

ANN CAREW

Mr Sharman's album: University High School and the Great War

University High School was just being established in Melbourne when the Great War began in 1914. In December of that year, the brilliant scholar, 38-year-old Matthew Stanton Sharman (1876–1953), was appointed as its second principal. It was his task to guide the school through the tumultuous years of the war. A remarkable album of letters that Matthew Sharman assembled as a memorial to the war experiences of his school community is now held in the State Library Victoria collection. This article is an introduction to the album, and the school's response to the war.

The school originally opened as the University Practising School in 1910 in a former primary school in Lygon St, Carlton. Its original name reflected its twin role in providing secondary education for state school students, and a training ground for student teachers. It was administered and governed by an advisory committee of the University of Melbourne Faculty of Arts and the Victorian Education Department. It was the second state-funded high school to open in Melbourne and was a select entry school, so applicants sat an exam and oral test to qualify for entry. There were no fees, but applicants were asked to commit to a three-year course. The students or, as they were known, scholars, were from a diverse mix of cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds and included a small number from regional Victoria. A diversity of denominations were represented: Baptist, Catholic, Church of England,

Percival Langford's letter from Alexandria is addressed to the 'Boys and Girls' of the school, 11 December 1914. MS Sharman Papers, Australian Manuscripts Collection MS 11240

M^r Langford

Alexandria

11/12/14.

Dear Boys and Gills of U. P. S.

I have waited a considerable time to send you all a brief account of our journey from Australia, as we were not allowed to send any account whatever of our doings or whereabouts while we were on the water. The Censorship was very strict. We were prevented from giving facts except regarding our health. This of course was not worth writing about. A letter stating "I am quite well" may be all very well in itself but is not very satisfactory from a news standpoint. But now that is all over I will try to give you a short account of the happenings on the voyage.

From Melbourne to Albany there was nothing very exciting. We took about five days to get there and arrived in the early morning just about daybreak. The entrance to the harbor being covered by a couple or so of small islands we were left speculating how many ships would be there to welcome us to W. A. There were only four or five, lying at anchor and one or two alongside the pier. We speculated ^{also} on the amount of leave we would get but our hopes were dashed to the ground when we found that no one was to be allowed ashore and we were debarred from finding out anything first-hand about ~~any~~ ^{this} port of call.

It was here that we lost our first horse. They suffer from a peculiar complaint at sea. The poor ventilation of the lower holds causes a kind of madness and without any warning a horse goes amok. We lost 13 in all before disembarking at Alexandria. The last one was killed just before we were lugged to the pier here. We stayed in Albany for about a week until the

Presbyterian, Wesleyan and Methodist; and, also, students from working and middle class families, the children of civil servants, teachers, merchants, artists, tramway workers and widowers.

Despite the diversity of backgrounds, and perhaps as a result of the cramped quarters of staff and students, the initial 82 secondary students, 27 trainee teachers, principal and four staff quickly became a close-knit community. By the time Matthew Sharman took up the reins in 1915, there were 220 students enrolled, some siblings of the 'pioneers' of 1910, and 60 students studying for a diploma in education.

When World War I began, the school community was forced to grapple with decisions about their futures and their roles in the war. One concern was how best to honour the sacrifice of the students and teachers who enlisted. For schools at this time, the most common method of celebrating the best and brightest students was to commission a gilt-inscribed honour board. From the early days of the Great War, however, there was a sense that schools' war memorials should have a lasting artistic value and be worthy reminders of their war heroes to future generations.¹

The Art Inspector of Schools, PM Carew-Smyth, was appointed to advise Victorian schools on their memorials, and he advocated that schools inscribe the names of their heroes in specially commissioned deluxe honour books made with fine materials, such as parchment or handmade paper, ornamented with decorative title pages, and bound in embossed leather.² Carew-Smyth observed that, properly produced, a school's honour book might become a ceremonial object and a focus for future commemorative celebrations, such as Empire Day.³ Melbourne High School was one of a small number of schools to produce just such a book, and it is displayed in a special case in the school's entrance foyer today.⁴

From 1915 until 1921, the *Victoria Education Gazette* published a series of articles with guidelines and suggestions regarding the content of honour books, with a strong emphasis on creating an historical record. In 1919 a column written by the head of the History Department at the University of Melbourne, Professor Ernest Scott, appeared discussing a proposed book documenting the Education Department's war service. He wrote:

This should be a beautiful book – no shabbiness is fit for a record of heroes. A well-made book is well nigh as imperishable as stone; and, as a record of soldiers of this special class, is far more appropriate. Some of the men I have known would far rather have that monument in a book than in marble, because they are men who liked books best.⁵

