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The Melbourne Public Library at war: 1914–18

In his unpublished recollections, ‘Fifty years of the Public Library’,¹ Edmund La Touche Armstrong (1864–1946),² chief librarian and secretary to the trustees from 1896–1925, describes in great detail many of the memorable events from his 44 years’ service at the then Melbourne Public Library (now State Library Victoria). Taciturn and cryptic in his descriptions, despite the text’s engaging anecdotal nature, one could be forgiven for thinking that little of note happened over this period, especially during the Great War. Certainly multiple individuals – librarians, trustees, watchmen and caretakers – are assessed, library procedures evaluated, and key events, like the opening of the Domed Reading Room noted, as was the difficulty and resistance of a key staff member, sub-librarian Amos Brazier, to the introduction of the Dewey Decimal System.³ Rules and regulations over this period were enforced with a professional efficiency and the backing of the trustees, as was in keeping with the status of the institution. One notable example involved the eviction of a sitting member of parliament from the Reading Room for refusing to don his dress coat. Studying with your dress coat off was an action deemed inappropriate for the Library; dressing as a gentleman, as writer and public servant Robert Croll later recalled, was still a requirement.⁴ Armstrong noted of his time that, ‘most local writers on serious subjects’, and this included journalists, ‘had to use the resources of the Library in connection with their work’. He added a caveat, however: ‘A public library is, of course, a likely



Staff of the Melbourne Public Library, Swanston Street, c. 1896–98. Edmund La Touche Armstrong in top hat, top left. Pictures Collection H13084

gathering place for oddities of all kinds as well as derelicts,⁵ something of which he was well aware, and tolerated, when managing the Public Library as both a public space and information resource. Although the Public Library exercised what Croll called a ‘notable influence upon my life’, he left its ‘monastic seclusion’ in 1892 with a great sense of relief.⁶

Croll’s image of the Library, which was formed several years before Armstrong became chief librarian, was a picture of a quaint, but mannered institution, still with the ‘traditions of Marcus Clarke and Sir Redmond Barry’, where one could dine with Rudyard Kipling when he called, but know that certain of his books were banned by the Library for crossing ethnic taboos. Somewhat removed from the realities of life, a photo of senior library staff taken in 1895, and including the soon-to-be outgoing Chief Librarian MF Dowden and Armstrong, his replacement, reflects the structured, entitled period at the end of Queen Victoria’s reign and the group of cultured and sometimes eccentric gentlemen who managed the Public Library.⁷ Again, such views are perhaps compounded by Armstrong: his obvious love for the Library, his dedication to its aims and ideals for over 40 years; and his perhaps unintentional portrayal of himself as the ideal civil servant – taciturn and diplomatic in handling the diverse personalities of the trustees, but able to

get the job done to his own high standards, and with a definite vision of how the Library should develop as one of Australia's premier cultural institutions.⁸

Armstrong was the son of Anglo-Irish migrants. His father was a Trinity College Dublin-educated barrister who reported on many cases, including that of the Irish leader Daniel O'Connell's impeachment. His mother, Alice O'Dell, was from a military background, her father having fought in key engagements during the Peninsular War, including Salamanca.⁹ Thus, while Armstrong was raised in a British Imperialist tradition, his family's Irish background influenced him to be perhaps more used than others to the idea of negotiating diverse political and cultural allegiances. Armstrong's father, a Crown prosecutor and acting County Court judge in Victoria, died in 1884 and, from 1896 to 1909, his mother lived with him on the Public Library premises. A confirmed bachelor, Armstrong was a noted member of the Yorick Club.¹⁰

The great European war was the event that ripped the fabric of Australia's social, cultural and political life and caused enormous upheaval in Melbourne.¹¹ In lieu of a full study of the surviving administrative records of the Public Library over this period,¹² this paper canvasses several preliminary questions and offers a number of observations on the Library's position vis-a-vis the war. Firstly, what was the Public Library's response in time of war and what role did the chief librarian and Board of Trustees see the Library as playing in these events? Secondly, how did this 19th-century Victorian institution respond to a changing world in the first decades of the new era? The two main Public Library protagonists who either wrote on or publicly engaged with the function of the Library over this time were Armstrong, chief librarian and secretary to the trustees, who is most noted for his two-volume work *The Book of the Public Library*;¹³ and president of the Board of Trustees, Henry Gyles Turner. In his work, Armstrong judiciously avoids engaging with the Anglo-Boer War, the Great War and other key political events in Melbourne; while Turner, as the president of the trustees, through a number of high-profile public lectures, confined himself largely to the study of war literature, and what Australia would be like after the Great War.¹⁴ Thus, there is a glaring lacuna in the memoirs of the key participants in the Library's affairs at that time, and in the annual published reports of the trustees, which were edited largely by Armstrong and Turner.



