuring the events which transpired behind a veil of futility, with no consideration for the details and nuances which distinguish the Great War from being 'just another war', arguably also blurs what is actually being remembered. Futility is the longstanding byword for the conflict, but more needs to be done to encourage the

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[399] For an in-depth discussion of the nature of Ypres in cultural memory and commemoration, see Mark Connelly & Stefan Goebel, *Ypres* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2018).
[400] Comment by u/[deleted] on 'Remembering WWI'.

public to see that the war can be commemorated as a mournful topic, whilst also raising awareness about the people involved, and the events resulting in large sacrifices.

Yet, there are instances where transnational unity in commemoration can be achieved and reflected upon online. A post in the more generalised subreddit of r/pics shared an image of a memorial at ANZAC Cove in the Gallipoli peninsula (See Figure 4).[401] The memorial shared Ataturk's words that the opposing troops who died on their land are now part of them. This message of reconciliatory unity was received positively by one user, who reflected that 'this is beautiful....to say that our former enemy's dead are now our own.....theyre [*sic*] saying that they want to end the violence and be brothers once more'.[402] Others were inspired by the mention of the place to share songs associated with the battle, including The Pogues' *And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda* (1984), and Sabaton's *Cliffs of Gallipoli* (2008), demonstrating the power of association in cultural memory of the conflict. Of course, the post also attracted comment on Winston Churchill's role in the offensive, and his subsequent reclamation of honour and rise to premiership.[403] This is arguably also a case of association – just as the previous users hear 'Gallipoli' and are reminded of a song, this user hears it and is reminded of Churchill. This is reflective of the fact that cultural memory,

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[401] u/[deleted], 'Since Yesterday was the World War I Centenary, I would like to show you the Memorial at Anzac cove in Gallipoli, Turkey', *Reddit* (29 July 2014), https://www.reddit.com/r/pics/comments/2c131u/since_yesterday_was_the_world_war_i_centenary_i/ [Accessed 19 April 2023].

[402] Comment by u/bipedalbitch on 'Since Yesterday was the World War I Centenary'.

[403] See 'Since Yesterday was the World War I Centenary'.

while often considered in broad terms, is essentially a web of interrelated elements woven together with the facts and cultural representations that the public are exposed to.
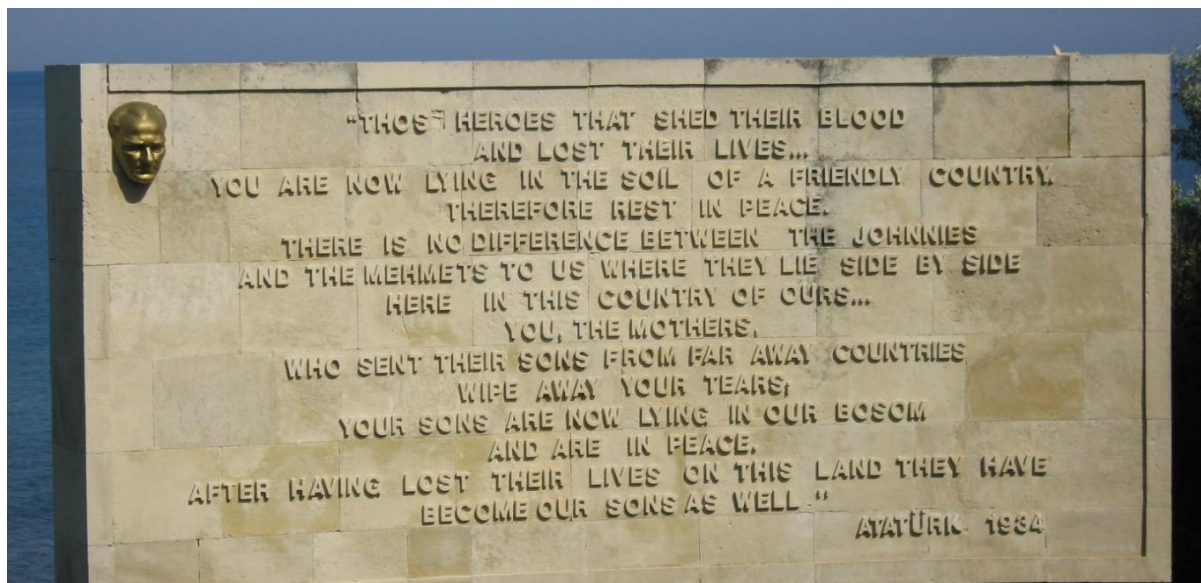

Figure 4: Memorial at ANZAC Cove. Source: Reddit

When the subject of commemoration in the UK was discussed, the responses were notably tame. A post in r/northernireland shared an article from the *Belfast Telegraph* discussing the 'Lights Out' event to mark the anniversary of the outbreak of war.[404] One user took the opportunity to be comedic about the activity by quipping that they 'turned the lights off for a whole hour while driving up the M1. Just a shame so many rude people beeped at me![405] However, a discussion about the causes of the war did take place in the comments. This focused commendably on the long-term factors relating to political allegiances and tensions, with a small discussion about the overall importance of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Unfortunately, some of the discussion is impossible to interpret because the users' comments and accounts have since been deleted. While highlighting considerable awareness from the public about the pre-war environment in Europe, it also

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[404] u/ctni, 'First World War centenary: Switch off the lights tonight, and remember the darkness that fell in 1914', *Reddit* (4 August 2014),
https://www.reddit.com/r/northernireland/comments/2cl6zv/first_world_war_centenary_switch_off_the_lights/ [Accessed 6 April 2023].
[405] Comment by u/gmcb007 on 'First World War centenary: Switch off the lights tonight'.

demonstrates the pitfalls of Internet posts as sources – it is remarkably easy for them to be removed and thus leave holes in areas of investigation.

While much has been said about governmental and other institutional commemorative activities during the Centenary, a post from 2014 seeks to explore what individual members of the public intended to do to mark the event. Indeed, the author contextualises their question in these terms, by asking that 'many governments, universities, historical associations, military regiments and others have their own plans for how to approach it -- but what are yours?'[406] Such questions are a revealing opportunity to observe how the public observe remembrance in their own way, either with or without direction from external sources. Some intended to engage with events which had been planned by the aforementioned institutions, such as one user who intended to attend a Dawn Service at the Australian War Memorial, and another who was hoping to manage to visit the newly refurbished IWM and potentially the Western Front battlefields, for which they asked for suggestions of places to go.[407] On a more academic level, one reader posted that

> This summer I had made arrangements with my advisor to do an independent study over the summer about WWI because my university does not offer a class on WWI. Interestingly enough, I may have inspired my advisor, who is the chair of the history department, to look into making a class specifically for this topic, but I digress. So this summer I will be reading nine books on any area of WWI, and writing reviews for each one that I read.[408]

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[406] u/NMW, 'Happy New Year! 1914 – 2014… what are your centenary plans?', *Reddit* (1 January 2014), https://www.reddit.com/r/wwi/comments/1u6i6x/happy_new_year_1914_2014_what_are_your_centenary/ [Accessed 2 February 2023].
[407] Comments by u/TasfromTAS and u/Bernardito on 'Happy New Year! 1914 – 2014'.
[408] Comment by u/vinnyorcharles on 'Happy New Year! 1914 – 2014'.

Rather than the Centenary being an opportunity to encourage further exploration of the conflict, this was actually a well-timed endeavour, given that the commenters' History department would then potentially have a class to explore such matters in during the anniversary.

Similar to posts explored previously, the Americans noted the difference in their likely levels of engagement. One jested that 'I'll probably contribute funds to Europe's remembrance events (specifically France's and England's), but I'll probably wait maybe 3 more years to do anything spectacular. Signed, a proud American'. Another referred to this, noting that 'it'll probably be 2017 when we (Americans) see anything on a national level, which is understandable'.[409] This is once again a reflection that the Centenary was not simply different for various people in terms of content, tone, and focus, but on international levels it also differed in length. One might argue that this meant the Americans were less likely to encounter concerns over 'Centenary fatigue' and what exactly should be the focus and output of four years of commemoration. Indeed, the US centred its Remembrance Day ceremony away from war memorials, as 'the National Cathedral was arguably more effective for rejuvenating early 20th century ideals of national purpose than, say, a war memorial or cemetery'.[410] So, the commenters reflections on American engagement with the Centenary were accurate.

In 2013, two separate subreddits engaged with an article from the website of the German public broadcaster Deutsche Welle highlighting concerns raised by historians about the focus of the Centenary. The link to the original article is broken, but the resulting

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[409] Comments by u/TheTapedHamster and u/an_ironic_username u/vinnyorcharles on 'Happy New Year! 1914 – 2014'.
[410] Jeremy Foster, 'Remembrance, Participation, (Re)emergence: Washington's National Cathedral, 11 November 2018', in *Experiencing 11 November 2018*, ed. by Shanti Sumartojo, p. 83.

discussions are still available for consideration. In r/unitedkingdom, one user responded to criticisms of *Blackadder Goes Forth* as a representation of the war by stating, 'I agree that the popular bumbling perception that things like Blackadder have given people is lazy and inaccurate. I still like it as a comedy but it's really more about Ben Elton's perception of war than any real facts'. They balance this by adding 'that the remembrance shouldn't just be about defeats and the like, but it would be a lie to suggest that there was really a good guys team and a bad guys team, one fighting for democracy and freedom, the other fighting for domination'.[411] These observations on *Blackadder* demonstrate a salient awareness of the reality of most modern representations of the war – they are often more reflective of the attitudes of the individuals who create them than the event itself.

Thus, there were also concerns about how the war would be represented during the Centenary. One of these was that 'next year [2014] will be dreadful, tons of dreadful poetry, hand-wringing and gushing from the like of Fiona Bruce. I'm not looking forward to it'.[412] This is a somewhat ironic observation, given that another commenter in the thread (who has since deleted their account) quoted from Siegfried Sassoon's 'Suicide in the Trenches' (1918). No comment was given on what the alternative should be to 'dreadful poetry', but it may be a reflection that the entrenched foundations of remembrance are starting to wear thin in the modern era. It should be noted that most of the comments in this thread reflected each individual's interpretation and opinion on how the war is commemorated, rather than the views expressed by historians in the news article.

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[411] Comment by u/qwerty321456 on 'British Historians up in Arms about WW1 Centenary', *Reddit* (11 July 2013), https://www.reddit.com/r/unitedkingdom/comments/1i2lnh/british_historians_up_in_arms_about_ww1_centenary/ [Accessed 31 January 2023].
[412] Comment by u/SpecsaversGaza on 'British Historians up in Arms about WW1 Centenary'.

In contrast, when the same article was discussed in r/AskHistorians, the responses were significantly different. The commenters largely engaged with arguments presented by historians about the war. One user noted that arguments put forward by historians such as Gary Sheffield suggest that 'British and French democracy was a better alternative to the militarised rather non democratic [*sic*] German Empire', and that while this view was popular at the time, it 'is oddly not what has been passed down in mainstream memory'. They note that the popular idea is that the war was a complete waste (a notion reflected in the thread considered previously), and that this is what historians are arguing against.[413] This was responded to by another user who challenged these arguments by countering with points raised by other historians. They noted that ideas about Britain being 'such a glorious democracy' have been brought into question by historians such as Adrian Gregory, and that the actual issue here is that 'this is where history and memory collide'. They acknowledge that the Centenary should remember the millions who lost their lives, but it should 'also be honest with the past and be open to grappling with difficult questions'.[414]

In response, another user notes that certain ideas have taken hold as a result of an ongoing issue. 'One of the biggest problems with the historiography (in general) I see cited on AskHistorians again and again is its overwhelming Anglocentric bias, and this is endemic to much of the scholars being cited themselves'.[415] This is a much more academic understanding of the issue than the views raised in the previous thread. A concern over Anglocentric historiography has been persistent in academia for some time, yet it is unlikely

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[413] Comment by u/Magneto88 on 'A few historians in the UK is arguing that the WW1 centenary next year should focus on the victories not defeats which he claims were significant and not futile. He further claims it was a war of national survival for Britain. Is there any validity in that?', *Reddit* (11 July 2013), https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/1i3e2n/a_few_historians_in_the_uk_is_arguing_that_the_/ [Accessed 16 March 2023].

[414] Comment by u/CanadianHistorian on 'A few historians in the UK is arguing'.

[415] Comment by u/HerrKroete on 'A few historians in the UK is arguing'.

to be a matter which the general public (certainly an Anglophone one) would concern themselves with. Given that the discussion in the more general subreddit of r/unitedkingdom did not engage with the historical arguments in the article to the extent of the thread in r/AskHistorians, we can assume that the public does not generally consider historiography in their broad interpretation of the war, or how it is remembered. Thus, it finds itself placed behind the media in its potential to inform cultural memory.

Reddit also provides examples of a plethora of much smaller scale remembrance activities by the public. One user posted a link to their Kickstarter page, on which they were seeking funds to help them produce a set of First World War playing cards.[416] In their post on *Reddit*, they noted that Kickstarter does not allow investment seekers to promise to donate money to charity, but that they would 'be donating 10% of the profits made from here on out to the Veterans mental health charity (PTSD Support)'.[417] One commenter promised to make a donation after they had next been paid, but it would seem this was of little help – the project failed to receive funding, only raising £194 of the £3,499 needed.[418] This is demonstrative of the fact that whereas widescale memorabilia initiatives during the Centenary received considerable attention and can be successful, such as Sainsbury's chocolate bar to commemorate the 1914 Christmas Truce, it is much harder for members of the public to share the same success, even with the broadened exposure opportunities of

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[416] *Kickstarter* is a crowdfunding website used by individuals and small companies to raise funds from the public to carry out a stated project.

[417] u/Samsscott97, 'World War One Centenary Playing Cards', *Reddit* (12 October 2014), https://www.reddit.com/r/wwi/comments/2j0gmd/world_war_one_centenary_playing_cards/ [Accessed 2 February 2023]. Links to '100th Anniversary World War One (WWI) Playing Cards', *Kickstarter* (2014), https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1717522126/100th-anniversary-world-war-one-playing-card-deck [Accessed 6 April 2023].

[418] Ibid. Kickstarter projects only receive funding if the stated amount is reached by the deadline.

the Internet. It is factors such as these which thus leave the domain of commemorative memorabilia largely in the hands of institutions.

Similarly, someone came to *Reddit* to share that in recognition of the Centenary, they were going to do 'a commemorative walking trek of 500kms of the WWI western front- from Pont Au Mousson, France to Ostend, Belgium'. They provided a link to a website which has since expired. As the link has expired, it is not entirely clear if they were seeking to raise funds, or simply to share their activity. It was positively received, though, gaining 22 upvotes and a range of comments praising the endeavour and wishing them well.[419] The author's commemorative idea here is more closely tied to more traditional remembrance ideas, being emblematic of the 'pilgrimages' to the Western Front undertaken in the post-war years, with the addendum that the Internet can now be used to promote such activities.

Another member posted a video which they had uploaded to YouTube to commemorate the conflict. It received 18 upvotes, but only one comment, albeit one praising it.[420] The video opens with *The Last Post* playing, notes the date the war began, and that 'Serbia and Austria-Hungary's tensions plunged the world into a state of political madness, and countries waged war on eachother [*sic*]'. This is a somewhat narrow outlook of the causes of the conflict, but it is also an unusual deviation from the habitual placement of responsibility on Germany. The video begins with a series of sentences which convey a

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[419] u/WarWalks, 'In September, for the centenary, I am doing a commemorative walking trek of 500kms of the WWI western front- from Pont Au Mousson, France to Ostend, Belgium', *Reddit* (12 July 2014), https://www.reddit.com/r/wwi/comments/2ajfkj/in_september_for_the_centenary_i_am_doing_a/ [Accessed 6 April 2023].

[420] u/sil3ntsir3n, 'You Never Came Home – World War 1 – 100 Years Centenary Remembrance', *Reddit* (11 November 2018), https://www.reddit.com/r/battlefield_one/comments/9w49yf/you_never_came_home_world_war_1_100_years/ [Accessed 31 January 2023]. Links to Alex Hazell, 'You Never Came Home – World War 1 – 100 Years Centenary Remembrance', *YouTube* (11 November 2018), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pkLFvb5BxAc&t=3s [Accessed 31 January 2023].

familiar tone of the war: 'Mud, rats, bombardments, lack of food and water and the foul stench of death plagued the trenches that the soldiers were held up in for months on end'. The video then displays a montage of archive footage and shots from documentaries, some of which are colourised. The footage generally shows warfare in the trenches, and thus establishes this as the creator's interpretation of the conflict. The video concludes by noting that 'on the 11th of November 1918, the armistice was signed, bringing the end the [*sic*] war to all fronts immediately', which is a somewhat misconstrued idea of what the Armistice was, and discounts the lengthy process of demobilisation across multiple fronts, as well as the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. Finally, it displays lists of casualties per country, maintaining the power of statistics in cultural memory, and notes the video is 'in memory of my Great-Great Grandfather Richard 'Dick' Gummer'.[421]

This is clearly an attempt to offer a form of remembrance for the men who died, in honour of their ancestor, and is thus a remarkable demonstration of the public now using modern technology to engage in their own personalised form of commemoration, with an ongoing connection to the importance of family history encouraged during the Centenary. It is worth highlighting, however, that the abstract amalgamation of footage in the video presents a vague sense of the war, rather than any particular narrative. This is perhaps emblematic of the fact that as the conflict moves ever further into the past, and personal connections to it are stretched, it may become rather unclear to the public what exactly it is they are supposed to remember. This idea of uncertain remembrance is a notion reflected in one of Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* novels, the plot of which centres around the tensions of historical warfare:

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[421] Ibid.

