

EDITORIAL

Little, if any, good came out of Australia's involvement in a war that today should be lamented rather than celebrated. Almost half a million Australian men and women offered to serve their King and Empire. Over 330,000, mainly young and single, left Australia, and almost 60,000 died in Turkey, the Middle East and Europe. Most of those who returned were damaged emotionally, and more than half by severe physical wounds. Numbers alone cannot convey the trauma of the survivors and the bereaved. In mourning its dead and damaged youth for a generation, Australia lost the optimism that had been its hallmark as the world's most advanced democracy.

Victoria during 1914–18 not only made proportionate contribution – some 114,000 men and women served, and 19,000 never returned – but it was the fulcrum of the Australian war effort. The decision for war was taken in Melbourne, the national capital where the Australian contribution was planned and coordinated. Melbourne was also the centre of bitter social and political conflicts that divided the nation, especially in 1916 and 1917.

This special edition of the *La Trobe Journal* brings together work of scholars with diverse interests to examine previously under-researched issues concerning the experience of war on the home front. Douglas Newton re-examines the standard account of how Australia became involved in the war and also asks why, before any British requests were received, our political leaders made extravagant offers of Australian assistance. In 'A divided national capital: Melbourne in the Great War', Judith Smart interrogates claims of general Australian enthusiasm for war by examining crowd behaviour in the city as war approached, and analyses divisions over the cost of living and recruitment. Contrasting a diary and a memoir of home-front family life, John Lack explores the ethnic, religious and class tensions that divided working-class from middle-class Melbourne, while Bart Ziino charts personal and private responses to the Gallipoli and Western Front campaigns, offering a fresh take on the emotional toll of war on the home front.



Dr John Springthorpe's controversial engagement in debates over Red Cross handling of supplies in Egypt, medical treatment of soldiers on the battlefield and conscription is part of Joy Damousi's larger project analysing the role of Australian intellectuals in the war. Kate Laing explores the internationalist activism of the Sisterhood of International Peace and the Women's Political Association and Peace Army. Australians of German descent were among the first home-front victims of war. Rosalie Triolo asks how, in this overheated atmosphere of vilification and persecution, did the Department of Education present Germany and the Germans to Victoria's schoolchildren? Jillian Durance's article on the Showgrounds Camp Band during 1915 is part of a larger study of the role of Victorian brass bands during the Great War.

Imperial policy forbade the repatriation of the remains of 'the fallen', but few bereaved Australian families could afford to visit Imperial War Graves Commission cemeteries overseas. Although memorials were raised to the war dead in cities and towns across Australia, and countless honour boards saluted them, the issue remained: How were families to preserve the memory of their loved ones? Catherine Tiernan's moving case study of Stroud Langford, inspired by an uncanny coincidence, broaches the role of the historian in recovering the memory of the war dead. Finally, Bronwyn Hughes directs our attention to those often glanced at, but under-appreciated, commemorations of the war dead – the stained-glass windows in Victoria's churches.

We would like to thank John Arnold for inviting us to edit this special issue, and to acknowledge his patient and wise editorial assistance and superintendence.

John Lack and Judith Smart

GUEST EDITORS

H Septimus Power, Original design for a commemorative mural commissioned for the Public (now State) Library (detail), oil on canvas, ca. 1922–23, State Library of Victoria Pictures Collection H2002.83. The final mural is above the staircase to the Library's Queens Hall.