Scott advocated the inclusion of soldiers' reflections of what they saw and felt during the Great War. The director of the Education Service, Frank Tate, also encouraged schools to produce a permanent written record to complement their roll of honour. Rather than merely list the names of the enlisted men, however, he was also in favour of books that captured the experiences of soldiers. In 1919, in a letter in the *Education Gazette*, he wrote, 'Is it not better to keep in our schools a genuine record – a human document, which will be of interest for all time, which will in fact grow interest as the years pass?'⁶

The handsome and substantial account of the Victorian Education Department's war service was published in 1921 and documented the service abroad of its staff and their children, and the war relief activities of state schools.⁷ The artist Harold Herbert designed the frontispiece and various illustrations by him decorated its pages. The Old Melburnians, the alumnae of Melbourne Church of England Grammar School, published the next major war book in 1923.⁸ The volume, with its embossed leather cover and specially designed frontispiece, included the details of 1325 Old Melburnians who served in the Great War, and a wealth of information about them, as well as 100 pages of excerpts of letters from the Front that had been published in its school journal, *The Melburnian*. Again, the emphasis was on capturing the history of the school's war service in a memorable and comprehensive fashion that would be interesting to future generations. These published books were exceptions to the rule, with many smaller schools struggling to compile even a complete list of names of those who served overseas, let alone their service history.⁹

It was in this context that Matthew Sharman arranged for correspondence that University High School received from the Front to be bound into an album. Today, this album is truly a 'human record' of the Great War and is a treasured artefact from the period. University High School donated the album to State Library Victoria in 1981. It was a welcome addition to the Library's 'significant collection of letters, diaries and reminiscences of WWI' that grew due to the efforts of the Field Officer librarian Patsy Adam-Smith.¹⁰

The album comprises 145 letters from 42 correspondents, including students, their parents and relatives, and teachers – some mere notes from training camps in Melbourne and others 'epistles' from the Front. The first letter is a short note from Frank Tate, congratulating the school on its war record. Letters and other records relating to the five students and one staff member whose war service was commemorated in the names of school's six Houses follow. The remainder of the album is organised in alphabetical

order, with letters usually grouped according to enlisted soldier and then in chronological order. Copies of letters from Sharman to students and parents are interspersed through the album. In a separate file there are additional letters from some of the correspondents, which were perhaps located after the album was bound, and a printed copy of the Australian war correspondent Charles EW Bean's speech, 'The Great War 1914-19', which was published as a pamphlet by the Commonwealth Peace Celebrations Committee in 1919.

The letters in the album bring to life the personal stories, feelings, thoughts and attitudes of the school community during World War I. It might be said that the students of University High School, as a selected entry high school, were a studious lot, certainly Lance Corporal Kerry Knott's 1918 letter supports this notion:

Percy Rose and I have the Engineering Manuals and I also have Low's Engineering Pocket Book & we swot up work for use in preparing ourselves for work in the Engineers. Also I have a French Bible and swot up my vocabulary for further use abroad.¹¹

The school, however, promoted the development of students across a broad range of academic, cultural, sporting and technical pursuits, and its graduates entered diverse professions. The album reflects the diversity of the school's population, and includes accounts of the wartime occupations of canteens, drivers, gunners, sappers, stretcher-bearers, quartermasters, munitions workers, signallers, staff clerks and education officers.

In 2014 the letters of Lance Corporal Percival Langford, who joined the school in 1910 as a science and mathematics master, featured in a compilation of short films, *Writing the War: personal stories from World War I*, for the State Library's *Changing Face of Victoria* exhibition.¹² The focus of the film script was the engaging letter that Langford wrote to the boys and girls of University High School from a hospital bed on the island of Mudros. The letter brought his experiences at Gallipoli to life for a teenage audience. This project was my introduction to both the original letters held at State Library Victoria, and to the records held at University High School.

The majority of the letters in the album are addressed to 'Mr Sharman'. A brilliant scholar and educator, Matthew Sharman became the second principal of University High School, and vice principal of the Teacher Training College in 1915, replacing the school's first principal, Lesley James Wrigley (1875-1933). In his application for the position of principal, Sharman was described as a 'distinguished mathematical scholar, as well as a fairly good classical one' by the headmaster of Scotch College, Alex Morrison.¹³ Born in



These pages of the University High School album show a photograph of CA Duff and a letter from Duff to Mr Sharman that he wrote from Lark Hill Camp on 28 October 1916. MS Sharman Papers, Australian Manuscripts Collection MS 11240

Brazil, Sharman came to Melbourne with his parents in 1882. He attended Richmond State School and, on winning a government scholarship, continued his education at Scotch College and was dux of his class in 1894. As was then the pattern, he began teaching at Wesley College in 1898 while a student at the University of Melbourne. In 1910 he joined the staff of the University Practising School as a method teacher in science and mathematics. He was principal of University High School for 26 years, until 1941. It was his life's work.