"Dat's what it is like up at der battle place," […] "My dad took me up dere when we were comin' to der city. He showed me dis kind o' rocky place, hit me on der head, and said, "Remember"."

"Remember what?" said Sally.

"He didn't say. So I just, you know, gen'rally remembered".[422]

Small cultural nods such as this remind us that as the responsibility of remembrance is passed from one generation to the next, it can become less obvious what the focus of that should be. Thus, somewhat abstract ideas as those shown in the aforementioned *YouTube* video will likely become commonplace, unless a personalised connection to the past through genealogy can be maintained. It is also worth noting here, that a concern over forgetting that which we should remember is another concern of the digital age, where the rapidity and availability of information fed to the public has the inverse effect of increasing our tendency to forget information. There are also broader considerations of how cultural changes in the modern age are increasing the act of forgetting.[423] Thus, the Internet is not a catchall solution to how we maintain our cultural memory of the conflict as the passage of time increases.

In a remarkably significant discussion, users of AskHistorians also considered how perceptions of the war might change following the passing of the last veteran. It was posted prior to the Centenary, but its relevance merits inclusion and consideration here. The first chapter of this thesis considered how broadcasters have attempted to convey a meaningful and authentic connection to the war without them, so it is highly useful for the public to discuss the impact themselves. The topic received 14 upvotes, suggesting it is also a topic of

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[422] Terry Pratchett, *Thud!* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), p. 251.
[423] For a comprehensive exploration of this, see Paul Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

interest and relevance to the subreddit members.[424] Despite the title, however, the resulting comments had little to do with the indicated topic, indicating instead that the conflict had already been losing importance. The discussion resulted from an American member who opined that with or without the veterans, the war was already becoming less significant.

> 'I think WWI is largely forgotten in the minds of the general public, at least in the United States, in favor [*sic*] of WWII. I mean, people know there WAS a first war, because they're numbered, but I highly doubt your non-history buff on the street could name an enemy besides Germany'.[425]

It should be acknowledged here that American memory of the conflict is naturally different to Britain's, but the user has allowed the caveat that it might be different for other countries. It is also unclear if the suggestion that the general public cannot name a Central Power other than Germany is more indicative of cultural memory in the USA, or of its education system. Another member follows on to this to suggest that most people view the war as idiotic, with no understanding of the reasoning behind it.[426] In reflection of the previous point about education, another respondent notes that Americans 'are taught that it was a "complex system of European alliances" that started the war, but we otherwise get very little context as to what that means'.[427] In comparison of these international differences, one user noted that they believe very few people in Britain consider America's involvement in the war,

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[424] u/Azons, 'With the centenary of the first Word [*sic*] War's commencement fast approaching and the death of the last living combat veteran, how might our perceptions of the war begin to shift?', *Reddit* (11 May 2012), https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/thstu/with_the_centenary_of_the_first_word_wars/ [Accessed 5 April 2023].

[425] Comment by u/Astark on 'With the centenary of the first Word [*sic*] War's commencement fast approaching'.

[426] Comment by u/[deleted] on 'With the centenary of the first Word [*sic*] War's commencement fast approaching'.

[427] Comment by u/[deleted] on 'With the centenary of the first Word [*sic*] War's commencement fast approaching'.

and explain the lack of interest amongst Americans in terms of its shorter involvement with the conflict and lower casualty count.[428] It seems unlikely that the UK public are broadly unaware of America's involvement in the war, given that the US has historically championed its role in securing victory in both world wars. However, it is a useful indication of public awareness in the differences between remembrance amongst the combatant countries, and how contemporary experience of the war has caused cultural memory to evolve in distinctive ways.

Poppies, Politics and Problems

As noted earlier, in the online realm public observance of the Silence becomes a performative matter, whereby people signify their participation in the event by posting messages on social media. A more clearly performative act of remembrance is wearing a poppy. A symbol of the fields in Flanders where they grew, in the century since the war's end the poppy has shifted from an emblematic connection to the battlefields where men fell to something of a political maelstrom. In the weeks before Remembrance Day, poppies suddenly become ubiquitous in media broadcasts. Not wearing one, or not wearing one to the satisfaction of others (such as the poppy being too small, or the leaf not positioned at 11 o'clock) can result in a slew of angry comments on social media.[429] The Centenary did little to quell such attitudes. In 2018, a Bristol pub refused to serve people on the weekend of Remembrance Day if they were not wearing

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[428] Comment by u/Pratchett on 'With the centenary of the first Word [*sic*] War's commencement fast approaching'.

[429] For a deeper consideration of this activity and its background, see Jon Dean, *The Good Glow: Charity and the Symbolic Power of Doing Good* (Oxford Academic, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1332/policypress/9781447340027.001.0001 pp. 121–142.

a poppy.[430] Following that Remembrance Day ceremony, one user took to Twitter to complain about the then-Leader of the Opposition, Jeremy Corbyn, appearing at the Cenotaph looking scruffy with a tiny poppy. Another user highlighted the clear political motivation behind this comment, by noting that 'the poppy-laying ceremony was not even over when you tweeted this? "In [*sic*] the going down of the sun, and in the morning, we will use the centenary of the Armistice to make cheap political points on Twitter".'[431] Poppy-wearing can prove a very contentious topic, so it is of little surprise that broadcasters ensure people appearing on camera are wearing one. However, adherence to wearing or displaying the poppy can occasionally appear to go too far.

On Twitter, the Poppy Watch account has set its remit to highlighting the more bizarre representations of the poppy and other remembrance activities. The account's bio outlines their activity as 'Watching Poppies®. Rating Poppies®. Guardian of Remembrance'.[432] One of their most famous posts (which at the time of writing is their Pinned Tweet)[433] shows photos of the Cookie Monster appearing on the *One Show* on BBC One in 2016. In the images, the Cookie Monster is wearing a poppy, to which Poppy Watch added the caption 'ME REMEMBER FALLEN'.[434] The caption is presumably intended to highlight the somewhat bizarre decision to put a poppy on a puppet, an inanimate object incapable of thought or remembrance. Moreover, a number of replies to the post note that someone at the BBC had to make a

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[430] Tristan Cork, 'The Bristol pub you won't get a pint in unless you wear a poppy', *Bristol Live* (8 November 2018), https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/bedminster-pub-you-wont-pint-2198290 [Accessed 23 March 2023]. See also Sean Donnelly (@thedonbs3), Tweet, *Twitter* (7 November 2018), https://twitter.com/thedonbs3/status/1060285903220944897 [Accessed 23 March 20180.

[431] CrémantCommunarde (@0Calamity), Tweet, *Twitter* (11 November 2018) https://twitter.com/0Calamity/status/1061605678450647045 [Accessed 16 February 2023].

[432] Poppy® Watch (@giantpoppywatch), *Twitter*, https://twitter.com/giantpoppywatch [Accessed 23 March 2023].

[433] Pinned Tweets are permanently displayed at the top of an account's feed on their profile page.

[434] Poppy® Watch (@giantpoppywatch), Tweet, *Twitter* (7 November 2016), https://twitter.com/giantpoppywatch/status/795710802280017920 [Accessed 23 March 2023].

decision about this. One commenter outlined this by stating that 'the extraordinary thing is that someone clearly thought it was a good idea - and no-one had the nerve to say 'er, hang on''.[435] Another expands on this slightly, by suggesting a potential conversation on the matter; '"We can't put a poppy on a muppet! That's stupid!" "If we don't, the Mail, Express and Sun will have our guts for garters, so just do it!"'[436] This latter observation highlights the intense feelings surrounding poppy-wearing, and the media's role in stoking these by drawing attention to those who do not follow suit. When poppies are put on things that don't have the means to engage with remembrance, it can seem like the emphasis has shifted from wearing a poppy to demonstrate remembrance of the fallen, to putting poppies everywhere simply because that seems to be the expected thing to do.

This incredulity towards the overabundance of poppies increases further when poppies are seemingly applied to everything possible, regardless of any considerations for potential dark irony. Beginning in 2016, Poppy Watch started a thread of poppy-themed food products. This included pizzas with poppies shaped out of pepperonis, olives, and peppers, and a meat counter adorned with the phrase 'Lest We Forget'.[437] Considering that one of the definitions for 'meat grinder' is 'a destructive object, action, or process',[438] using the famed remembrance idiom in such a setting demonstrates a considerable lack of awareness of appropriateness in the need to demonstrate support for the idea. This is perhaps symptomatic of the hyper fixation on poppy-wearing around Remembrance Day – when in doubt, put a

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[435] Gareth Simkins (@GarethSimkins), Tweet, *Twitter* (8 November 2016), https://twitter.com/GarethSimkins/status/795812657500667905 [Accessed 23 March 2023].
[436] Antony Shepherd (@AntonyShepherd), Tweet, *Twitter* (5 November 2017), https://twitter.com/AntonyShepherd/status/927130297942052864 [Accessed 23 March 2023].
[437] Poppy® Watch (@giantpoppywatch), Tweet, *Twitter* (7 November 2016), https://twitter.com/giantpoppywatch/status/795772876217520129 [Accessed 23 March 2023].
[438] As defined by *Oxford English Dictionary*, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/meat-grinder_n?tab=meaning_and_use [Accessed 24 September 2024].

poppy on it. The prominence and popularity of discussions about the poppy each Remembrance Day are reflective of the power of politics in driving online discussion. This occurs regardless of the historical veracity of the points being argued, as 'subject matters rise to the top of the news feed due to political agendas or commercial interests, not because of their scholarly or factual merits'.[439] Overall, such issues demonstrate the power of the news media combined with social media in enforcing popular ideals about traditional events throughout modern life. It is also another demonstration of the conflation between the physical and virtual worlds discussed earlier, whereby activities in the former inform debate in the latter. While the development of conflicting views towards the poppy is not a phenomenon unique to the Centenary, the broadened application of its use and the associated backlash this can draw have been amplified in the modern age.

#OTD: Live Tweeting History

The hashtag OTD, shorthand for 'On This Day', is a ubiquitously used term across various historical and heritage institutions (and other accounts) on social media. The posts accompanying the hashtag mark the anniversaries of historical events which happened a certain number of years ago (usually in decades or centuries) from the date of posting. There are also various Twitter accounts dedicated solely to this activity, marking anniversaries in the histories of newspapers, football clubs, and various other subject areas. As a grand anniversary in itself, the Centenary saw a plethora of OTD posts on Twitter from various institutions, thus incorporating mini anniversaries into the larger one. A considerable number

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[439] Steinhauer, *History Disrupted,* p. 4.

of these posts were associated with #Somme100, wherein posts commemorated events from the Battle of the Somme a century beforehand.

One of the most prominent examples of this in OTD posts was the first day of the battle, commemorated on Twitter on 1 July 2016 by numerous institutions. In usual focal form, these posts referred to the casualty count of 19,240 on the opening day of the offensive. Museums additionally took the opportunity to draw attention to their digitised collections. The IWM produced one such tweet, which included a link to a webpage and transcript of one of their audio interviews with a veteran who participated in the first day of the battle.[440] This was part of their Voices of the First World War project, which also demonstrates how smaller scale commemorations can be part of larger ones. Similarly, the Cambridge University Library shared excerpts from Siegfried Sassoon's diary, sharing photos of the diary pages accompanied by a selected quote, with a link to the digitised version in their collections.[441] While the Centenary gave such commemorative forms a boost, they are not entirely restricted to that time period. The WW1 On This Day Twitter account still tweets events from the given day during the war, albeit in a less chronological fashion.[442] This is reflective of the popularity of this form of anniversary observance – the date provides a connection to the past, as it invites the reader to consider life on the present day in the past, allowing them to compare their current experiences with contemporary ones.

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[440] Imperial War Museum (@I_W_M), Tweet, *Twitter* (1 July 2016), https://twitter.com/i_w_m/status/1013332645395206144 [Accessed 17 April 2023]. Links to 'Voices of the First World War: The First Day of the Somme', *IWM*, https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/voices-of-the-first-world-war-the-first-day-of-the-somme [Accessed 17 April 2023].

[441] For example, see Cambridge University Library (@theUL), Tweet, *Twitter* (1 July 2016), https://twitter.com/theUL/status/748765705017757696 [Accessed 17 April 2023].

[442] See WW1 On This Day (@WW1IEPER1917), *Twitter*, https://twitter.com/WW1IEPER1917 [Accessed 17 April 2023].

However, such activities are not without complication or controversy. Firstly, the popularity around On This Day content, in addition to posts associated with history, is also driven by a nostalgic interest in our own personal histories. Such behaviour is actively encouraged by sites such as Facebook, which has a dedicated feature for presenting users with posts from the current day in the past. Secondly, occasional tweets are generally unproblematic, but when the speed becomes more akin to 'live tweeting', it elides the past and present in muddying ways. It should be noted that the habit of 'live tweeting' is a modern phenomenon – academics familiar with Twitter will recognise it as a means of relaying conference talks online, whereby an individual posts tweets describing someone's paper as it is presented. This allows anyone not in attendance to feel a part of the event as it happens. However, when applied to past events, this contemporising of proceedings obscures their historicity.

Shanti Sumartojo considered this issue in relation to the Australian ABC news network's 'live tweeting' of the Gallipoli campaign. ABC posted tweets containing information from the records of various individuals leading up to and on the day of the Gallipoli landings on 25 April 1915. While this modern form of relaying information is readily accessible to a wide audience, and short enough to keep the attention of anyone reading it, Sumartojo identifies pitfalls in its nature.

> 'The "live tweeting" of the landings at Gallipoli confounded and complicated the familiar and ritualised commemorative forms by treating events and figures a century old as contemporary rather than timeless, or even as having happened in the past [...] thus, ways of understanding memory, history and its role in narrating

national identity to large audiences were complicated by the time-spaces and accessibility of digital social media'.[443]

Therefore, the means of communicating and engaging with cultural memory in the digital age could be confounding the fact that it is commemoration of a historical event, which occurred at a time when information dispersal occurred at a slower rate and on a much smaller scale than it does today. While the Internet offers broader potential for such activity, there is clearly some debate about the merits of its use.

The importance of primary sources in achieving an authentic connection to the past was covered in the first chapter of this thesis, thus one can see the merit of using them in this form of commemoration. Yet, it is worth highlighting that such sources were never intended to be shared and distributed at the speed and scale afforded by the Internet. Similarly, their organisation and combination into a coherent narrative belies the fact that they are otherwise disconnected documents, written by individuals in different places at different times. So, their collation in this manner also complicates the boundaries between past and present 'by organising the past in a particularly linear way that simplifies and tidies it while simultaneously attempting to present it as complex [and] emergent'.[444] It also negates the fact that contemporaries did not learn about the events of the Gallipoli landings until later in May. Sumartojo thus also aptly notes that 'in presenting the past this way, a particular kind of forgetting is taking place, in which uncertainty and emergence are smoothed away into one story'.[445] Therefore, we can see that continuing to utilise the traditional links of cultural memory in the digital age, without considering the implications of

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[443] Shanti Sumartojo, 'Tweeting from the Past: Commemorating the Anzac Centenary @ABCNews1915', *Memory Studies*, 13.4 (2020), p. 401.
[444] Ibid.
[445] Ibid., p. 408.

the methods used to distribute them, can complicate understanding of their historical and localised nature. While it allows for a broader range of themes to be covered across a long period of time, and thus could change and challenge older ideas about the First World War, caution should be exercised to avoid damaging the very awareness it intends to raise.

A Democratising Power for Good?

Underlining much of the discussion in this chapter is a sense that the Internet provides a democratising platform where all voices can be heard equally and can lend themselves towards discussions which they may not otherwise be a part of, and thereby who can play a role in shaping cultural memory online. However, there are a number of caveats behind this concept. Firstly, while Internet access and use seems ubiquitous in the modern age, it is not consistent across all demographics. This has commonly been understood as a 'digital divide', which covers a range of inhibiting factors such as access to physical hardware and the possession of adequate digital literacy skills. Secondly, access to information does not grant a utopic sense of knowledge and understanding. Before the dawn of the Internet, in the early twentieth century the Belgian author Paul Otlet expressed his belief that a system allowing the spread of information to all would prevent wars, as people would be able to refer to documents to resolve disputes.[446] Of course, hindsight allows us to observe that this greatly overestimates the intellectual ability of human nature; one of the key lessons of social websites such as Twitter is that more people having access to a piece of information simply means there are more people to disagree about what it means. In terms of awareness of the

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[446] Cited in Ronald E. Day, 'The Erasure and Construction of History for the Information Age: Positivism and Its Critics', in *Memory Bytes: History, Technology, and Digital Culture,* ed. by Lauren Rabinovitz and Abraham Geil (London: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 81.

First World War and its cultural memory, as shown earlier, this can result in the reinforcement of old ideas, or notions of remembrance becoming lost in controversy and political debates.

Moreover, debates about the meaning behind a source of information is ultimately what the practice of History is based on. In addition, simply having access to vast sources of information does not imply a grasp of the meaning behind them. 'More historical information online does not translate to greater ease in finding, learning or understanding that information. It may, in fact, have the opposite effect'.[447] A surplus of information floods the reader with details and makes it difficult for them to filter out the important and the factual from the banal and incorrect. Its disconnected nature and lack of academic standards also 'compels individuals to try and derive meaning from simplistic, controversial, pseudo-academic and conspiratorial sources intermixed with scholarly and journalistic ones'.[448] Thus, while it can be a valuable resource for historians to appraise, it should be done so with an awareness of the difficulties for the public in discerning and interpreting the multitude of sources available to them. It is also important to remember that much of Web 2.0 does not exist for the purpose of informing the public. Social media sites are commercially driven, gaining their revenue from advertisements, thus promoting material to encourage engagement (often regardless of its veracity) to ensure the public see the advertising. In this regard, while the Internet could be deemed to have the potential to offer broader opportunities for the dissemination and reforming of cultural media than mediums such as television and radio, the reality is that its lack of structure can complicate such opportunities.

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[447] Steinhauer, *History Disrupted* p. 3.
[448] Ibid.

As also revealed in this chapter, discussion about remembrance of the Great War online is not exempt from the usual hostilities of online interactions. As Andrew Hoskins has noted, 'since around 2005, the multitude has vacated the centre ground, with all the most ugly and irrational in human thought aroused through rage and dismay thriving in the polarizing virality of social networking'.[449] Social media has amplified the nature of combative politics, where the left and right wings battle each other over every topic possible, with such discussions being amplified by algorithms which push these debates towards larger audiences in the understanding that emotive topics result in increased engagement. These conflicts are littered with terms which reflect their aggressive nature – 'keyboard warrior', 'white knight', and 'social justice warrior' all evoke a sense of the Internet as a battlefield. Remembrance is an inherently political matter, so it is of little surprise that hostile interactions take place around this subject matter too, most notably demonstrated here through discussions about poppy-wearing. Thus, the Western Front of old becomes the World Wide Web Front of today, where issues about how to remember the conflict remain a point of contention. The extent to which this marks a departure from 1960s ideas is somewhat unclear – in some cases, people espouse these views, whereas in others they defy and challenge them. Perhaps the greatest shift is the number and variety of people now involved in discussions on cultural memory.

Overall, this chapter has demonstrated that online discussions during the Centenary about the First World War, its representations, and commemorations, were often contentious and featured familiar tropes of cultural memory being espoused through digital means, with some evidence of pushback against them. Political affiliations also remain a fulcrum of memory, as well as a means of weaponising it. The Internet is an important tool both for the

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[449] Andrew Hoskins, 'Memory of the Multitude: The End of Collective Memory', in *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition*, ed. by Andrew Hoskins (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2018), p. 88.

public to engage in discussions to develop and understand cultural memory, and also for academics to observe such changes and interactions. However, care should be taken to ensure that the use of digital technology does not obscure the realities of the historical event, and that an awareness is maintained of the differences between today's rapid communication abilities with the much slower methods of the past. Awareness should also be maintained of the core *raison d'etre* behind social media – to drive engagement and increase advertising revenue, not to increase public awareness of any topic. It provides an avenue for discussions which can spread and shape cultural memory to occur, but it does not necessarily dictate what the basis of that memory should be, other than through the cold influence of algorithms. This chapter has largely provided insight in to a more grassroots view of cultural memory discussion, and demonstrated how it is a prominent example of change and continuity in cultural memory of the conflict and attitudes towards remembrance practices. Yet, as the public's understanding of the war is often influenced by larger institutions, it is to the presence of such organisations online to which we now turn.

5   A Digital Legacy? The Centenary, the Internet, and the Future

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'We know the future only by the past we project into it. History, in this

sense, is all we have'.[450]

While the Centenary was commonly espoused as an opportunity to revitalise cultural memory

and understanding of the First World War, the existence (or lack thereof) of a lasting legacy for

this opportunity has received less consideration. If there is no legacy, the ability of the Internet

to create a lasting impact and maintain the new areas and themes in cultural memory explored

during the Centenary is brought into question. A plethora of websites popped up across the

Internet during the Centenary, from institutional sites to more small-scale personal projects.

Or, more succinctly termed, 'the Centenary of the First World War has seen a "digital big

bang".[451] Indeed, according to the report produced by the DCMS on the Centenary, 51% of

NLHF-funded projects produced websites to share their output.[452] Relatedly, 50% of projects

maintained a social media presence to promote their work and content output.[453] These

platforms allow users to explore the war's history, view digital (and digitised) memorials and

monuments, and participate in online commemorative events and discussions. Virtual tours of

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[450] Gaddis, *The Landscape of History*, p. 3.
[451] Agiatis Benardou, Lorna Hughes, and Leo Konstantelos, 'Saving the Centenary's Digital Heritage: Recommendations for Digital Sustainability of FWW Community Commemoration Activities' (University of Glasgow, 2018) https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/190714/1/190714.pdf [Accessed 31 October 2023], p. 3.
[452] *Lessons from the First World War Centenary* (London: Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2019), p. 34, https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcumeds/2001/2001.pdf.
[453] Leo Konstantelos and Lorna Hughes, 'Digital Sustainability Review of HLF-Funded Projects' (University of Glasgow, 2019), https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/213440/1/213440.pdf [Accessed 31 October 2023], p. 15.

battlefields, war cemeteries, and museums have enabled individuals to experience and engage with the war's physical locations and memorials remotely.

As the Internet is commonly viewed as an infinite and eternal space, one might assume that such sites created a lasting digital legacy. However, the reality is more complicated. While a number of websites still exist to form a respectable web of memory, broken links reveal the pitfalls of a reliance on digital technology to outlast physical media. This chapter will consider the broader issues of the Internet as a source for information dissemination and commemoration, thus revealing the themes by which such sources can be appraised. Firstly, it will consider some of the broader implications of this research, namely the more flexible definitions of place and space in the digital realm to expand on those provided in the previous chapter, before providing an overview of the institutions which form the primary backbone of this chapter.

It will then address the role of institutions on social media to contrast and compare with the more informal accounts in the previous chapter, before considering a range of websites produced during the Centenary, the messages they intended to deliver, the presentation of physical spaces in the digital realm, and the outreach of institutions beyond these sites into social media to promote their commemorative activities. An outline of the general themes present in extant websites will provide an overview of what is deemed worthy of remembering, and what is deemed (accidentally or otherwise) 'forgotten'. Finally, a consideration of digital commemorative activity beyond websites will allow a broader perspective on this particularly contemporary activity. In doing so, this chapter will present a vital snapshot of digital commemoration during the anniversary of the conflict and beyond. Furthermore, it will address how much of this material actually remains, highlighting the

precarious nature of the notion of a digital legacy, and possible implications for similar events in the future. It will demonstrate that the Internet can be used by various institutions to broaden understanding, reshape cultural memory and challenge the entrenched ideas of the 1960s – but it requires work and upkeep to do so.

Digital Disorientation: (Dis)placed Communities and Memorials

Present literature on memorials in the traditional sense has often highlighted the importance of space and place.[454] This can broadly be interpreted by the intention of a memorial relating to its location, with small, communal memorials intended for the local parish often being found in churches, and larger, more broadly intentioned memorials such as cenotaphs often being placed in a central city location. They are situated with regard to their intended audience, and while the broadcast era led to some skewing of this nature, it has become increasingly complicated in the digital age. Unlike the physical memorial, confined to its location and shared with those present and any audiences to which it is broadcast, the digital memorial's reach is seemingly limitless and can reach a much broader global audience. Therefore, when considering such digital phenomena, it can also be much harder to view it as an example of British commemoration, when the creators and viewers of digital content can be of varied nationalities and demographic backgrounds. Ergo, 'the new communities made possible by mass media are not limited by geographic, religious, or ethnic borders'.[455] This is due in part to the evolution of communities and their defined boundaries in the age of Web

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[454] See Pascal Moliner & Inna Bovina, 'Public Spaces and Circumscribed Spaces of the Collective Memory: A Research on the Location of Commemorative Monuments', *Memory Studies,* 17.4 (2024), pp. 676–691; Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, pp. 78–116; Winter, *War Beyond Words*, pp. 143–171.
[455] Janice Hume, 'Memory Matters: The Evolution of Scholarship in Collective Memory and Mass Communication', *Review of Communication*, 10.3 (2010), p. 192.

2.0, as explored in the previous chapter, but as we address the notion of digital memorials more specifically, it is helpful to consider how definitions and understandings of place and space change in the virtual realm.

Traditional definitions for 'place' and 'space' often give reference to physicality, such as towns or buildings for the former, with the latter being defined by its lack of physical structures. Of course, situating things via physical structures on the Internet is less tenable – for all the familiar insinuations of the term 'home page', it is less confined than its real-world counterpart. This sense of dislocation is not entirely new – older forms of communication have already been reducing the importance of where we are in relation to who we can communicate with. Some other considerations abandoned the importance of space entirely, promoting notions of a postgeographic era, whereby the presence of technology removes the importance of our social identity and location altogether.[456] While this lack of geographic confinement in the online world can make focussing on specific nations difficult, the coming together of different peoples also increases the opportunity for locally or nationally developed ideas and cultural memories to be informed and remoulded by external influences.

Recent research of computer-mediated communication (CMC) has been more restrained in deserting the concept of place. An understanding of physicality in CMC ranges from considerations of the infrastructure required for it (such as the electrical grid, fibreoptic cabling and satellites) to the fact that the Internet is accessed through physical devices which, with the exception of mobile CMC devices, are often contained in certain locations.[457] Indeed, CMC can also be used to connect diasporic communities, who share in their loss of a place by

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[456] Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place*, p. 115.
[457] Wilken, *Teletechnologies*, pp. 66–67.

connecting together online and creating a less centralised memory culture.[458] Of course, an understanding of place and space online in these forms is still broadly metaphorical. As Rowan Wilken has termed it, 'there would seem to be some sense of a "soft where" but not internal or concrete "there".'[459] This distinction can be applied to the consideration here of memorials. In their physical form, they have dimensions, spatial context, and a tangible existence. Their digital forms, on the other hand, are tangential – they exist in a more ephemeral form. The Internet's sense of space and place is often understood as a milieu, read through its derivation of *mille lieux* – a thousand places. In the context of cultural memory, the Internet can thus be viewed as a *mille lieux de mémoire*. These thousand places of memory form what is referred to in this chapter as a web of memory, with certain institutions forming a substantial spine from which others stem. This chapter covers several key institutional groups throughout, and it is thus worth providing an overview of their general nature and activity.

Government Initiatives

In his speech outlining plans for the Centenary, the then Prime Minister David Cameron outlined a planned spend of over fifty million pounds.[460] A tenth of this was earmarked for the IWM and its Centenary plans, with the rest going to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and other organisations. Common to the IWM and other organisations was an online presence. For the IWM, this took the form of a site to promote its Centenary Partnerships, thus establishing itself as central in the Centenary web of memory and offering some hope of a lasting digital

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[458] For an in-depth analysis of this activity, see David Clarke et al., 'Diasporic Memory Practice on the Internet: Remembering Lost Homelands', *Memory Studies*, 16.4 (2023), pp. 1003–19.
[459] Wilken, *Teletechnologies*, p. 69.
[460] 'Speech at Imperial War Museum'.

legacy. Others were more specific, such as the websites produced by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) engagement centres. These centres also worked with community groups funded by the HLF, thus reinforcing the notion of a cohesive web of activity. The IWM had the benefit of its reputation to offer a broad reach, and indeed its homepage champions its audience of 'at least 4.5 million people reached globally in 2018', its involvement with '4,159 organisations, from 62 countries', and 'almost 2.5 million' visitors to the Partnership website, 1914.org.[461] Alongside access to its archives, the IWM notes it provided 'online platforms' for these projects, establishing its status as a foundation for further commemorative work. Most poignantly, it also notes that its drive for collaboration 'developed a deeper public understanding of the First World War, ensuring a lasting legacy for the centenary'.[462] The IWM's aims are generally focused around maintaining a sense of relevance for the conflict in the present day, widening access to their collections, and stimulating collaboration to ensure continued activity and a legacy for the event.

The AHRC engagement centres offered something similar; while social media allows the general public to engage with institutions and academics about their work, these centres were designed to form a more tangible connection, and to stimulate the development of different methods of commemorating the conflict. The notion of 'legacy' is more specifically defined as being focused around maintaining the networks formed during the Centenary – it does not allude to the maintenance of the previously mentioned 'online platforms'. However, it does note the creation of a website dedicated to these research groups, which it identifies as a 'digital portal' to 'record how the First World War centenary was marked for future

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[461] 'First World War Centenary Partnership', *IWM*, https://www.iwm.org.uk/partnerships/first-world-war-centenary/centenary-partnership [Accessed 6 September 2023].
[462] Ibid.

generations to explore'. In addition to their connections and projects, each centre had websites offering information on these activities, which continue to provide valuable reservoirs of information about community-level commemoration during the Centenary. However, while the impetus of the centres was to advise on community projects, and their own work remains apparent, the activities of these groups has been much more susceptible to digital oblivion.

Further to this goal of maintaining digital access, the IWM also states that it 'will share and develop sector knowledge of the digital preservation process, and establish and disseminate best practice guidelines'.[463] This is indicative of the increasingly crucial role digitisation is playing in expanding and maintaining access to historical sources and information. Their drive to increase research of the conflict is also shared by other organisations active during the anniversary. Each of the five engagement centres have their specialised areas of work, and yet there are threads (beyond their funding source) which connect them in the online 'web of memory' considered throughout this chapter. Their respective designations lead a path from opening up exploration into First World War Research for the community (*Gateways*), allowing the experiences of those involved to be heard (*Voices*) and those stories which are less-well represented (*Everyday Lives* and *Hidden Histories*), through to what those experiences still mean and how they are commemorated in the present day (*Living Legacies*).[464] Most of the centres still have their projects and events listed on their websites, consistently preserving the activities from the Centenary for future consideration – memorials of a great memorialisation. In tandem with the IWM, these

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[463] Ibid.
[464] Voices of War and Peace (2024), https://www.voicesofwarandpeace.org/ [Accessed 25 September 2024]. Everyday Lives in War (2024), https://everydaylivesinwar.herts.ac.uk/ [Accessed 25 September 2024]; The Centre for Hidden Histories: Community, Commemoration and the First World War (2024), http://hiddenhistorieswwi.ac.uk/ [Accessed 25 September 2024].

websites form not only a web of memory, but a legacy of the Centenary which has managed to endure beyond 2018.

A Web of Memory: Digitising the Past for the Future

Websites and pages produced during the Centenary formed a web of memory designed to preserve the event for the future. This particular process of memory-making is emblematic of a cultural memory which conceives of the importance and relevance of a particular moment for the future.

> Remembering together is construed as a practice through which a cluster of people collectively archive material that when subsequently retrieved might serve future purposes [...] every act of remembering is always already about a particular conception of the future.[465]

More traditional forms of remembrance, such as the Silence, can be viewed as an awareness that the past is still important in the present. However, when memorialisation is preserved for future access, it demonstrates that the memory is also important for the future — 'We know the future only by the past we project into it', as succinctly noted in the opening quote of this chapter.[466] Moreover, it involves a decision-making process about which aspects of the memory are relevant for future audiences.

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[465] Roger I. Simon, 'Remembering Together: Social Media and the Formation of the Historical Present', in *Heritage and Social Media: Understanding Heritage in a Participatory Culture*, ed. by Elisa Giaccardi (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2012), p. 90.
[466] Gaddis, *The Landscape of History*, p. 3.

Naturally, the Centenary did not birth the importance of digitising the past for the future – this process has been an ongoing focus of the heritage industry for some time. In 2008, it was already recognised that 'a museum without a collections database and a Web presence is hardly considered professional, although not all institutions are using online access equally well'.[467] This simultaneously demonstrates a strong awareness of the importance of the Internet in the nascent period of Web 2.0, in tandem with the habitual tendency for social institutions to grasp on to emergent technologies as they become more prevalent, which is arguably symptomatic of the need for such organisations to be seen as consistently keeping up with the times. As has already been noted in this thesis, and will be expanded on in this chapter, a range of technologies were adopted to commemorate the First World War during the Centenary, both to present new perspectives and broaden the potential audience.