Sharman's motivation for collecting the letters is contained in a letter that he wrote to Private Eric C Hancock on 8 October 1917:

I am hoping you will send me an account of your doings as I wish to keep your letters to the School. Your mother promised me one of your photos, but if you could send me one from the Front I shall value it and put it in

our School collection. I am also collecting trophies or relics that our boys at the Front manage to keep or send me so that the future pupils of the School may have some evidence of the work you have been doing in the big fight.¹⁴

He displayed the photographs and relics in a special glass cabinet in the foyer of the school; some of the first relics to be presented were those brought back from Gallipoli by Lance Corporal Langford in 1916. Sharman's impulse to collect the letters may have been inspired in part by the example of University High School advisory committee member, and the principal of Wesley College (1902–32), Lawrence A Adamson, who corresponded with Wesley's old collegians on active service abroad and who, in 1915, began to collect an archive of letters relating to the Gallipoli campaign.¹⁵

Sharman's genuine affection for his former students and staff is evident in the correspondence. We learn of his efforts to encourage patriotic values amongst the students. He invites enlisted students and staff to the school to be officially farewelled and presented with wristwatches and, later, school badges. The school newspaper, *The University High School Record*, is posted to those serving overseas, and he maintains a regular correspondence with those on active service, and their parents. The girls, boys and teaching staff knit socks in the school colours and make leather wallets embossed with the initials of the soldiers to send to those serving overseas.

The letters that Sharman receives from former students and teachers at the school are frank, sometimes gruelling in their details and often, despite the gravity of the war and its consequences, imbued with humour. He is held in great respect and many of the students are self-conscious when corresponding with their former principal. Their letters are sprinkled with apologies for poor English expression, humble writing materials, nondescript and 'dry' narratives, and tardiness of replies: Edgar Stonham apologises for the places where he has 'scratched words out but paper is too hard to obtain here'. Frank Grant writes from France, 'You must excuse this scrawl but I have to make the best use of my materials and I am writing with a bad thumb'.¹⁶ Eric Hancock regrets that he has not written sooner, 'Perhaps when I tell you this is being written in a "Pill Box" you will understand that I have not been able to reply to same earlier', and blames the censor for the 'poor account of his doings';¹⁷ while Keith Burrows comments on his use of slang:

I must ask you before I really begin the narrative to excuse what sprinklings of Australian slang appear from time to time, but I honestly believe that in the future, 'après la guerre' of course that some of the words used by the A.I.F. in foreign countries will be included in every dictionary as good English.¹⁸

Some of the students and teachers 'disguise their feelings writing commonplace news', downplaying their injuries and describing their experiences as 'stiff fighting' or 'a lively time'. There are also, however, accounts that tug at the heartstrings as they tell the story of a generation awakening to the horrors of war. In July 1916, Private James Makin even surprised himself in the unvarnished and gruelling account he gave of his experiences on the battlefield at Pozières in July 1916:

Nearer the line the horror of the unburied dead is unforgettable. The pathos of the scene engraves itself on the mind. Imagine the dead lying along the tracks by the wayside, in trenches, along parapets – some lying, some kneeling, some standing, some with rifles clutched tightly facing the enemy to the last. Then come nearer still and hear the moans of the fearfully wounded and the plaintive call for stretcher bearers, see the noble bearers carrying back the shattered bodies of the brave lads still possessing hope of life, and all the time the shrapnel whistling and the shells bursting ... War. Such scenes as these harden one, make one callous, but what man could remain unmoved when his comrade is struck down beside him? In places it is death to stand up.

He then writes, 'I don't know why I am writing all of this, but I can't help it. I feel that more should be known of war's horrors so that the sacrifice of the brave dead may be better appreciated by those of us who are spared'.¹⁹

The students from University High that enlisted and corresponded with the staff and students were familiar faces, having left the school perhaps one or two years earlier. At school assemblies, students and staff would crowd into two upstairs classrooms, some sitting and others standing, listening as Matthew Sharman read the letters received from the Front.²⁰ In 1918, a letter arrived from Private James Keith Burrows describing in vivid and graphic detail an attack on the German frontline on 4 July 1918. It includes a description of his role in the death of a German soldier and was partly written on paper souvenired from the battlefield:

this piece of paper is a 'souvenir [de] la guerre'. I happened to come across a few sheets of it in the pack of a sergeant who was lying dead in the trench and knowing that writing paper would be scarce when we arrived I salvaged it ... there were all sorts of souvenirs to be had; revolvers, caps, helmets, belts, buttons and innumerable other articles that our boys take from every German prisoner.²¹

The letter was received at the school in the days following the news that Burrows had been killed in action on 29 September 1918. He was the school's fourth casualty.