Yet, this drive also highlights the fact that the adoption of a technology can be hampered by unfamiliarity with the best way to use it. Indeed, Bearman and Geber expand on this notion by noting that 'the techno-social context in which cultural institutions will operate is changing much faster than professionals in these organisations appreciate'.[468] This concept of the 'techno-social' refers to the hyperconnectivity between societies and the technologies they utilise to communicate with others, resulting in an entwining of the personal and digital worlds. The convergence of three technological developments – the Internet, social media, and mobile communication devices – form what is referred to as the 'triple revolution', as the confluence of use between these technologies has revolutionised who has access to

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[467] David Bearman and Kati Geber, 'Transforming Cultural Heritage Institutions through New Media', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 23.4 (2008), p. 385.
[468] Ibid., p. 399.

information, and who is given a voice to share it.[469] The geographic scope permitted by these modern communication methods has also stretched and blurred traditional understandings of society and community, with Web 2.0 birthing new digital communities unrestrained by geographic borders or cultural bounds.

A prime example of this is the 1914–1918 Online International Encyclopedia of the First World War. Launched in October 2014 in collaboration between the Freie Universität Berlin and Bavarian State Library, the site promotes itself as 'the largest digital English-language reference work on the First World War'.[470] While being presented in one language, the site features contributions from more than 50 countries, resulting in more than 1,600 articles on a broad range of topics which can also be browsed by theme, geographic area and chronologically. The articles are peer-reviewed and thus offer a level of academic scrutiny and credibility, but unlike many academic journals, they are open-access to the public. The website remains active today, and continues to accept papers on subjects deemed missing from the collection, and so is notable in its commitment to consistently expanding public understanding of the conflict. Thus, it is a paradigm of a digital archive produced early on in the Centenary, and continuing to offer information beyond the anniversary's conclusion.

The physical archive has had a reasonably consistent process and structure throughout the history of historical documentation practices. Yet, it is not the case that simply transferring items online represents the best use of the Internet. Of course, in the 20 years since the emergence of Web 2.0, heritage practitioners are becoming more familiar with the benefits of digitisation, and how to improve ease of access and understanding of the documents and

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[469] Mary Chayko, 'Techno-Social Life: The Internet, Digital Technology, and Social Connectedness', *Sociology Compass*, 8.7 (2014), pp. 977–978.
[470] 1914-1918 Online, https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/ [Accessed 25 September 2024].

artefacts they hold. The process of digitisation also acts as a further preservation technique for the documents, as digital artefacts are much easier to maintain than physical ones. The sector can also use social media to promote their collections more broadly, while opening up a dialogue with their audiences which was previously restricted to the limits of feedback forms.

This process shifts the traditional nature of heritage as well. As Brant Burkey has noted, 'what was once treated as a narrative from cultural institutions is becoming something more like a conversation between heritage practitioners and their communities'.[471] The heritage and archival industries have long been the gatekeepers of what are deemed relevant historical artefacts worthy of preservation, yet the spread of these institutions on to social media means the observing public can voice their opinions about such collections. This activity has started to balance out the authority of major institutions over smaller projects, and allowed the public to be involved in deciding what should be studied and commemorated, rather than this being determined solely by institutions and their perception of what people want to see. As discussed in the previous chapter, this shift also affects the role of the historian, whose identity can be blurred by the anonymity of the Internet, or whose role in the dissemination of information can disappear entirely. Despite this balancing process, recognised names of institutions are still afforded more consideration from the public than lesser-known names. It is a recognised form of best practice in the field of History to seek information from reputable sources, and this standard is replicated when addressing online sources.

The Centenary was one of the first major commemorations of a historical event to occur since the birth of Web 2.0, excluding more recent observances such as the anniversary of the 9/11 terror attacks, thus it may seem that the occasion was a proving ground for the use

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[471] Burkey, 'Total Recall', p. 238.

of the Internet for such practices. Nevertheless, a level of impermanence in digital resources produced in the Arts and Humanities sector was identified back in 2006, in a report resulting from the LAIRAH (Log Analysis of Use of Internet Resources in the Arts and Humanities) Project. Plainly, this project set out to examine the progress of resource development and use in the emergent field of Digital Humanities, whose work is also often of a more advanced methodological nature than the simple production of websites and their content. Despite its age, the key findings are applicable here, particularly in reference to a lack of sustainability of online resources, but also in its statement that about a third of the digital resources they examined were unused.[472] Consequently, the report also set out several suggestions for the improvement of future resource production, relating to content, users, management, and dissemination.[473] Thus, while the report is inherently aimed towards those in the Digital Humanities, events such as the Centenary are undeniably prime examples of where this field would be expected to work closely with the more traditional field of History.

What it ultimately demonstrates is that the problems of digital impermanence were identified well before 2014. The report's recommendations also provide a framework for assessing how well websites produced during the Centenary fared in those terms. It also offers an understanding of the differences in how humanities scholars interact with digital resources, such as 'chaining' (the following of references from one source to another), and the acceptance of digital technology on the basis that it helps them save time and effort.[474] Of course, historians often have additional concerns about the validity of source material, and

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[472] Warwick et al., *The LAIRAH Project*, pp. 5–6.
[473] Ibid., pp. 7–8.
[474] Ibid., p. 11.

this awareness becomes amplified online. In a later journal article further explicating on the findings of the Project, it was noted that

> many of the resources that participants used most regularly are commercially produced, and thus the content and interface are usually of a high standard. On the evidence of this sample, users seem unwilling to allow for any lesser standards, even if they know a resource is not commercially produced.[475]

Essentially, if websites are not presented to a standard associated with large institutions, a user will deem that its content is of lesser value, and potentially seek information elsewhere. Website builders thus need to ensure that sites are presented in an accessible and aesthetically pleasing manner, to maintain their place among the crowd of similar sites.

In this manner, the website builders share the same concerns as those of television producers discussed in earlier chapters, whereby maintaining the interest of the viewer/user is paramount above all else. Indeed, similar to the concerns of channel-hopping television viewers, 'users tend to make up their mind about whether they will use web-based resources in a remarkably short time [...] most visitors bounce out of websites very quickly after entering them'.[476] The difference between the two media, however, is that while websites may have the chance of a single page view to capture a user's attention (in contrast to the few minutes that a television viewer may afford a programme), they are less restricted by the amount of information they can present beyond this point. Of course, associations with legitimate sources are relatively easy to identify on dedicated websites; yet, in the muddied waters of social media, where institutions and individuals collide, a voice of authority can be harder to

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[475] Warwick et al., 'If You Build It Will They Come?', p. 96.
[476] Ibid., p. 89.

identify. It also raises issues around provenance. Whilst institutions and the researchers using items in their collections are aware of the needs for citing the location and ownership of sources (thus preserving the organisation's copyright possession of the source), this can become lost or disregarded online, where such considerations are often deemed less critical, and the audience sees an image as an image, rather than a collection piece. It is this issue which, as opposed to challenging myths and old ideas about the First World War, can instead result in their proliferation. When these posts gain attention, they form growing echo chambers where the opinion or misconception becomes amplified further.

This issue is also replicated for authorship of some websites. For example, 'The London WW1 Memorial' website seeks to correct the fact that there is no 'war memorial dedicated to all Londoners lost in action during the First World War'.[477] The website acknowledges the presence of more localised war memorials, but argues these are incomplete, and also states that the memorials are 'limited in scope' as they generally only provide 'a name and initials'.[478] This is, of course, better suited as an observation on the natural restrictions necessitated by physical memorials – a corporeal memorial providing more than just the names of those commemorated would need to be considerably larger in size. Yet, because the website offers no details about its authors, it is difficult to extrapolate its basis and intended audience. The site itself allows navigation or searching by location, with London (as geographically understood during the First World War) being broken down into 250 areas, and currently contains details for 115,140 people (including women). 'Producing these names in physical form would be unthinkable - the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme, the CWGC's

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[477] 'WW1 War Memorial London', *The London WW1 Memorial 1914-1918* (2023), https://londonwarmemorial.co.uk/ [Accessed 14 November 2023].
[478] Ibid.

largest memorial, is inscribed with 72,337 names across 48 panels and is 140 feet tall.' As noted by Alex King, 'in large urban communities the addition of names to a monument might be ruled out by the number required and the cost'.[479] The digital London war memorial, without providing any additional details, if produced in the same style as Thiepval, would potentially be 210 feet tall with 72 panels. Thus, digital space offers fewer restrictions than physical space for a greater scope in memorialisation, albeit with a diminished sense of communal commemoration as is generally the case in London.[480] However, it does offer more input for public involvement, as website visitors can submit new entries, or suggest alterations to existing ones. Allowing the public to offer previously untold stories can also help move cultural memory beyond 1960s tropes. The aspect of public involvement is one of the most unique aspects of digital memorialisation, and it is towards this we now turn.

The Front Lines of Politics

Political debate, the participation in which was previously restrained to those prominent enough to be granted a platform in such activities, has become a much broader activity following the boom of social media. The entwining of cultural memory and politics was discussed in the introduction of this thesis, yet considerations of this relationship on social media broaden the scope for its analysis. Sites such as Twitter commonly feature individuals debating each other about current affairs and political issues, and this has also been the case with discussions about historical conflicts. This furore peaks when commemorative events are in the spotlight, as the general public have a broad spectrum of views on what

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[479] Alex King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain: The Symbolism and Politics of Remembrance* (Oxford: Berg, 1998), p. 146.
[480] For a deeper consideration of this, see Connelly, *The Great War, Memory and Ritual*.

commemoration should look like, and who it should include. It also sparks debates about events following the war, adding more recent events to the remoulding of cultural memory.

One such example of this is a post from the BBC News account, sharing Queen Elizabeth II arriving at Westminster Abbey for a service marking 100 years since the end of the war.[481] One commenter remarked that '[i]t also mark [*sic*] 100 years since British occupied Palestine & hand it over to Israel, thus starting never-ending war/conflict in Middle East'.[482] Two commenters highlighted a tension with the religious theme of the service, the first arguing that '[w]e should remember that the churches on neither [*sic*] side did not speak out against the war'.[483] The other called it '[a] bullshit ceremony! If ever there was a need for God to make an appearance surely events such as the World Wars were one. So many brave and innocent died and yet people still revere a God of a cult. May as well worship turnips'.[484] As commemoration of the war has held to religious foundations since the observation of Remembrance Sunday, this detraction of the tone is notably unusual. It is also indicative of persisting attitudes about futility towards the war, demonstrating some lasting power of 1960s ideas. In a similarly unusual attack on events, someone took aim at the presence of the Royal Family. 'Typical BBC to turn this into a PR puff-piece for the parasitic Windsors, bedecked in their fake honours. Don't forget that it was a giant spat between the so-called 'royals' that started the slaughter in the first place. Celebrate the fallen, but not the monarchy'.[485] Such

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[481] BBC News (UK) (@BBCNews), Tweet, *Twitter* (11 November 2018), https://twitter.com/BBCNews/status/1061683348483915776 [Accessed 22 May 2023].

[482] Iskander (@ezracopters), Tweet, *Twitter* (12 November 2018), https://twitter.com/ezracopters/status/1061987533171683329 [Accessed 22 May 2023].

[483] Steven Isle (@damnthatcursor), Tweet, *Twitter* (12 November 2018), https://twitter.com/damnthatcursor/status/1061917070768644096 [Accessed 22 May 2023].

[484] Rafe (@zanderzootPWi), Tweet, *Twitter* (11 November 2018), https://twitter.com/zanderzootPWi/status/1061728499109629953 [Accessed 22 May 2023].

[485] The Spirit of Diderot (@UK_Republic), Tweet, *Twitter* (12 November 2018), https://twitter.com/UK_Republic/status/1061899360005447680 [Accessed 22 May 2023].

remarks could be seen to demonstrate that in the modern age, some of the long-established aspects of commemoration are coming to be seen by some parts of the population as out of touch, and that the transition of such events from a sphere largely devoid of social commentary to the textual battlefield of social media reveals the clashes which hitherto gained less notice.

Commemoration of the war also commonly tends to be used to reflect on the modern state of international relations, often stemming from its natural relationship with calls for international commemoration and peace. In 2018, French President Emmanuel Macron 'stressed the importance of global unity at a ceremony in Paris marking a century since the end of World War One'.[486] Despite the president's calls for peace, some responses to the Tweet were not so diplomatic. One respondent argued that 'the people who fought and died in WWI didn't die for a One world, globalist agenda. They would probably identify as Nationalists'.[487] This broad-brush stroke approach to the motivations behind thousands of men enlisting is often used to enforce modern political ideas. Sometimes, the connection to the past is abandoned altogether, with a complete disregard to the resulting irony. The commenter who stated 'we don't want a European army' gives no heed to the fact that the conflict necessitated the cooperation of armies across Europe to achieve a common aim.[488] This is part of a widely expressed viewpoint, as seen in other responses in the thread, that is critical of the notion of a European Army being used for good purposes. This shattering of pan-European commemoration of the First World War is also something of a recent phenomenon,

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[486] BBC News (World) (@BBCWorld), Tweet, *Twitter* (11 November 2018), https://twitter.com/BBCWorld/status/1061595691774955520 [Accessed 22 May 2023].

[487] Tones of Home (@tonesofhome26), Tweet, *Twitter* (11 November 2018), https://twitter.com/tonesofhome26/status/1061681915986472960 [Accessed 22 May 2023].

[488] Jenni (@suffragettecity), Tweet, *Twitter* (12 November 2018), https://twitter.com/suffragecIty/status/1061777830110023681, [Accessed 22 May 2023].

which arguably is due in part to Brexit. The 2016 referendum, which split Britain in half across the Remain-Leave vote, increased voices of European division in the middle of an anniversary ultimately intended to encourage European cohesion and peace. Evidently, not all shifts away from the ideas of the 1960s are positive ones.

Naturally though, not all attempts to gerrymander the political machinations of the past to the present serve one political viewpoint. One of the comments supported Macron's speech with the words '[l]ong live Europe and I think you in collaboration with @BBCNews need to say more frequently that in order to retain PEACE in the UK [...] you need to educate the UK. Then we need to have a #PeoplesVote'.[489] The hashtag is commonly used on Twitter in reference to debates around holding a second European Membership Referendum. Beyond this specific attachment to Brexit, some of the other positive responses in the thread indeed identified with the call for peace. These disparate responses to the same speech about the past demonstrate how our current views and outlook on the world will skew how we respond to it, and ultimately the ways we identify and shape the cultural memory of the event.

Has The Memory Lasted? Websites and Other Digital Memorials

Beyond the convoluted world of social media lies the more regulated landscape of institutional websites, alongside those produced by smaller groups and organisations. Structured around the ethos and aims of the individual institutions, and often acting as a branch of their larger websites, these pages served as virtual memorials and repositories for cultural memory of the conflict during the Centenary. Smaller works are harder to find, as they

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[489] Jenny NICE LIVERPOOL FBPA (@Jenny_Nice), Tweet, *Twitter* (11 November 2018), https://x.com/Jenny_Nice/status/1061662060763930626 [Accessed 22 May 2023].

tend to not register highly on search engine algorithms, but also because the funding

requirements for server space and domain ownership mean they tend to have shorter online

lifespans. Some small collections are housed on collection websites such as *Historypin*,[490]

whereas others are grouped together in collections built by web crawlers.[491] One such

initiative for this activity is *Archive-It*, which specialises in organising webpages into

collections.

A more specific collection, built by the International Internet Preservation Consortium

(IIPC), is for 'World War I Commemoration', which contains 2,746 archived pages, of which

708 are in English – the majority are French; with France as the highest domain region and

Canada as the third, this is somewhat understandable (see Figure 5 for language distribution).