The volume of correspondence that passed between the enlisted men, the school, and their relatives, was considerable – Mr Sharman’s album contains just a snippet, as does the school newspaper, the *Record*. Former teacher Lance Corporal Langford records that when he received his backlog of mail in the trenches of Gallipoli in October 1915 it contained 71 letters written between April and September, 26 from students at University High School.²² Former student, Gunner Charles Gray, known as ‘Tigger’, is also kept busy answering correspondence – he has so many letters to write that he forgets to whom he has written:

I really couldn’t tell you all the different ones who have written to me but their letters have all been answered and I told them how pleased I was to hear both from them personally, and from the School.²³

The Education Department encouraged teachers to integrate topics and activities related to the war effort into the curriculum. In English classes, students were encouraged to write letters to those serving overseas.²⁴ Former teacher Norman Heathcote, who corresponded with students and with Matthew Sharman, suggests jovially in one letter from the Front:

I would suggest that the U.H.S. senior physics class devotes some attention to inventing a light portable foot warmer, and thus earn the thanks of thousands of khaki clad mud waders.²⁵

The soldiers serving overseas encouraged the students to write to them. Driver Frank Grant writes to Sharman:

I would be very pleased if you would get some of the scholars to write to me and tell me the latest news in school world. You would not think that we look forward to letters from home as much as we do.²⁶

Private Edgar Stonham writes to Sharman from France in 1917 that he has received a letter from a pupil, Jean Stubbs, and he then asks Sharman to get his old chum, Nestor Roth, to write to him.²⁷

University High School was coeducational and the female teachers and scholars played an important role in all aspects of the school’s daily life. During the war years, the female students proved to be enthusiastic and dedicated correspondents – of the 26 letters Langford received in the one delivery, 25 were written by the ‘girls’. The correspondents included Stella Langford, Mona Grant, Dorothy Atyeo, May Eddy, Gwen Robinson, Eili Heinz and Minnie Varle. They also assisted with writing and editing the school newspaper, which published summaries of and excerpts from letters the school received.

The school's English and history teacher, Dorothea Marshall, received and wrote many letters to those serving overseas, and three are included in the album. Born in England, Dorothea Ida Marshall studied at Sommerville College, Oxford, and Dublin University (most likely Trinity College), before arriving in Australia in 1913, when she joined the staff of University High School. As well as teaching English and history, she assisted with student-teacher training and acted as a producer and stage manager of plays for the high school and its Old Pupils Association. Matthew Sharman had a great deal of respect for her skills and, in 1918, wrote a personal letter to his mentor, Frank Tate, describing her as 'a most inspirational and enthusiastic' teacher, and suggesting that she be promoted to the position of headmistress.²⁸

The letters sent to Dorothea Marshall demonstrate the close rapport that she developed with her students. Two of the letters that former student Gunner 'Tigger' Gray sent her are included in the album, one describing at length the thrill of his first aeroplane flight.²⁹ She also writes to Sergeant Charles Alexander Duff, who was killed in action in June 1917, and his forthright letter to her, written in March 1917, is pasted into the album. Duff had recently shared a meal with schoolmates Corporal Vivian Gray (Gay) Burston and Private Charles (Charlie) Waern. He recorded that during the meal they discussed former University High School student Patrick (Pat) Sheehan. Sheehan, who was a talented athlete, footballer and cricketer, had been the school's senior champion in 1912 and captained its football and cricket teams; and in 1913 he became the first secretary of the Old Pupils Association. Duff writes of Sheehan's decision not to enlist in the Australian Imperial Force:

Gay Burston is rather disgusted with Pat Sheehan & his standpoint. I know if we had him here he would soon get it knocked out of him. The fellows don't 'cotton' to any one who shows the 'white feather'. I have seen one or two where the fellows have cut them. They do not have a single pal and their existence must be rotten.³⁰

He signs his letter to Dorothea Marshall with, 'With close regards to our mutual friends'. Marshall's views on voluntary enlistment are unknown, however in 1924 she co-produced George Bernard Shaw's play about the futility of war, *Arms and the Man*, for the University of Melbourne Dramatic Club.