Resultingly, Verdun is also the most common theme in the collection. The spread of

geographic domains is considerably broad, so it is also possible some international sites were

written in English to reach a larger audience. This collection features websites which would

score poorly on most search engine algorithms (for example, *Wordpress* pages), and as such

offers a broader overview of such activity, once again offering up lesser-known narratives to

broader cultural memory. It is somewhat cumbersome to navigate – despite the option for

keyword searches, many of the titles offer little detail about the scope of their content.[492] As

such, it is still a valiant effort to save smaller scale projects from digital obsolescence. The IIPC

itself is a fascinating aspect of the awareness of issues surrounding digital longevity of

materials in the modern age. Founded in 2003, early on in the digital age, its mission is 'to

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[490] For example, 'First World War Centenary', *Historypin*, https://www.historypin.org/en/first-world-war-centenary/ [Accessed 27 October 2023].
[491] Web crawlers are software programmes which search the Internet for web pages containing certain content and download them.
[492] 'World War I Commemoration', *Archive-It* (2015), https://archive-it.org/collections/6415 [Accessed 14 November 2023].

acquire, preserve and make accessible knowledge and information from the Internet for future generations everywhere, promoting global exchange and international relations.[493] This demonstrates an awareness from the earlier days of the Internet of the risk in assuming that everything uploaded to the Internet will remain there in perpetuity, an assumption which can be easily forgotten in the face of the large quantities of information available online today.
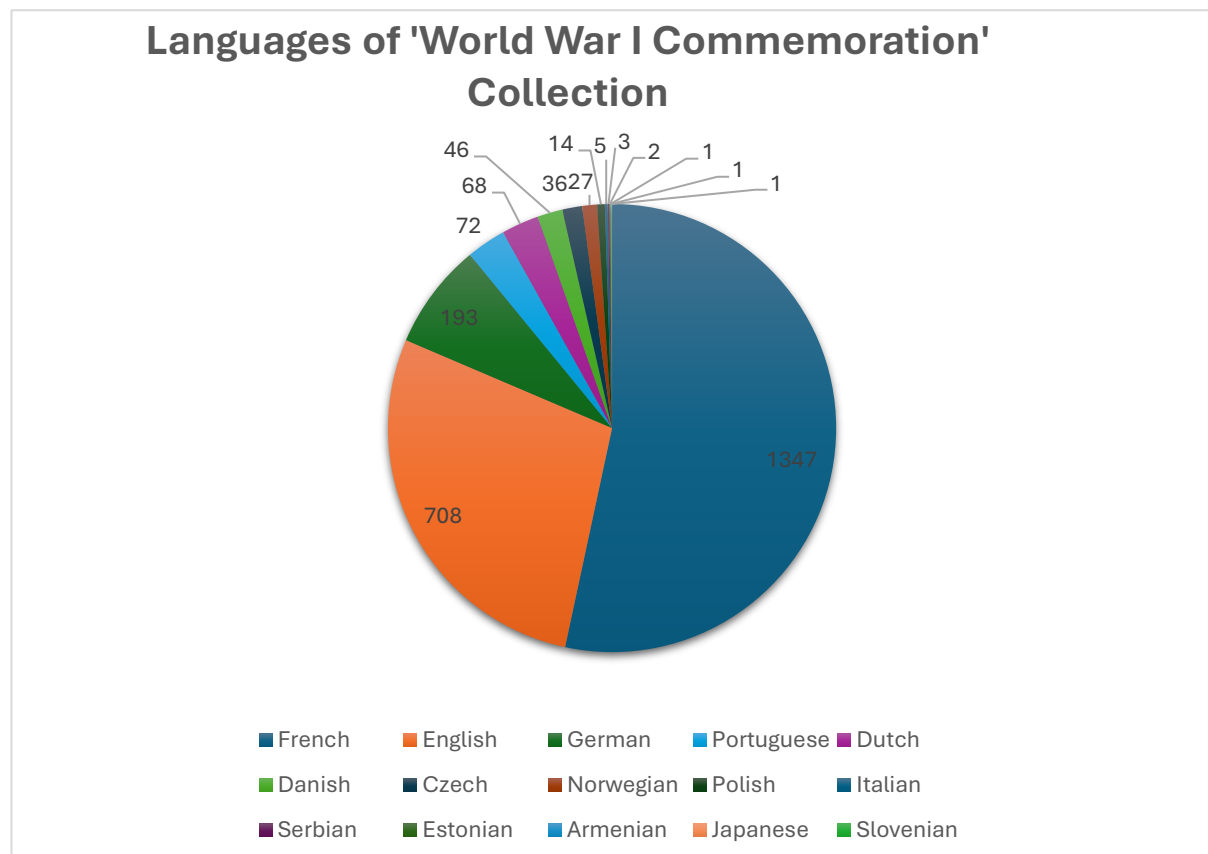

Figure 5: Language Distribution of 'World War I Commemoration' Collection on the IIPC

While vast numbers of references to Centenary activity are scattered across social media sites, finding them can prove difficult, and interpreting their contextual nature and engagement levels even more so. As observed by Jerome de Groot, 'it provides an enormous new archive but appreciating it is incredibly difficult, and the tools are still not quite developed

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[493] 'Mission & Goals', International Internet Preservation Consortium (2012), https://web.archive.org/web/20170606134927/http://netpreserve.org/about-us/mission-goals [Accessed 25 September 2024].

properly'.[494] The lasting digital legacies unsurprisingly stem from larger institutions which have the funding to maintain their upkeep. Furthermore, the algorithmic structuring of search engines is devolving human control over what is deemed relevant. Traditionally, an archivist can advise a researcher on further sources based on their own knowledge and understanding of collections. With search engines, and also social media, there is no such interpersonal interaction. Algorithms rank and organise search results and provide information based on criteria collected and interpreted by machine learning processes, more commonly identified as artificial intelligence (AI).[495] In this manner, such algorithms are only ever attempting to guide a user at a surface level, albeit with deep-rooted systems guiding the process. It is this level of superficiality which discourages scholars, including those in the arts and humanities, in trusting search engine results as meaningful information – 'they find words rather than meaning'.[496] The push from a superficial understanding of a subject, such as the First World War, towards a more nuanced and critical evaluation requires more than just a search result – it needs a powerful stimulus.

Windows to the Past: From Memorialisation to Investigation

Memorials in their various forms exist as metaphorical windows to the past – although they are produced in the present, they are intended for the viewer to picture a conception of the past. The emphasis here is on *conception*; memorials do not teach history; they highlight the preconceived notions held by the spectator. They may present an unfamiliar aspect of history,

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[494] De Groot, *Consuming History*, p. 98.

[495] See Massimo Airoldi, *Machine Habitus: Toward a Sociology of Algorithms* (Cambridge: Polity, 2022), pp. 76–77.

[496] Fabio Ciravegna et al, 'Finding Needles in Haystacks: Data-Mining in Distributed Historical Datasets', in *The Virtual Representation of the Past*, ed. by Mark Greengrass and Lorna Hughes (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008), p. 65.

for which the individual has no reference points, whereby they will either take the details provided at face value or, in some cases, seek further information through other sources. In physical form, this is difficult, as it requires a lasting determination in the spectator – a statue cannot provide links to further reading (without modern interventions such as quick-response (QR) codes). However, on the Internet, this is much easier to facilitate through hyperlinks, conveniently and immediately transporting the reader from one point to the next. This potential for broadening awareness was at the heart of the Centenary, with commemorative events designed to both memorialise and encourage a deeper awareness of the First World War. The ability to lead a web user along a path of discovery also increases the chances of reshaping their cultural memory of the conflict, and challenging preconceived notions. In some situations, this does not work – the image designed to provoke thought and further investigation gets no further than raising the audience's entrenched ideas about the subject, as the power of the visual connects with the power of the emotional. This is particularly evident when considering interactions with institutions on social media.

The Bigger Picture: Cultural Memory as a Visual Snapshot

While the previous chapter explored some of the ad hoc ways the public engaged with social media during the Centenary (focussed on shared talking points and informal accounts), the accounts of institutions present a more recognisable and concentrated area for engagement, while also demonstrating the ways such organisations may have attempted to direct commemoration and the conversations around it. Of course, social media is a paradoxically complicated and simple place; it is complicated because there is actually little structure to inform and direct discussions, yet it is simple because it is based around a fairly

straightforward and unabashed intention of gaining the most attention possible through short and eye-catching Tweets. In this manner, it shares some similarities with television – the need to capture the attention of the audience, often through impact.

One of the simplest ways to snare the attention of someone scrolling through their social media feed is the use of pictures. This is particularly relevant on Twitter, where the character limit of posts restricts the amount of information that can be given in a Tweet. For some institutional posts, these images and the text connected to them often serve as an intended springboard to their own websites, providing a glimpse of the information to be gained beyond the provided hyperlink. However, in the highspeed world of social media, interaction often fails to get beyond the first step. A prime example of this is a Tweet from the IWM's Twitter account towards the end of the Centenary. The Tweet stated, 'Today marks the centenary of the Battle of Amiens and the start of the Hundred Days campaign, a four-month period of Allied success, which resulted in the signing of the Armistice on 11 November. Learn more: http://ow.ly/NlYP30lgWjj #Amiens100'.[497] The link leads to a page on the IWM's website, detailing the Battle of Amiens and its resultant victory on the Somme after several years of attritional warfare.

Indeed, the IWM clearly intends to use its Twitter account as a gateway to its collections, as the account's bio instructs readers to '[s]earch picture numbers on our website for more information'.[498] The responses to the post on Twitter, however, demonstrate little engagement with the content matter, instead reflecting common views about the war as a

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[497] Imperial War Museums (@I_W_M), Tweet, *Twitter* (8 August 2018), https://twitter.com/I_W_M/status/1027095832959561729 [Accessed 29 August 2023].
[498] Imperial War Museums (@I_W_M), *Twitter*, https://twitter.com/I_W_M [Accessed 29 August 2023].

whole. The post is accompanied by a photo which shows a vast number of soldiers.[499] It appears to be the photo alone, and not the additional information about the battle, which several respondents engaged with. One queried that they 'wonder how many of these men returned home?'[500] Another, in reflection of the ongoing connections between historical remembrance and modern politics, said 'Lest we forget. So many young and wasted lives in one picture. 100 years later and if you see a picture of mass people gathering they are all wearing kufi/topi caps and heading to a mosque with no love for our countrynor [*sic*] values'.[501] Perhaps he missed the programmes and projects throughout the Centenary highlighting the involvement of people from other nations in the war effort, most notably here the 400,000 Muslim soldiers who fought for the British Army. Once again, the Internet proves the endurance of 1960s ideas in contemporary cultural memory of the war.

This is reflective of the shallow level of engagement which the very nature of Twitter (and indeed broader social media) encourages. As observed by Edward Relph, digital media 'make it easy for alternative beliefs to be constructed merely on the basis of feelings or idiosyncratic observations, and then for these contrived truths to be shared, no matter how empirically erroneous or politically obnoxious they may be'.[502] It is also indicative of the fact that for all of the benefits of the spread of information and resources on the Internet, traditionally entrenched notions about futility in the 'lions led by donkeys' vein – enforced culturally through *Oh, What a Lovely War!* (1963) and *Blackadder Goes Forth* (1989), and

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[499] The photo is from the IWM's collections: 'The Hundred Days Offensive, August-November 1918' (IWM (Q 9271)), *IWM* (27 August 1918), https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205194920 [Accessed 29 August 2023].

[500] Gilflirt (@GIL_FLIRT), Tweet, *Twitter* (8 August 2018), https://twitter.com/I_W_M/status/1027095832959561729 [Accessed 11 July 2023].

[501] Deks_LUFC (@d3ksx), Tweet, *Twitter,* (8 August 2018), https://x.com/d3ksx/status/1027323836251996160 [Accessed 11 July 2023].

[502] Relph, 'Digital Disorientation and Place', p. 575.

historiographically through Alan Clark's *The Donkeys* (1961) – remain hard to shift. While the IWM has provided a link to further information, the short attention spans inherent in the multitude of people scrolling through a 'feed' means few are likely to actually click it. Thus, the institution has attempted to provide further knowledge, but many are simply working with what is immediately in front of them and using this to present ideas already familiar to them. Overall, out of the six replies to the tweet, only two actually engaged with subject matter itself.

Yet, some links do receive engagement, often when there is no media in the tweet for the audience to immediately engage with. Another tweet from the IWM celebrated a collaborative project with Aardman Animations, renowned as the creators of *Wallace and Gromit* (1989–present) and *Morph* (1977–present). As the post mentions, the studio had 'made a beautiful film for #ww1 centenary and the opening of our new galleries http://ow.ly/yQxia'.[503] Endemic across much digital content from the Centenary, the link is now broken. However, the video can still be viewed by using the Internet Wayback Machine. It is a short video (of one and a half minutes in length) in a painted animation format. It opens with numerous green pairs of quotation marks styled as birds taking off into the sky, as a myriad of voices recount experiences from the war – certain ones manage to stand out, such as a man shouting "Gas, Gas!", and another singing *It's a Long Way to Tipperary*. During the course of the video, the quotes fly out across the former Western Front, over to the English coast, then through London to the IWM, where they finally settle. It closes on the line 'Many never came home. But their stories have' and notes the institution's new First World War Galleries. The responses to this all engaged with the film in the link, unanimously praising it.

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[503] Imperial War Museums (@I_W_M), Tweet, *Twitter* (7 July 2014), https://twitter.com/I_W_M/status/486065402553073664 [Accessed 29 August 2023].

250

Several found it moving, with one respondent noting it brought them to tears. It has received 76 retweets and 31 likes, which is a considerable level of interaction from a non-famous social media account. The IWM itself saw a considerable growth in its followership during the Centenary, doubling from around 53,300 followers in September 2014 to around 122,000 by December 2018.[504]

While it is the general public who often form the majority of responses to institutional Tweets, occasionally institutions will engage with each other through their social media accounts. There has been something of a subculture forming around this activity in recent years, as rival brands engage in light-hearted interactions with each other, with a prominent example being the legal dispute over a caterpillar cake between Aldi and Marks & Spencer in 2021. Interactions between museums are of a considerably lesser profile, yet they still take place. When the IWM posted an #OnThisDay Tweet to mark the death of the war poet Wilfred Owen at the Battle of Sambre, two institutions chimed in with their own contributions.[505] The Chelsea Physic Garden account noted that '[i]t is said that he spent one of his last afternoons in London at the Physic Garden, Osbert Sitwell had a key http://bit.ly/1vzKABC'.[506] Once again, the link is broken, but the Wayback Machine reveals that it led to a webpage with 'The Garden's WWI Story'. The Marjon Archives also highlighted that their 'records indicate he was sent in to replace one of our students who had been killed in action - John Coulson Babbage'.[507] Such interactions are demonstrative of the ability of social media to not only

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[504] Figures obtained using the Internet Archive Wayback Machine for the IWM's Twitter page https://web.archive.org/web/20180801000000*/https://twitter.com/I_W_M [Accessed 25 September 2024].
[505] Imperial War Museums (@I_W_M), Tweet, *Twitter* (4 November 2015), https://twitter.com/I_W_M/status/661876301372985344 [Accessed 29 August 2023].
[506] ChelseaPhysicGarden (@ChelsPhysicGdn), Tweet, *Twitter* (4 November 2015), https://twitter.com/ChelsPhysicGdn/status/661883793687617536 [Accessed 29 August 2023].
[507] Marjon Archives (@gillianfewings), Tweet, *Twitter,* (4 November 2015), https://twitter.com/gillianfewings/status/661877954780241920 [Accessed 29 August 2023].

encourage public involvement in commemoration activities, but also of institutions leaning on each other to share knowledge and promote their own collections.

It is arguably a widely held concern that the simplification of information through media such as television and the Internet can result in the impairment of understanding about the past, and the perpetuation of commonly held misconceptions about events. These concerns are compounded when institutions share information without additional details about its creation, as the public may not be likely to immediately query information from what they perceive to be an authoritative source. A paradigm for such dilemmas appeared in the form of a Tweet by the IWM, which stated that 'This rare document from IWM's collections shows the moment the First World War ended. The artillery activity it illustrates was recorded on the American front near the River Moselle, one minute before and one minute after the Armistice'.[508] Quoted in the Tweet is a post from the BBC Breakfast account, showing a clip of a sound graph illustrating the sudden cessation of the guns at the Armistice.

However, the two Tweets use noticeably different terminology. While the IWM post states the activity was 'recorded on the American front', the BBC post notes it 'has recreated the ceasefire'. This difference in language results in the BBC acknowledging that the sound graph is a reproduction, whereas the IWM seems to suggest it was created at the time of the Armistice. Responses to the IWM's post indicate that many of them had believed the sounds were genuinely from the Western Front, with comments noting the emergence of birdsong after the guns fell silent, alongside the usual handful of Tweets criticising the loss of life

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[508] Imperial War Museums (@I_W_M), Tweet, *Twitter* (6 November 2018), https://twitter.com/I_W_M/status/1059859754196045827, [Accessed 11 July 2023].

resulting from the war. Such sentiments are shared on the BBC Breakfast post, with more people noting the poignancy of the birdsong, contrasted with the noise of the guns.

When reading replies from the BBC Breakfast account's original post, it becomes clear that at least one member of the audience was more aware about the convoluted veracity of the source. One user asks for clarification about if it is 'actual recorded sounds from 1918 or is the sound graph more like a seismograph and @I_W_M has just selected sounds to approximate it based on the noise levels? Is the bird sound that everyone loves at the end authentic or an editorial choice?'[509] The IWM's account responded to this Tweet noting that it 'is not an actual sound recording made at the time, it is a purely visual representation of the noise made by the guns captured on photographic paper'.[510] They expand on this noting the use of sound designers who took inspiration from the museum's collections.[511] Another respondent then highlighted that 'this has confused 75% of Twitter!'[512] While it is understandable that Tweets allow for a short space to make an impact, it is somewhat bizarre that the truth about the audio on the clip is hidden away in a response to someone's question, presumably leaving many of the others who commented in the belief that what they listened to was really the end of the war. This is reflective of the observation earlier about localised echo chambers forming online, where misconceptions about the war and its representations can quickly take hold.