Pat Sheehan's failure to enlist was a sore point for many of his peers, including Private James Makin who, along with Gay Burston, Charles Duff and Sheehan, entered the school in 1910, Makin writes to his mother from England in January 1917:

As for Pat, I thought when he reached 21 he would take the matter into his own hands. I am mistaken now, and of course I have nothing but contempt for him and his fellow shirkers. I could never be the same to him again.³¹

Pat Sheehan was one of 26 boys from his year level who chose not to enlist. During the war years he competed successfully in the Victorian Athletics League carnivals, with his greatest wins occurring in the latter years of the war. It was perhaps this focus, combined with his Irish Catholic heritage, that particularly riled his former classmates. There is no doubt that issues concerning enlistment divided the school community. Alice Hoy, who joined the staff of University High School in 1915, recalled a 'large scale battle' that was waged in the 'school yard over the honour of a highly esteemed master who though not in khaki, was in fact already enrolled for skilled service of a special kind in England's war effort'. The students returned to classes with 'torn guernseys, bloodied noses, and obvious wounds'.³²

Those serving abroad also had mixed feelings about service overseas. Private John Campbell Blogg writes to Matthew Sharman from the field in July 1918:

By the last mail I received a letter from Archer and am very pleased he has advanced so and am sure he is doing more good in Australia for the Empire than by coming over here. I am glad his parents will not give their consent. It is for his own benefit which he will find out afterwards.³³

Blogg obtained the consent to enlist shortly after his 18th birthday in May 1917. His letter to Sharman was written in France in July 1918, where he was serving with the 3rd Pioneer Battalion. A month later he was diagnosed with influenza and, after a stint in hospital in England, he was hopeful that the medical board would send him home; he was eventually returned to Australia on 2 January 1919 with an anxiety disorder referred to as 'Effort Syndrome'.

Sharman's album contains an interesting archive of letters sent to him by his former teaching staff. Captain Alexander D Ellis, Lieutenant Norman Heathcote, Lance Corporal Percival Langford and Stanley Sissons were all close colleagues and, like Matthew Sharman, just establishing their careers. The Education Department encouraged teachers to enlist, and promised them security of employment when they returned. Prior to their enlistment in 1915, Ellis and Heathcote were advised that their war service would be regarded as 'service as a teacher' and that they would be able to continue their studies on their return to Australia.³⁴ Heathcote was able to sit his final examinations at the University of Melbourne prior to his departure as part of the special arrangements for those enlisting.³⁵

7 Kudall St
Essendon
19. 4. 17

Mr Sharman

Dear Sir

I thank you for your kind expressions of sympathy in our terrible sorrow & nothing but a victorious ending in favour of our Allies & Empire has satisfied the Irish for which my hope was that you should dear clean little birds for lay with in any messers console us for the loss of our dear ones. Mr Saltau asks if you will let any of his schoolmates know that a Memorial service will be held on Sunday night next 22nd at the Presbyterian Mission Hall when both of my dear ones by their lives & teaching shewed to others an example worthy to be followed. I had a little a mail of day ago from a man old enough to be Bryan's father & he said that but for my having influence he might have gone altogether to the dogs. In regard to your letter to Brian I do not think he ever received them as he always told

me whom he heard from
Thanking you once more
Saltau. his O's
be always very sincerely yours
Isabel Saltau

P.S. will you kindly tell Miss Marshall that I have found the letter she left with me & which I thought I had mislaid.
Isabel Saltau

A letter from Mrs Saltau, mother of the former student Sergeant Brian Saltau, to Mr Sharman, 19 April 1917. MS Sharman Papers 1914–1919, Australian Manuscripts Collection MS 11240

Alexander Ellis taught English, mathematics and Latin at University High School and was in the third year of a law degree at the University of Melbourne when he enlisted in 1915, at the age of 29. Although Sharman accuses him of ‘garrulity’, his frank letters paint a vivid picture of his changing attitudes to his life of ‘soldiering’. In one of his last letters in the album he writes:

We have had another success – I mean the 29th Btn my first & only love – and paid the due price ... Thank heavens that twice as many filthy Boches are disappearing in the mud in the immediate vicinity. A dead German is the finest sight I have seen in my life. I hope to see a million of them yet. Some day I'll tell the School why a peaceful & literary & loving individual like myself will never see quite as many dead Germans as I want to. It's a thing I could never have believed myself.³⁶

The editors of the *Record* observed that he had lost his characteristic ‘piquant humour’.³⁷ Ellis rose to the rank of captain during the war and was awarded a Military Cross in March 1918. After the war ended, he stayed in London, where he wrote a history of the Australian 5th Division, which was published in 1919. The album contains eight letters written by Ellis.

Norman Heathcote enlisted in 1915, at the age of 28. In February 1917 he was fighting in a 'salient' in France with the 15th Machine Gun Company and, in replying to a letter from Sharman, who had evidently asked what it is like to be under fire, he writes a colourful and adrenalin-fuelled description of a stunt:

My machine guns play a ripping accompaniment to the shrieks of the shells and mortars ... flares of all colours going up, shrapnel bursting, high explosives ripping and tearing in all directions.³⁸

He concludes, 'But enough of this you'll begin to think I am a real bruiser if I continue', and observes that there was no time for 'feelings', it was simply a matter of getting on with 'the job at hand'. He asks Sharman not to publish any extracts from his letter in the *Record*; it was a personal letter. Heathcote's six letters in the album describe conditions on the frontline and other incidental details:

The word 'Blighty' I believe is the Tommies pronunciation and spelling of a Hindu word meaning 'home'. At least that is the generally accepted explanation over here. Even the Germans know the word. One who was captured in Flanders was all smiles as he explained in English that he'd just returned from 'Blighty' leave to Berlin so he didn't mind being taken prisoner.³⁹

He rose through the ranks during his war service and, by July 1918, Lieutenant Heathcote is reporting that:

But now I am one of those persons who, by the ordinary 'Digger' is considered to be the acme of stinginess – in other words – a battalion quartermaster or supply officer.⁴⁰

At the end of the war Heathcote made the most of his opportunities in London while he waited to be repatriated, and wrote a letter to Sharman outlining his professional development activities. He returned to Australia in October 1919 and continued his career with the Education Department, becoming an inspector of schools in Victoria's Shepparton district in 1925.

The album also documents the activities of Stanley Sissons, the school's former chemistry teacher, who worked in Scotland during the war. After a long wait, his application to work in the chemistry laboratories of the British Munitions Board was accepted in 1916, and he was granted leave of absence from University High School.⁴¹ In 1917 he started work as a staff chemist in the nitroglycerine section of a munitions factory in Gretna, Scotland:

This factory is the largest explosive factory in the world, its length extends over 12 miles. It has upwards of 50 miles of railway line in it; It employs 16,000 hands on factory work; and 25,000 in new construction work ... There are quite a crowd of Australians at work here – Callister and Parkin who did the University course with me in Melb. have responsible positions here, Parry – whom you will remember – arrived here 1 month after I did. 6 Melbourne graduates and 6 Working Men's College students are also on the work.⁴²

The album contains 13 letters from Sissons to Matthew Sharman, and he is also mentioned in the correspondence of Lieutenant Norman Heathcote, who visited him in Scotland while on furlough.

The *Record* contains a wealth of information about the school's activities during the war years. It was published in June and December, and eagerly awaited and welcomed by those serving overseas. Ellis writes:

A 'Record' arrived today and letters from Vera Hopton & Elsa Roll. Quite a breath – and a jolly fragrant breath – of the dear old School.⁴³

Through the *Record*, those serving overseas were able to share their experiences and keep in touch with their 'pals at the front' and 'mates' left behind.⁴⁴ The paper chronicled events in the life of the school, examination and sporting results, news from class reunions and activities at home and abroad of past teachers and students. During the war years, the paper included photographs of recruits, a column with news of their activities, 'About our soldiers', excerpts from their letters, obituaries, and a list of addresses of 'Masters and Old Boys on active service'.

Letters received by students and staff at University High School were regarded as common property, and shared between friends, family and the community. Some of the letters the school received went astray. In a letter to Mrs Saltau, Matthew Sharman confesses that he has lost her original account of her son's landing at Gallipoli, and that it might now be in the possession of the editor of the *Record*. When news arrives that Sergeant Brian J Saltau has been killed in action, Dorothea Marshall gives the correspondence she has received from Saltau to his grieving mother.⁴⁵ Saltau was one of the first students to enter the school in 1910, and the first student to enlist.

The school's first intake of students were all still under the age of enlistment when World War I began. As each year passed, small groups of students graduating from the school, and usually underage, persuaded their parents to give their consent for them to enlist. In 1914 one student enlisted; in 1915, 14 students; 1916, 11 students; 1917, 10 enlisted; and, in 1918, another 14 enlisted. By the end of the war, 55 students and five former staff had served.

The school's youngest recruit was Ush Schneider, who enlisted in January 1916 at the age of 16 years and nine months, without his parent's permission, under the name of Private John Clifford.