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[509] Erick Harper (@ObiWanHarp), Tweet, *Twitter* (7 November 2018), https://twitter.com/ObiWanHarp/status/1060119867729305601 [Accessed 29 August 2023].
[510] Imperial War Museums (@I_W_M), Tweet, *Twitter* (7 November 2018), https://twitter.com/I_W_M/status/1060201279627104256 [Accessed 29 August 2023].
[511] Imperial War Museums (@I_W_M, Tweet, *Twitter* (7 November 2018), https://twitter.com/I_W_M/status/1060201602466938891 [Accessed 29 August 2023].
[512] Ken Powers (@KenPowers00), Tweet, *Twitter* (9 November 2018), https://x.com/KenPowers00/status/1060998201694552064 [Accessed 29 August 2023].

One of the less obvious forms of visual snapshot are maps. Less evocative than their photographic and artistic counterparts, maps still offer a sense of location and place to discussions about the First World War. Somme100, a commemorative partnership project lead by the IWM for the anniversary of the Battle of the Somme, most prominently featured reruns of the titular 1916 films. The web archive for the project contains further details about the screening tour, in addition to other Somme100 activities, such as the production of a '4D Somme' interactive map.[513] At first glance, it appears this unique digital content has also been lost to digital obscurity – the National Archives web link does not lead anywhere. Rather, it has not been archived by them, and the site and map still exists in the original web location.[514] Produced in collaboration with Living Legacies 1914–18, the map focusses on the area of the Somme battlefield which involved Irish battalions, 'notably the 36th (Ulster) Division and the 16th (Irish) Division.[515] The project demonstrates the effectiveness of combining the technological output of the past (i.e., the maps produced by surveyors and cartographers at the time) with modern geographical information systems (GIS) technology to overlay one with the other, providing a real time illustration of the locations of battle activities on modern maps.

This site provides a paragon of the utilisation of digital technology to expand the ways we understand and experience the history of the First World War, by providing modern refence points to historical sources and virtual representations of physical spaces. The use of

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[513] Hannah Clark, 'New "4D Somme" Interactive Map of the Battlefields Launched', *1914.org* (2016), https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20190322123439/http://www.1914.org/news/new-4d-somme-interactive-map-of-the-battlefields-launched/ [Accessed 31 October 2023].
[514] '4dSomme: Mapping the 1916 Battle of the Somme and the Actions of the Irish Raised Divisions', *Living Legacies* (2016), https://queensub.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=f0629347d5dc4d6987686f876eec5649 [Accessed 31 October 2023].
[515] Hannah Clark, 'New "4D Somme" Interactive Map'.

virtual experiences to present information about the conflict became a slowly emerging phenomenon during the Centenary, and the ongoing appearance of such projects suggests it may become an increasingly common feature in future commemorative events. Indeed, in 2019 the Newman Library at Virginia Tech's Blacksburg campus hosted an exhibition which featured a virtual reality tour of the First World War tunnels under Vauqois, accompanied by a physical replica.[516] Moreover, VR essentially shares the sanctification of physical places in the same manner that television did during the Centenary, albeit with a greater sense of immersion.

Springboard Sources

Attempts to encourage further investigations of the past do not always fall flat. One of the more successful ways to achieve this goal is by tapping into areas which are already popular with the general population. As noted earlier in this thesis, genealogy has held popular interest in recent decades, partly inspired by the success of the television series *Who Do You Think You Are?* (BBC, 2004–Present). Thus, encouraging the public to explore their own familial history with the First World War was a keystone in Centenary commemorative activity.

One of the IWM's own online projects was Lives of the First World War.[517] Running from May 2014 to March 2019, the digital project saw a collaboration between 160,000 people to connect the lives of those who experienced the war, on the home and fighting fronts, through digitisation of physical materials and the sharing of anecdotes. The

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[516] See Zach Duer et al, 'Making the Invisible Visible: Illuminating the Hidden Histories of the World War I Tunnels at Vauqois Through a Hybridized Virtual Reality Exhibition', *IEEE Computer Graphics and Applications*, 40.4 (2020), pp. 39–50.

[517] 'Lives of the First World War', *IWM*.

background reinforces this focus on individuals with a collage of photographs of people named on the website, with the bottom of the page linking to some 'Featured Lives' for those who have not come looking for a specific individual, or for a page to contribute to. People commemorated on the website are connected through 'Communities', such as the regiment they served with, allowing the previously individual stories to be combined into a larger representation of events. As alluded to previously, this also connects names on war memorials, providing a cohesive history to an otherwise vague list of information.

This particular aspect also pertains to the comment made in the previous chapter about defining exactly who and what the public are supposed to be remembering. The profiles on the website are also given an authoritative basis through a list of evidence connected to the profiles about them, or 'Life Stories' as the project terms people profiles. However, as noted in the site's FAQs, the evidence list does not link to any hosted records for the 'permanent digital memorial', although links are provided for external references.[518] This identification of the site as a 'digital memorial' was reiterated elsewhere, namely in a 2017 conference paper about the project, and on the website for the company which produced the Collections Information Integration Middleware software utilised by the IWM's online collections.[519] As part of an ongoing commitment towards helping the public with their research, the website also provides a link to guidance for individuals attempting to trace their family history. This highlights the need to ensure that an interest in family history, specifically around the First World War, does not simply disappear now the heightened activity around its anniversary has ended. Moreover, encouraging an awareness of personal family histories and

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[518] 'For Researchers', *IWM,* https://livesofthefirstworldwar.iwm.org.uk/research [Accessed 27 October 2023].
[519] See 'Lives of the First World War: Creating a Digital Memorial', *Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales* (2017), https://rcahmw.gov.uk/lives-of-the-first-world-war-creating-a-digital-memorial/ [Accessed 14 November 2023]; 'IWM's Permanent Digital Memorial', *Knowledge Integration* (2023), https://www.k-int.com/iwms-permanent-digital-memorial/ [Accessed 14 November 2023].

specific experiences of the conflict is arguably beneficial for combating generalised notions promoted by 1960s historiography.

Other organisations also sought to encourage grassroots level investigations into the history of the conflict. One such example is Gateways to the First World War, an AHRC engagement centre founded by the University of Kent, and involved partnerships with Essex, Portsmouth, and Leeds universities. Their goal was driving public interest in the Centenary through a range of events and activities, alongside the provision of various resources and support for other projects. The thematic concentration of their work centred around commemoration and memory; the Home and Fighting Fronts; and medical, propaganda, maritime and operational histories of the conflict. The most recent post is a link to the report produced by the centre in 2019, detailing the success and outreach of their events from 2014–2019. It covers how Gateways supported 73 HLF funded organisations, from helping with their funding applications through to the provision of expertise and advice for their projects; the development of a research network to provide guidance and support for community researchers and events; and the formation of collaborations with 65 partners to produce long-term frameworks for academic and public research.[520] The site also serves as a repository of information and guidance for those carrying out their own research, by providing answers to common questions about the research process, and links to websites with information covering different areas. To this end, the Internet was the primary means for Gateways and other engagement centres to gather an audience and community groups to work with, as it consisted of members from various universities and thus lacked a physical centre. Thus, an

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[520] Gateways to the First World War, *We Made Sure It Wasn't All Over By Christmas 2014* (Sheffield: Research Retold, 2019), https://www.gatewaysfww.org.uk/sites/default/files/GFWW%20Visual%20Summary%20-%20Research%20Retold%2023%20Oct%20%28Print%29-compressed.pdf [Accessed 10 October 2023].

online presence was not merely a useful means of connection for such organisations during the Centenary—it was essential. This cohesion between academics, the public and community research groups is also beneficial for reshaping cultural memory, as well as further breaking down any perceived walls demarcating Public History.

A Broader History

As noted in chapter two, one of the key aims for the Centenary was to broaden and diversify the people and places included in First World War commemorations. The activity on television was mirrored by research projects designed to cast light on these less explored areas. The Centre for Hidden Histories, one of the smaller AHRC engagement centres involving Nottingham University, Nottingham Trent University, and the University of Derby, focussed on aspects of war which were usually less prominent in mainstream commemoration, such as 'the internment of "enemy aliens", the treatment of Belgian refugees' and the role of 'people from the British Empire and Labour Corps in Britain'.[521] This scope naturally results in a smaller number of projects, yet the focus on this area resulted in a higher level of representation for such groups than was seen on television during the Centenary. This notion of 'hidden' or 'forgotten' histories became a popular buzzword during the Centenary, featuring across television programmes and book titles, and yet it was somehow out of step with the increasing amount of historiography in these areas in the years prior to (and during) the anniversary. Thus, it is the centre's acknowledgement of its exclusion from 'mainstream commemoration' which highlights the novel nature of its work. One of the projects listed on the website adopts

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[521] 'About Us', The Centre for Hidden Histories, http://hiddenhistorieswwi.ac.uk/about/ [Accessed 11 October 2023].

this nomenclature for 'Hidden Strangers', which considered the violence experienced by German citizens in the East Midlands during the war. The experiences of Germans in Britain during the war were largely missing from Centenary broadcasts, with the sole exception being the experiences of Dieter Lippke in *Home Front*. The website also has a reflective report on the centre's activities, which notes the development of research skills by participants, the enhanced exposure for involved organisations, and the attendance of local and national government representatives to some events.[522]

Everyday Lives in War, founded by the University of Hertfordshire and including collaborations with Essex, Northampton, Lincoln, Central Lancashire, and West of England universities, covered a range of projects devoted to microhistories of various social groups during the conflict. Where *The Centre for Hidden Histories* explored some larger-scale notions about unexplored histories, this centre opted for more everyday situations. The Collaborative Projects page demonstrates the scope of this work, from farming and fishing in Devon to basketmaking to Quakers. Much like the other centres, they produced a report at the end of their funding period, which they have stylised as a guide to working in collaboration with other groups and organisations, informed by the experiences of their own time doing so throughout the anniversary, to help others avoid the 'uncertainties and problems' they encountered.[523] Helping the public avoid the pitfalls of collaborative research is a useful way to encourage the activity and maintain engagement with the conflict and its cultural memory.

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[522] 'Impact: Reflection Workshop with Community Partners at Edin's Café, Nottingham', The Centre for Hidden Histories, 14 September 2016, http://hiddenhistorieswwi.ac.uk/uncategorized/2016/09/impact-reflection-workshop-with-community-partners-at-edins-cafe-nottingham/ [Accessed 11 October 2023].

[523] 'Making Histories, Sharing Histories Putting University – Community Collaboration into Practice', Everyday Lives in War, 9 November 2020, https://everydaylivesinwar.herts.ac.uk/2020/11/making-histories-sharing-histories-putting-university-community-collaboration-into-practice/ [Accessed 17 October 2023].

Women's Work 100 was an international project headed by the IWM to explore the contribution of women to the war effort. As noted in the second chapter of this thesis, the experiences of women during wartime were raised during the Centenary as one of the traditionally lesser commemorated areas, with *Kate Adie's Women of World War One* (BBC Two, 2014) identified as one of the attempts to amend this on television, alongside the radio drama *Home Front* (BBC Radio 4, 2014–2018). The linked website for the project has pages for 'Stories', which are articles about specific areas of women's involvement with the war, and 'Collections', which detail the various archives and sources for records relating to relevant research areas.[524]

Although the Punjab and World War One project website was launched after the Centenary in 2021, it is indicative of ongoing digital commemorative work around the conflict.[525] A collaboration between historian Gavin Rand and the UK Punjab Heritage Association (UKPHA), the project set out to transcribe and digitise the service records of approximately 320,000 Punjabi soldiers who participated in the war, through a lengthy process involving 26,000 pages from the relevant registers. This endeavour to reveal the contribution of those whose voices have been muted in mainstream commemoration works in tandem with the fact Rand and Amandeep Madra, the founder of UKPHA, were on the committee responsible for the non-commemoration report produced for the CWGC in 2021.[526] In addition to the lesser-known histories explored in chapter two, and the engagement centre engaging in similar activity, the website also lists the fathers of the soldiers, enhancing the

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[524] 'WomensWork100, *1914.org* (2018), https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20190327114748/http://www.1914.org/womenswork100/ [Accessed 31 October 2023].

[525] *Punjab & World War One*, http://punjabww1.com/ [Accessed 27 October 2023].

[526] George Hay and John Burke, *Report of the Special Committee to Review Historical Inequalities in Commemoration* (Maidenhead: Commonwealth War Graves Commission, 2021).

familial aspect for those engaging in genealogical research. In a launch event for the project, Rand noted that the information revealed from the records allowed Tejpal Singh Ralmill to attend the Festival of Remembrance in 2018, where he appeared holding a photograph of his great-grandfather, Subedar Major Bawa Singh, who served with the 23rd Sikh Pioneers.[527] In tandem with similar themes on television, projects such as these add to the transformation of cultural memory beyond previous norms.

Memorialising Commemoration

A particularly introspective aspect of the Centenary was the widescale reflection on activities and methods of commemoration both during the anniversary and beyond its conclusion. Project 2018: Armistice 100 Days, which marked the anniversaries of the Hundred Days Offensive and the Armistice, was an IWM partnership project in collaboration with *26*, a not-for-profit organisation. The project shared a story online every day from 5 August – 12 November 2018. The stories were broad in thematic and geographic scope, in tandem with the other featured partnership projects, further indicative of the IWM's part in moving beyond Anglocentric commemorations. The project also reinforced the primacy of 100 in its methodology – 'the project engaged 100 volunteer authors to each write 100 words, about 100 individuals'.[528] The page also alludes to the sense of Centenary fatigue, noting its hopes that the stories would 'reinvigorate public interest in commemorations in advance of the centenary of [*sic*] Armistice'.[529] This is a critical awareness of the last chance of the Centenary to make an impact.

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[527] Gavin Rand, 'The Punjabi Registers', University of Greenwich [online presentation], 11 November 2021.
[528] 'First World War Centenary Partnership'.
[529] Ibid.

Other initiatives have focussed on remembering war through individual stories. Voices of War and Peace was established by the University of Birmingham, 'in collaboration with Cardiff, Durham, Manchester Metropolitan, Newcastle, Birmingham City, Wolverhampton and Worcester universities'.[530] Poignantly, the centre had commemoration as one of its key themes, alongside gender, childhood, belief, cities at war and the home front. The projects presented on the site convey a range of themes. One notes the support of a production of a short film by the Central Youth Theatre, which tells the story of 'soldiers from the Midlands who were shot at dawn'.[531] The page for this project is a revealing reflective piece from the initial research stage of the project, revealing the impact of holding the court martial papers in the National Archives, further highlighting the ongoing power of artefacts in our understanding of the past, as previously noted for television programmes.

A comment on the page notes the inclusion of three mutineers in the pardon, and the addition of their names to the Shot At Dawn Memorial in 2017. This is further evidence of cultural memory moving towards increased acceptance of figures previously regarded as transgressive, a theme which was also present in some television programmes. This offers both a revealing glimpse into the research phase not often seen from academic historians, as well as the opportunity for others to lend their thoughts to it. This particular theme is also relevant, as the campaign to pardon those shot by firing squad took place in the decades preceding the Centenary, demonstrating the change in attitudes towards those shot under its mandate, albeit with some disagreements and controversy.[532] Other links on the homepage

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[530] 'World War 1 Engagement Centres', *UK Research and Innovation*, 2022, https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/our-main-funds-and-areas-of-support/browse-our-areas-of-investment-and-support/world-war-1-engagement-centres/ [Accessed 9 October 2023].

[531] 'Shot at Dawn – Lest We Forget', *Voices of War and Peace*, https://www.voicesofwarandpeace.org/portfolio/shot-at-dawn/ [Accessed 9 October 2023].

[532] For discussions of the Shot at Dawn Campaign and the resultant memorial, see Emma Hanna, 'Contemporary Britain and the Memory of the First World War', *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps*,

which also share similarities with Centenary television programmes include posts on women's desire to be involved with the war effort and their contributions; the experiences of children and refugees; and longitudinal analysis of chaplaincy and memorialisation from the conflict to more recent wars and timeframes.

Living Legacies 1914–18, the last of the AHRC engagement centres, focussed on the current impact of the war and its commemoration during the Centenary. Based at Queen's University Belfast, the centre had a unique opportunity to present the history of the war from a Northern Irish perspective, with a broadened geographic scope enabled by collaboration with Ulster, Glasgow, Swansea, Goldsmiths, and Newcastle universities. The majority of their supported projects fell under the category of 'Digital and Engagement', with 'Critical Commemoration and Creative Practice' being the next most common theme.[533] In addition to noting the number of events and partners, the page also highlights its achievements of '836,000+ website hits', '1,411 social media followers' and '18,777+ objects and stories in our digital archive'.[534] This level of engagement is impressive for a project focussed on one nation of the UK; yet, as was demonstrated on television with the BBC's Scottish Pipers programme, there is considerable interest across the UK in the histories of different nations, yet again broadening cultural memory.