Some students struggled to obtain the consent of their parents to enlist for active service. In May 1915 a group of them, all still underage, were given permission to enlist in the Australian Medical Corp (AMC), amongst them Vivian Gray Burston, whose twin brother had already enlisted under a false name. His father, the headmaster of St Kilda State School, whose patriotic poems were published in the *Argus*, writes:

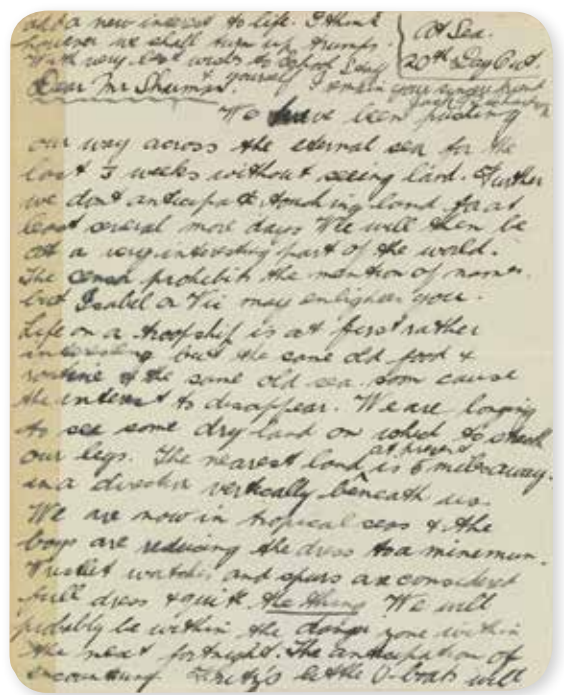
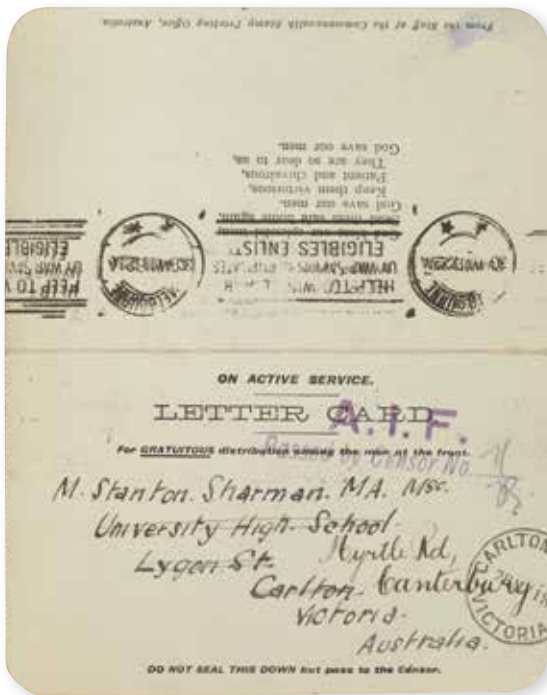
I have two lads one at the front, the other, aged 19, in camp at Seymour. You will surely wonder when I inform you that I withheld my consent to the enlistment of the latter unless admitted to the Army Medical Corps when I tell you that although he has been in the Citizens' Army for 12 months and has attended his drills regularly he has not had any practice at the butts, since the war began.⁴⁶

Burston's former classmates, medical students Roy Hardy and Frank Grant, also enlisted in the AMC on the same day. When Hardy, Burston and Grant received permission, Duff was able to persuade his widowed mother to allow him to join the AMC.⁴⁷ The prudence of these parents also reflects the range of attitudes in the school community to enlistment. Of the 40 boys who won scholarships to the school in 1910, only 14 enlisted. When John Campbell Blogg enlisted in May 1917, the editors of the *Record* comment that he is the first of the class of 1915 to enlist, and has 'broken the ice', and 'has shown the way to the many others who were waiting for such a precedent to use as a lever to get *the consent*'.⁴⁸

In 1918 the parents of Raymond Shalles (Ray) Mathews stipulated that they were only willing for him to enlist if it were with the Varsity and Schools Unit, which he did in July 1918. On hearing the news, Sapper William Leigh Orchard writes with great pleasure from the signal school at Broadmeadows:

I believe my old pals Ray Mathews and Claude Farrow are coming into camp with the 'Varsity and Schools Unit' next week. It was an understood thing with the old 1915 Va that we would form a contingent of our own in 1918 and I believe now it is going to come true.⁴⁹

The students had started together in the same fifth form year. Orchard finally embarked for England in August 1918 with school mates Corporal Wilfred John (Jack) 'Rollo' Robinson, Private Alan 'Portia' Porteous, Private



A letter from Fussell John (Jack) Richardson to Mr Sharman, 'At sea 20th day out', HMT Nestor, c. March 1918. Note the AIF censor stamp. MS Sharman Papers 1914–1919, Australian Manuscripts Collection MS 11240

Horatio Greenhalgh, and Stoker Eric Harris. Greenhalgh, a trainee teacher, writes to Matthew Sharman before he leaves:

I finish teaching on Wednesday 15th, and will spend the time between that date and the 29th swotting exams ... I hope to be in camp before my chums, Claude Farrow, Knott, Orchard and dozens more embark as I would like to go with them if possible.⁵⁰

The last group's service with the Australian Imperial Force was brief but, nevertheless, eventful. The letters of Ray Mathews record the outbreak of Spanish flu on the trip to England:

Those two weeks between Cape Town & Sierra will always live in my memory as a sort of horrible nightmare. Seven hundred odd of the troops went through the hospital in slightly over a week & twenty were buried at sea ... after a few days the supply of medicine was very much diminished & those who were amongst the last to enter the hospital were unable to get the treatment that we had.⁵¹

Many of this group's letters concern the long wait for repatriation, and their activities in postwar England and France.

In June 1917, Matthew Sharman calculated that there were 18 former students serving overseas and, of these, three had been killed in action: Corporal William E Bruce, Sergeant C Alexander Duff, and Sergeant Brian J Saltau. As Sharman commented in a letter of condolence to Duff's mother, it was a high percentage of deaths given the small number of students serving overseas.⁵² All three students were 'pioneers', who had started at the school in 1910. Bruce was killed in action in November 1916, Saltau in March 1917 and Duff in June 1917. The June 1917 issue of the *Record* included obituaries for Saltau and Bruce. One of Billy's former classmates sets the tone for the school's future commemorations of the fallen:

though Duty prevents your return to the School, old friend, your memory will remain evergreen there. You have helped to make its traditions. The story of our boys' sacrifice will stand forth in the history of the School, and throughout the coming years will help to inspire its members to great deeds in the service of their country.

Richy, Obituary for Billy (William Edward Arnold) Bruce, 1917⁵³

At the end of the war, Sharman commissioned an honour board and it included portraits of the five masters and 38 former pupils known to have served in the Great War. Updates to the lists of pupils, student teachers and staff who had served, and perished, in World War I continued to be published in the *Record*. By 1921 the Education Department's calls for schools to progress their work on honour books and rolls had become more insistent, and district school inspectors were called to report on the progress in their regions.⁵⁴ The December 1922 issue of the *Record* listed the names of 60 former pupils, student teachers and staff who had served in the Great War.⁵⁵

Memories of the Great War continued to be a potent element in the school's life throughout the 1920s and '30s. In 1922 the school introduced a House system that honoured the 'heroic and gallant deeds' of its war heroes by naming the Houses after them. The individuals selected were Percival Langford, who became the first sports master and first to enlist from the school; and former students William Bruce, Keith Burrows, Alexander Duff, Eric Hancock and Brian Saltau. In July the House captains presented large framed portraits of each soldier to the school in the presence of parents and dignitaries.⁵⁶ The album of letters is closely associated with this event – the letters and correspondence relating to Bruce, Burrows, Duff, Hancock, Saltau and Langford are grouped together in its first pages.

On the sporting field there were other reminders of the school's contribution to the Great War. The Duff Cup for hockey, inscribed with the

words, 'The Duff Cup, In Memory of Alec Duff, Killed in Action 7th June 1917', was presented annually from the 1920s until the 1950s. Sharman also proposed that a memorial hall be built to honour the school's contribution, although this did not eventuate until 1965. It is known as the MS Sharman Hall.⁵⁷

On 17 March 1924, a memorial service was held on the anniversary of Brian Saltau's death. This came to be the first of many such ceremonies that were held during school assemblies. In 1934 Sharman learnt that Harold Clifford Brooke had enlisted and perished during World War I and, in 1935, Langford House became Langford-Brooke House and a memorial notice was placed in the *Melbourne Age*.⁵⁸

Sharman, as headmaster of University High School, demonstrated throughout the war years a keen interest in preserving the stories and memories of those who served in the Great War. In compiling the album he was influenced perhaps by Frank Tate's advocacy for the preservation of war records and for collating stories of those who served. Sharman's album was also a ceremonial object and it was associated with rituals arising from the annual commemorations of the school's war heroes by the Houses.

Prior to its acquisition by the State Library, a copy of the letters was bound by University High School and has been used as a resource for history students at the school who have researched the stories of a number of the former masters and pupils. The photographs of the soldiers that Sharman collected are held at the school and, in the entry foyer, the honour board, the portraits of the soldiers presented by the Houses, and the House banners, are displayed. Sharman's album captures the school's experience of war through a diversity of viewpoints and voices, and is a still today a treasured 'human record'.