1.113-114 (2014), pp. 110–117; Alasdair Brooks, 'Shot at Dawn: Memorializing First World War Executions for Cowardice in the Landscape of the UK's National Memorial Arboretum', *Post-Medieval Archaeology*, 56, 1 (2022), pp. 28–42.

[533] 'Project Impact', Living Legacies 1914-18, http://www.livinglegacies1914-18.ac.uk/project-impact/ [Accessed 10 October 2023].

[534] Ibid.

Beyond the Browser: Commemoration in other Online Media

While various websites offer a broad overview of online commemoration during the Centenary, it would be prudent to consider other forms of digital memorials. The previous chapter alluded to discussions on Reddit about holding memorial events in First World War related video games, and this aspect itself is worth further exploration. A very obvious opportunity for gaming communities to engage in a commemorative event presented itself in the form of the 2014 anniversary of the Christmas Truce, which offered a foundation for similar activities in the following years. Standing as an example of digital reenactment, which is unique from most other web-based memorials, it is of particular significance for the ongoing state of this phenomenon in cultural memory. The anniversary of the Christmas Truce was the first big wartime event in the Centenary, and was similarly commemorated by the National Children's Football Alliance, who hosted football games in Belgium.

The most prominent gaming community to engage in online commemoration of the Christmas Truce was that of *Verdun* (M2H/Blackmill Games, 2015). The game was released in 'Early Access' (through which developers sell games before they are finished to broaden their playtest participation pool and gather feedback for improvements) on the digital game distribution service Steam in 2013, allowing it sufficient time to comprehensibly formulate plans for an online, in-game Truce commemoration. The gameplay focuses on trench warfare, with unusually forensic levels of attention to detail given to maps, uniforms, and weaponry. This level of accuracy attracted those with a genuine interest in the conflict to the game's development, birthing a community with a heightened level of enthusiasm towards historical detail, which continues to the present day in the developer's 'World War I Game Series' Discord server.

Thus, in 2014, plans for a commemoration of the 1914 Christmas Truce were put in place in-game. In between matches, players could enter No Man's Land to play football and throw snowballs at each other (See Figure 6). Cautious of a need to encourage players to engage with the unusual activity, the developers held competitions for videos and screenshots of the event, noting the details on a Steam discussion forum post.[535] This activity was repeated in subsequent years. In 2019, the developers released a *YouTube* video promoting the event, which featured gameplay footage of truce activities accompanied by diary readings from soldiers present at the 1914 truce.[536] This activity has also been used to raise money for charity.[537] The repetition of the event offers a prime example of a lasting form of digital memorial originally stimulated by the Centenary.

Figure 6: Screenshot of Verdun *(M2H/Blackmill Games). Source: War Child.*

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[535] See Blazy013, 'Christmas Truce Event', *Steam* (18 December 2014), https://steamcommunity.com/app/242860/discussions/0/619574421263154332/ [Accessed 9 November 2023].

[536] WW1 Game Series, 'Verdun I Official Christmas Truce Trailer', *YouTube*, 19 December 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LqSbWDa-RyU [Accessed 9 November 2023].

[537] See Dion Dassanayake, 'First World War shooter Verdun re-enacts Christmas truce to raise money for War Child', *Express* (20 December 2017), https://www.express.co.uk/entertainment/gaming/894855/Verdun-game-First-World-War-Christmas-truce-War-Child-PC-PS4-Xbox-One-games [Accessed 16 November 2023].

Consideration of a truce was also raised in Reddit discussions for the game *Battlefield 1*, yet it found little traction with that particular community, probably due in part to the series' consistent focus on action and firepower over adherence to the historical record. It was not completely absent from the game, however – in December 2016, developer DICE issued players with a 'Holiday Truce dog tag'.[538] However, there was little pacifist sentiment among the player base. Discussions around the possibility of a truce in the same year were met with comments such as 'Damn your truce, I want my n00b harvest'.[539] This is indicative of the struggles that can be encountered when trying to introduce representations of the war to new mediums, particularly where input can be offered. There was at least some appetite for commemorative spirit in the community, though. A *YouTube* video was shared in the same year, which features an odd juxtaposition of the narrator explaining the history of the Christmas Truce to the accompaniment of footage of gameplay from Battlefield 1 – discussions of poignant moments of peace punctuated with gunfire and deaths, a stark contrast to the more sombre offering for *Verdun*. It also inevitably features the inclusion of photographs of soldiers playing football in Salonika in 1915.

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[538] See Heather Alexandra, '*Battlefield 1*'s Christmas Truce Didn't Quite Come Together', *Kotaku* (27 December 2016), https://kotaku.com/battlefield-1s-christmas-truce-didnt-quite-come-togethe-1790525959 [Accessed 9 November 2023].

[539] Comment by u/slayermcslay on u/L0RDJ0NSN0W, 'Thoughts for a "Christmas Truce"', *Reddit* (20 December 2016), https://www.reddit.com/r/battlefield_one/comments/5je45t/thoughts_for_a_christmas_truce/ [Accessed 9 November 2023]. A 'n00b' is a player new to a game who is deemed poorly skilled.

Figure 7: Screenshot from 'The Christmas Truce of World War 1!' YouTube video

Yet, the comments on the video show a reasonable level of enthusiasm towards the game developers instigating a truce activity in-game, in the form of either throwing snowballs at each other or playing football.[540] These suggestions are reminiscent of the activities engaged in by the *Verdun* community, but as they never took place, they reveal the stark contrast between online communities; they are defined by different interests, ideals, and beliefs. Indeed, the number of online communities engaging with the First World War and its history are numerous, from Twitter profiles and subreddits to *Discord* roleplaying servers engaging in digital reenactment. Each hold different ideas about what is remembered and how, with varying levels of community size and subject focus. As with other communities, they are also prone to things falling through the metaphorical gaps in cultural memory. With the Internet bringing people from different communities together into new ones, this issue is particularly pronounced.

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[540] Westie, 'The Christmas Truce of World War 1!', *YouTube* (23 December 2016), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lDgetpsZzxc&t=587s [Accessed 9 November 2023].

The video game industry has also been responsible for some of the more interesting developments in representations of the First World War. As noted earlier in this thesis, in comparison to earlier examples of televisual representations of the conflict, during the Centenary broadcasters shied away from using the native language of respective characters, in some cases opting to use jarringly artificial accents applied to English, such as was the case in *The Somme 1916: From Both Sides of the Wire* (BBC Two, 2016). Yet, for *11-11: Memories Retold* (DigixArt/Aardman Animations, 2018), language barriers form a central aspect of the gameplay. When Canadian photographer Harry and German engineer Kurt speak to each other, while the subtitles appear in English, the characters speak their native languages, with the few words they can both understand being shown in white in the subtitle, to demonstrate how little they can understand each other (see Figure 8). The importance of a global perspective in the game is not surprising though; its director Yoan Fanise also worked on *Valiant Hearts: The Great War* (Ubisoft Montpelier, 2014), which consists of four characters: a Frenchman, his German son-in-law, an American soldier and a Belgian nurse. Evidently, the video game industry has much to offer in terms of lasting global perspectives of the war beyond the Centenary, and can help to mirror the broadening of geographic understanding in cultural memory demonstrated on television.

Figure 8: Example of subtitle highlighting in 11-11: Memories Retold (Digixart/Aardman Animations)

Error 404: Memory Not Found

For all that is said about what is remembered and how, considerably less is said about what is

forgotten, disregarded, or lost. The second chapter of this thesis gave some consideration to

the notion of 'forgotten' or 'hidden' histories on television, and this notion was also explored

when considering some of the research projects in this chapter. But how much of it is actually

retained? In addition to the issues of digital obscurity and impermanence discussed earlier,

there are increasing concerns in the field of memory studies about the impact of modern

technology on our memory-making and information processing habits. Whilst much attention

is given to how media can reinforce both cultural memory and our personal memories, less is

given to how it can distort and destroy them. Andrew Hoskins has noted that 'this idea that

media are memory's principal champions is really dominant [...] Increasingly, I see forgetting

as much more significant than memory'.[541] He thus suggests an alternative way of considering

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[541] Andrew Hoskins and Huw Halstead, 'The New Grey of Memory: Andrew Hoskins in Conversation with Huw Halstead', *Memory Studies*, 14.3 (2021), p. 676.

memory in the modern day – 'the notion of "grey memory": the sense that a conscious, active, willed memory is obscured in the digital era'.[542] Our online experiences, ever guided by algorithms, rapidity of access and the fragmentary nature of social media feeds, are increasingly reforming our assessments of our ideas about ourselves and the past. This thesis has considered how cultural memory has changed since the attitudes espoused in the 1960s, but if it is simply forgotten, this point would become moot.

Of course, as time moves forward, we increasingly find that there are elements of the past that we would rather not see memorialised, if not forgotten entirely. Physical memorials have borne the brunt of criticism towards their nature; in 2019, the Bomber Command Memorial in London was defaced with white paint; in 2020, a statue of the slave trader Edward Colston in Bristol was pulled down by protestors. Removing physical monuments is thus relatively easy – this is not the case for digital media, even when those creating it might want it to disappear. In 2016, EA/DICE produced promotional materials for their First World War game, *Battlefield 1* and posted them on Twitter. The materials featured images from the game, captioned and utilising the hashtag #justWWIthings, a hashtag ostensibly derived from the original in the genre, #justgirlythings. The materials were met with criticism and outrage at their inappropriateness, and thus were swiftly taken down – but not before they were screenshotted by various media outlets for posterity (See Figure 9). EA/DICE essentially attempted to topple their own statue, but not before others took photographs of it. As Hoskins has explained it,

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[542] Ibid.

this is the ultimate problem with the convergence between communication and archive. All our communicational acts are archival. We are archival in ourselves, and that fundamentally transforms the nature of memory and our capacity to control it.[543]

In this manner, cultural memory in the digital age is becoming immune to either conscious or unconscious efforts to control what it does and does not contain.

Figure 9: Screenshots of the Battlefield 1 promotional materials. Source: The Guardian

Furthermore, there are also inconsistencies in what is deemed inappropriate in this memory. Whereas the use of casual hashtags and imagery of warfare in EA/DICE's marketing was met with disapproval, the game's community has found itself in a 'white mythic space', defined as an area which 'erases non-white elements from the pseudo-historical setting and transforms it into a racially homogenous space that is perceived as an authentic representation of the past'.[544] This analysis rose from the fact that the game's cover, which featured an African-American soldier, was met with rejection by part of its intended audience, on the basis that it was 'blackwashing' and not representative of the war.[545] In this

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[543] Ibid., p. 677.
[544] Quiroga, 'Race, *Battlefield 1*', p. 188.
[545] Ibid., pp. 189–190.

manner, communities can be selective about what they deem should and should not be included in cultural memory and representations. This indicates a regression of ideas in comparison to some of the progression seen elsewhere on the Internet, television and radio, highlighting the flux and variety present in contemporary cultural memory expressed online. While the notion of forgetting details is an issue which modern technology has predominantly sought to solve, this apparent ability has resulted in legislation calling for the opposite – the right to be forgotten – enshrined through General Data Protection Regulations and EU law, and including information held about people online. While the First World War and its commemoration are external to these concerns, it is worth emphasising that the technologies that broaden the potential for commemoration and other activities bring with them disadvantages and caveats.

Of course, the level of attention given to cultural memory varies over time. The Centenary was intended as an extended, heightened period of attention, yet the mini anniversaries in it resulted in their own peaks of activity. Remembrance Day is the most prominent example of an ongoing peak in the cycle of attention towards the First World War (and indeed the Second World War, and later conflicts). This habit proved true in the Centenary as well – in fact, it was bookended by them. Figure 10 is a Google Trends graph for the search term 'WW1' from January 2013 to September 2023.[546] As indicated by the graph, the peaks in popularity for the search term occurred in November 2014 and November 2018, the periods containing the first and last Remembrance Days of the Centenary. With the latter being the actual peak, it would appear the anniversary ended with a boom of interest in the subject, which quickly dropped off – the November months in the Centenary had higher

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[546] This search term was used as it proved more common than other terms such as 'world war 1', 'world war I', 'WWI', 'first world war', 'FWW', and 'great war'.

levels of popularity for the term than those months after it. Future considerations of cultural memory of the First World War may further reveal the extent to which cultural memory has (and has not) developed over time.
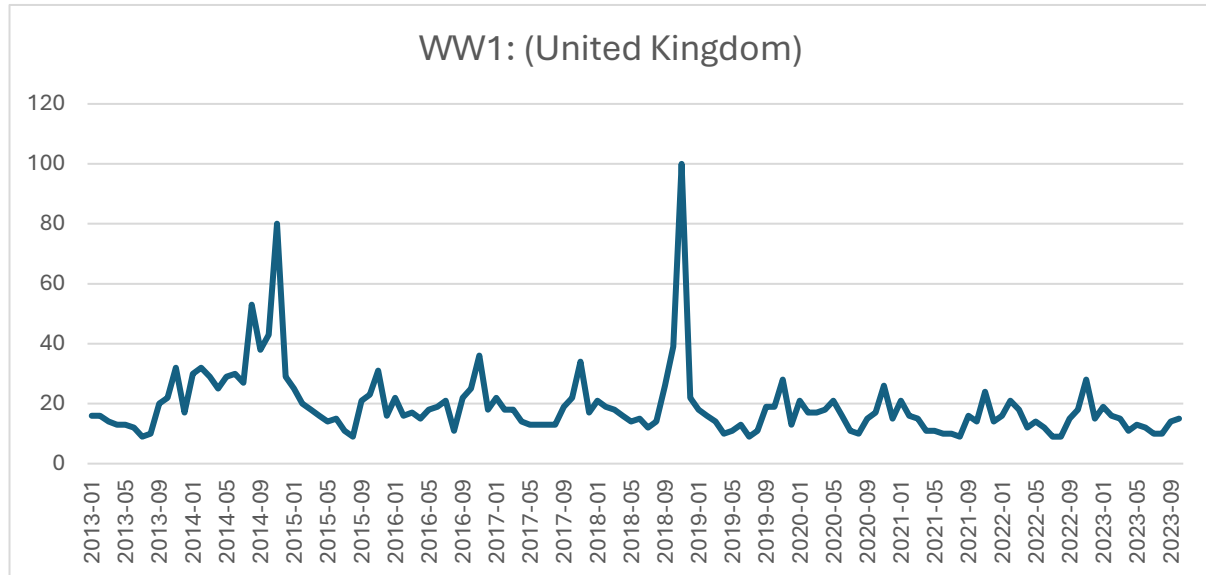

Figure 10: Google Trends graph for popularity of the search term 'ww1'

Following considerations of memorial activity in video games, it is also worth noting that the growth of this particularly digital activity in the future is currently uncertain. While games related to the First World War continue to be produced, many have been shifting away from the FPS format which lends itself more naturally towards commemoration events – a recent emergence in the genre, *Beyond The Wire* (Redstone Interactive, 2022) proved unpopular and thus devoid of online activity. The reason for this shift is uncertain, though one could speculate that the FPS genre is a highly competitive area to release games in, and the war has been covered in various ways under this genre in the past few decades. Furthermore, there has been something of a shift towards horror games, a genre for which the primary purpose is to scare the player. This is not an entirely new development, with previous examples including *1916 – Der unbekannte Krieg* (Kriegsgraben und Stormvogel, 2011) which centres itself in the German trenches, and *Call of Cthulhu* (Cyanide Studio, 2018), which is set 10 years after the war, but for which the protagonist is a veteran suffering

claustrophobia as a result of his wartime experience, adding an element of difficulty to the horror game trope of hiding in cupboards. In recent years, the list has grown to include *Amnesia: The Bunker* (Frictional Games, 2023), *Ad Infinitum* (Hekate, 2023) and *Conscript* (Jordan Mochi/Catchweight Studio, 2024). While *Ad Infinitum* puts the player in the shoes of a German veteran returned home suffering PTSD flashbacks to the trenches, the other two are situated in the trenches. With the exception of *Conscript*, the games feature monsters to evoke a horror atmosphere. The necessity for additional horror stimulus beyond that of war, and why these games feature a higher percentage of German developers than other genres, is a consideration to be left for future research.

While the prevalence and enmeshing of digital technology in our daily lives is unquestionably high, the benefits of it for representing and remembering the First World War, and broader history as a whole, are currently less certain. There is a plethora of technologies and software available to produce digital exhibitions and collections, but the adoption of some of these methods has been slow, and the ongoing challenges of financing server space mean these avenues are still restricted to larger institutions. Furthermore, while the inclusion of, and presence of a voice for, the public is a welcome addition to a formerly institutionalised process of representation and cultural memory dissemination, a greater awareness needs to be held in regard to the potential for misinformation and political manipulation of arguments and intentions. If these caveats can be managed, and if the relevant technologies are made more broadly available, understood, and funded, then the potential for future commemorations to break beyond the tropes of the 1960s can be realised.

Conclusion

Evidently, there is now a myriad of ways to appraise cultural memory and determine how it has and has not changed since the 1960s. Moving beyond its traditional confines in sculpture, and expanding now beyond television, the ways we represent and thus interpret cultural memory are rapidly developing beyond the definitions originally outlined by historians. The public are now more closely involved in discussions about the past and how it is remembered than ever before. It is this dissemination of control of such debates which is largely unique to the Internet. Thus, the online world presents itself as a source of material which cannot go ignored by historians. Representations of the war on television found themselves occasionally refashioning pre-established, premediated ideas and concepts, yet there were significant examples of representations exploring previously neglected groups and areas, indicating some level of expansion of cultural memory. Although there was also evidence of familiar tropes online, it was here that some of the more novel elements of representation and discussion emerged.

Apparent across both television and computer screens, however, is a sense that the most emotive aspects of the war are the most enduring, and the most resistant to change. For all of the technology available to us to discuss and represent the war, at the heart of much of this, many elements remain the same. These lasting elements, familiar to historians of cultural memory, are exactly why we should engage with such source material, to offer comparative studies of memory as an evolving concept. Failing to do so will mean the field of memory studies risks approaching these more contemporary methods of expressing cultural memory as something new and unique to social media, rather than a development of tropes already present on television and radio.

The Ties that Bind

For all of the developments that emerged during the Centenary, some elements remained similar to previous representations of the First World War, which this thesis has demonstrated through a consideration of earlier representations of the war. One of the most recurrent themes across much Centenary broadcasting, and to some extent online, was a desire to either present or understand the war in its most authentic and truest form possible. For broadcasters, this meant finding threads that link us to an event outside of living memory. This was often achieved through familiar means, such as the use of the recorded testimony of veterans, which formed the backbone of several television series and offered a human voice, and in tandem with the use of footage from the war, offered a sense of familiarity to those accustomed with the BBC's previous representations of the war. *The Great War* offered something of a foundation stone from which the BBC built its representations of the war, in some cases directly forming the basis of programmes, such as *I Was There: The Great War Interviews*. This focus foregrounded the importance of understanding the conflict through the people who experienced it. While this could be seen as potential for cementing 1960s ideas, the Centenary demonstrated that it can be used to offer the public a deeper understanding of specific experiences of the conflict, rather than generalised emotional sentiments which otherwise tend to dominate cultural memory.

A human connection to the war was also found on television and radio through the involvement of descendants of soldiers, and by generating an atmosphere in which the public was encouraged to reflect on their family history, thus acting as a potential springboard to the various online Public History initiatives which encouraged people to research and share their

relatives' experiences with the war. Encouraged by the popularity of genealogy inspired by programmes such as *Who Do You Think You Are?*, the use of descendants on several programmes across the Centenary pushed the notion of understanding the war through people who experienced it to the fore, imploring the public to seek out voices of experience from their own pasts following the passing of the last veterans. The IWM's Lives of the First World War project sought to collate these together online, to form a lasting legacy of stories and people who had been 'remembered' during the Centenary. Such matters also often appeared in posts and tweets, ranging from people being reminded of their ancestor's experiences in the war by a post made by an institution, to more vague discussions in political debate about what soldiers did or did not die for. There is a clear sense of duality in cultural memory here, where on the one had such endeavours allow for a broader understanding of the war and thus a move away from 1960s ideas, and on the other, there is evidence that such notions still remain.

Historians offered an authoritative voice during the Centenary, and also engaged in debate on television programmes to bring current discussions about the conflict to a broader audience. In some cases, their published work was brought on screen, such as with Niall Ferguson's *The Pity of War* which featured a panel of historians to debate ideas with, or David Reynolds's *Long Shadow* which televised content from his book of the same title. This activity was reflected online on websites such as Reddit, where the public became active participants in discussions about the war and its representations in popular media. The social media element has in some ways evolved public history and combatted ideas of a separation between public historians and academics, as historians have the opportunity to share their knowledge outside of traditional educational settings, if they choose to engage with such

websites. Despite some instances of old ideas reemerging, the trend was largely to move away from old ideas and myths.

A connection to the landscape of the war was established in varying forms on television and in the virtual realm. Shooting on location at the former battlefields of the Western Front also offered a sense of awareness of the lasting impact of the conflict on the landscape, thereby acting as one of the last few tangible connections to the war. Artefacts, the other lasting physical link, offered a gateway to stories about the war and the people who lived through it, as explored in the *Antiques Roadshow* 'World War I Special'. Similarly, discussions on subreddits such as r/wwi often focussed on objects, with people seeking further details about the items left behind by their ancestors. These aspects demonstrate that as long as we continue to have some form of physical connection to the past, their power and role in cultural memory will remain. This element did less to progress ideas from the 1960s, though this is understandable given that its use does not in itself present new ideas to the audience.

The relationship between politics and memory was also affirmed in various forms of commemoration. The Centenary was mired in political controversy from the outset, as David Cameron's speech drew criticism for having an overtly celebratory tone felt inappropriate by several commentators. On television, certain programmes such as Niall Ferguson's *The Pity of War* and Jeremy Paxman's *Britain's Great War* often strayed into political discussions about the futility of war and attitudes towards those who did not want to take part in it. This behaviour was amplified online, where mentions of the war and its commemoration often received politically motivated responses. The conflict also found itself entangled with the memory of the Second World War, with some arguing that the latter war demonstrated that

the previous one had failed to change anything in Europe. Online, this was reflected in criticisms of *Battlefield 1*'s marketing campaign for being insensitive, and negative responses to the presence of a black soldier on the game's cover art. These instances demonstrate the entwined nature of war and politics, and also suggest there is some work to be done before a fully multicultural, global view of the war is accepted by everyone. It is also in these situations where the entrenchment of 1960s ideas becomes most apparent, indicating it is more likely to happen when the war is being used to make a point, rather than when it is being examined or represented for other reasons.

Events viewed as keystones in the war remained largely unchanged, with the majority of attention remaining with the outbreak of war, 1916, and the Armistice. Acknowledgements of theatres of war such as Gallipoli and Jutland were largely disregarded during the Centenary, except for official government events to mark them, and they found little traction in dramatised representations of the conflict. This omission has reinforced the power that events such as the Battle of the Somme hold in cultural memory, which has now become a byword for futility and a common reference point in online discussions about the war and its representation. They are also most commonly associated with the use of statistics, and it is almost impossible to see discussions of the war on television, and to some extent online, without reference being made to the casualty figures of 60,000 on the first day. The Somme has long been, and will likely continue to be, the embodiment of the futility narrative of the war, one of the stalwart points of the 1960s. What remains to be seen is if elements which challenge it can be brought further to the fore.

The Road Less Travelled

For all of the similarities to previous anniversaries and representations of the First World War, there were certain elements during the Centenary which were, if not entirely new, more prominent than in previous cases. For television programmes, this activity broadly fell in the scope of attempting to broaden knowledge of the war, by covering less-represented people and battlefields, while simultaneously attempting to broaden the viewing audience. These 'forgotten' stories, a commemorative trope in itself during the Centenary, formed the basis of several programmes, such as David Olusoga's *Forgotten Soldiers of Empire* and *Kate Adie's Women of World War One*. The spotlighting of these lesser-represented groups may have been symptomatic of the changes in the political landscape during the period. Similarly, the BBC Radio 4 drama *Home Front* drew the focus away from the battlefields entirely, exploring the stories of various fictional characters across England during the war, albeit losing some of its claims to originality for essentially being *The Archers* during the First World War. BBC Three's *Our World War* also used a previously established format, namely *Our War*, to bring the conflict to the generation most removed from those who lived through it. Such programmes are some prominent and significant example of Centenary programming breaking the norms of previous representations, and indicated one of the largest shifts away from 1960s tropes.

These programmes demonstrate that just as contemporary memory of the war is influenced by the history of how we have presented it, the ways we depict the war are often influenced by preexisting cultural models. Its use of imagery found in video games, while ahistoric to its content, brought a sense of familiarity to warfare representations for its audience, albeit with the risk of confounding an accurate understanding of the conflict in the

same way the games were criticised of. It also demonstrates that there are likely to be further efforts in years to come to find ways to represent the war to the generations most distantly removed from it. Such attempts are likely to receive similar criticisms to television and the Internet in general for the tendency to favour entertainment over historical accuracy, though the latter has become a focal point for some game developers. In tandem with video games, these methods combined to introduce younger generations to the war; as these generations are the furthest from the 1960s and thus less exposed to the ideas, they also offer a crucial opportunity for remoulding cultural memory of the First World War anew.

Of course, some of the largest changes to how the war is remembered and represented occurred through the Internet. One of the most transformative elements of the online realm has been its ability to expand public history, weakening perceived barriers between it and academic historians, and to include the public on a broad scale, marking a significant growth in the communities actively involved in remoulding cultural memory. On Reddit, r/AskHistorians in particular saw several debates and Q&A sessions take place across the Centenary, and with the nature of anonymity, the lines between academic historians and the general public became blurred, though this also raises concerns about assuming the veracity of answers given by unknown people. Nevertheless, it still broadened the scope for the people involved in conversations about the First World War and how it is remembered, an element which was largely absent from previous anniversaries, which did not have the medium available to them.

Elsewhere, such debates took place entirely separate from any connection with the subject of History (academic or otherwise), with representations of the war being discussed in video game subreddits which opened discussion about how the war could be

281

commemorated in virtual worlds. Yet, as it has entered the online realm, cultural memory has also become something which is susceptible to the pitfalls and demands of social media, such as the drive to generate engagement with posts and receive likes or upvotes. This has sometimes meant that online discussions about the war and its commemoration have become more of an exercise in being interesting (or controversial), than being meaningful attempts to consider how we understand and remember the conflict today. This does not detract from their usefulness as sources, but does add an element akin to bias to be aware of when using them for research.

This larger-scale involvement of the public was facilitated in part by the AHRC engagement centres, which saw an effective combination of the expertise of academic historians with projects run by community groups. Buoyed by HLF funding and support from institutions such as the IWM, the Centenary saw a drastic shift towards an integration of the work of academic historians and the broader community. This involvement of the public with commemorative work on the war has set the foundation stones for future events, by showcasing the importance of including a broad spectrum of individuals to move towards representations of the war which are made by and include everyone. It sets a notable precedent for the potential future of public history, and is likely to be a recurrent feature in future centenaries. If this activity continues in the future, and combines with emergent themes on television and radio, there will be further opportunities to move beyond the tropes of the past.

In addition to new developments and emergences in theme, some previously present elements in representations of the war disappeared or diminished during the Centenary. The sense of a changing world, as outlined in *Parade's End*, was a theme which was largely absent

282

from 2014 to 2018. While the docudrama *37 Days* was set in the immediate pre-war period, it covered the events leading to the outbreak of war, rather than addressing the broader world around them. It did, however, lend itself towards the notion of the war being an unexpected event, though this is largely due to the short time period it covered. This was evident of both a shift in time and focus. As reiterated throughout this thesis, cultural memory is often more heavily influenced by contemporary circumstances than by the event being commemorated, and the changes present today make the shifting Edwardian world seem unrelatable and distant. Yet, increasing concerns over demographic representation in commemoration of the war has drawn more attention to the people the war happened to, rather than the world it occurred in. It is thus not a negative element that certain tropes diminish in representations, but rather a useful insight into the themes deemed important in the contemporary world.

There have also been new and evolving ways of representing the war. This thesis has explored the notion of our understanding of space evolving in the digital age, and the blend of the physical and virtual realms. One of the major examples of such a blend is one of the exhibits referred to in this thesis, which existed in part as a virtual reality experience. This is perhaps one of the biggest changes in the ways we remember the past in the digital age, though it is worth noting that it was not a common occurrence during the Centenary. Whether it becomes a more common feature in the future remains to be seen, as the technology still sees fairly minimal use around the public, especially outside of the video game industry. While video games about the First World War are not a new development, there have been changes in their style and genre in recent years. Originally finding their place almost exclusively in the shooter and strategy genres, video games related to the conflict are now expanding to point-and-click and horror games, broadening the scope of experiences from the war that developers can convey. This activity is opening up the possibilities for increasing knowledge

about the war for an audience which may be less familiar with televisual and other cultural representations of the conflict, and thus are less likely to have had their opinions moulded by 1960s ideas and representations.

Overall, however, returning to the analogy of history as clay at the start of this thesis, the general impression is that while there is significant evidence of the fingerprints of the 1960s remaining on cultural memory, there have also been crucial developments to add new areas to start challenging them. With the blending of public and academic history and their work with communities both online and in person, the public became involved in projects and commemorative work, instilling them with the ability to expand their own understanding and proliferate it elsewhere. It is the emotive nature of cultural memory which remains the most resistant to change, and as it can be raised by familiar images or political debate, it is also here where old ideas become the most enduring. So, we have not seen a complete shift away from the mud, blood and poetry concepts of the 1960s. Yet, there is evidence of the foundations of progress emerging in the Centenary which could be built upon in the future.

The Future of the Past

It is clear that a serious consideration of online sources is imperative for cultural memory scholars in the digital age. This thesis has addressed only a fraction of the material available for study on the Internet—there is much more to still be considered. Whereas this work has provided a broad overview of the source types and opinions expressed during the Centenary across several websites, there is much to be gained from more in-depth analyses of online activity around certain events. Various commemorative events, such as those organised by

14-18 NOW saw a boom in online activity, and while the level of tweets dedicated to such events have been too extensive to cover here, they would offer revealing glimpses in to public responses to different forms of commemoration. Such responses could be tracked across various events to better understand how the public responds to certain event types, which would both improve understanding of the reception to national commemorative events and inform the most well-received formats for future historic anniversaries. It could also help us to have a better understanding of how the public engaged with events throughout the four years of the Centenary, to see if the public experienced the sense of 'fatigue' on which the BBC based its decision to pause coverage in 2015.

Larger scale projects would also be able to cover a larger amount of online sources, as the volume of them throughout the Centenary is simply too much for one person to adequately explore. The initial intended scope of this thesis was hampered by Twitter's blocking of web scraping software. Should Twitter's attitude to web scraping change, or if they allow the usage of such software through certain avenues in the future, it would also offer an opportunity to properly assess the number of people engaging with commemorative events, which this research hoped to cover, but was not possible following the discontinuation of free access to the website's application programming interface (API) in February 2023. If it is made possible to use such software, scholars will be able to consider a range of areas, such as popular times, keywords, and phrases, either broadly or in relation to specific institutional accounts. Such research would help to provide a clear overview of the tone of cultural memory across previous years up to the present day, and thus offer a better understanding of the extent in the changes in cultural memory which have been outlined in this thesis.

As the next major historical warfare anniversary is still some way off in 2039, ongoing technological developments make it difficult to speculate exactly what this research might mean for such an event. The Internet is not likely to go anywhere, but the ways we use it continue to change. Following Elon Musk's takeover of Twitter, a large number of people, including some historians quoted in this thesis, have left the website, objecting to the change in values brought about by its new ownership. There are alternatives, which emerged too late in the stages of this thesis to be explored in it, and these may be useful avenues for future research. Furthermore, while met with a considerable amount of controversy and objections, the role of AI on various digital platforms continues to expand as time goes on. While such programmes are still largely in developmental infancy, they are being developed at an increasingly rapid pace. Instances have already emerged online of 'chat bots' (large language models designed to converse with the user) based on a range of historical figures, which claim to communicate with users in the manner the relevant person would have been expected to, a claim which will likely frustrate historians for some years to come. It is also a risk of the rise of old ideas, as large language models are trained on information across the Internet, and thus are likely to pick up a significant amount of material espousing old ideas.

For all of the uncertainty around digital potential, the Centenary of the Second World War will undeniably face similar, if not greater, challenges when met with varying political ideologies. The clash between left-wing and right-wing viewpoints was evident during the anniversary of the First World War, and the introduction of Nazis to representations will only serve to fuel that fire. Indeed, concern about such difficult political buzzwords resulted in the game developer Paradox avoiding any mention of Nazis, or any displaying of swastikas, in the launch trailer for their new game expansion—which focusses entirely on Germany during the

Second World War. The Centenary of 2014–18 may have had to compete with entrenched ideas about futility, and awkward attempts to continental cohesion following the Brexit referendum, but as political attitudes and debates continue to become increasingly contentious topics across various forms of media, the organisers of the next centenary will likely find it even harder to strike the correct tone, and thus historians and memory scholars will have an even harder job separating the useful reflections on commemoration from outright political grandstanding. Likely, much as this thesis demonstrated, there will be evidence of old ideas and new ones entangled throughout cultural memory and across television, radio and the Internet. It is in these cases perhaps more useful to adopt the notions of cultural memories, to acknowledge the variety of ideas it encompasses. To explore this further in the future, considering online sources will remain a crucial if complicated element, which leads historians down roads of terminology and reference points not often found in our field. Yet, as memory scholars continue to appraise the virtual realm as a viable source base for their work, historians must do the same, lest we leave our understanding of cultural memory in the past.

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