At the outbreak of World War I, Melbourne, as capital of Australia, was the hub of government, industrial action and military activity and, as the colony that

had suffered perhaps most in the financial collapse of the 1890s, its resurgence in a Federated Australia as an industrial, financial and political hub, as well as being the centre for organised labour activity, was both remarkable as it was politically fraught.¹⁵ The two most telling examples of this tension are Premier William Hill Irvine's decision to break a labour strike by introducing a Strike Suppression Bill, followed immediately with the sending in of strikebreakers to halt the Victorian Locomotive Engine-driver's and Firemen's Association strike in 1904 in order to prevent it further disrupting vital state and national infrastructure;¹⁶ and Henry Bournes Higgins fight for the minimum wage for workers and his decision from the Harvester judgement in 1907 that, in effect, set labour case history in Australia by establishing the first national wages standard.¹⁷ The first event represented a major challenge to the newly federated Australia, being the first major industrial strike in the country. The second was a milestone in industrial relations and a reflection of the maturing of Australia as an evolving industrial state where arbitration between employers and employees represented a considerable advancement in any social contract. Victoria was a state on the move with a population that was active in seeking answers and solutions to many of the day-to-day economic and social issues of the times; it was also a state in which people sought to meet their educational needs, something that was recognised by the founder of the Public Library Sir Redmond Barry, and Edmund La Touche Armstrong, and something that required a response from the Public Library in terms of the types of scientific and technical literatures it acquired in the new century.¹⁸ This was further exemplified during the war years when, in 1916, the Workers Educational Association petitioned the Library to extend its opening hours to Sundays to enable workers to have greater access to the Library's resources, a move declined by the trustees because of staff retrenchment during the war.¹⁹

Where, then, does the Melbourne Public Library sit between the turn of the century and the end of the Great War and what was its role over those years? As historians W Boyd Rayward and Christine Jenkins suggest, great libraries reflect the 'intellectual and cultural authority' of the period and are closely tied to the 'apparatus of government and higher education, where they reflect the power and prestige of the state', both in their content – what they house – and their physical presence:

Our great national and research libraries are subject themselves to what is usually a slow process of change over time in terms of what they do, how they do it, and for whom. Nevertheless, the substantial buildings in which their physical bulk is manifested are designed to suggest weight, solidity,

permanence, and continuity. Libraries so housed are designed to evoke awe, even reverence towards that which underpins, anchors and outlasts the evanescent events of daily life.²⁰

Social continuity and social change are dependent on an infrastructure that allows information to be generated, disseminated and used within a society, and the self-effacing Armstrong is justifiably celebrated for having achieved much for the Library over his tenure, particularly his ability to get things done, to get money from government, and to enable the library to grow in size, prestige and influence, enhancing its position as Australia's de facto national library in the capital city.²¹ This is perhaps best reflected in the building of the £80,000 Domed Reading Room in the years immediately preceding the war. A major architectural feat, the completion of the reading room enhanced the Library's physical presence in the city of Melbourne – the dome was visible for miles around²² – with comparisons made between it and the structures of some of the great libraries of the world, such as the British Museum and the US Library of Congress. But it was also distinctly Australian, with the *Argus* pointing out that £4300 had also been spent on the furniture alone (and more on the shelving), all of it made in Australia.²³ Further, as well as being able to hold 300,000 volumes the seating allowed accommodation for up to 300 readers.²⁴ Formally opened by the Governor General Lord Denman on 14 November 1913, it was described as a structure of which 'any city in the world might feel proud'.²⁵

The Domed Reading Room represented a great improvement in library services, and one has only to reflect on the 1910 photograph of the then current book delivery and information service – through a hatch – at the end of Queen's Hall,²⁶ to register the move from a more enclosed and monitored access to information to a more spacious and readily accessible browsing collection, albeit with the raised central dais occupied by attendants 'giving supervision along eight radial desks each seating twenty-eight readers'.²⁷ Not that such a system did not have some drawbacks, and there had always been occasional problems with open access, but, overall, the dome encouraged greater attendance at the Library and led to fewer thefts and mutilation of books.²⁸

The Public Library showed unstinted commitment to the maintenance of a first-class collection and, since the time of Redmond Barry and the first chief librarian Augustus Tulk, the acquisition of a broad general collection of international breadth, combined from 1904 with the purchase of outstanding high-value works through its Felton Bequest,²⁹ had been its underlying strength. Despite being heavily criticised in its early days by

former Irish politician and later Victorian premier Sir Charles Gavan Duffy for its classical leanings and lack of works on British affairs, philosophy and political economy,³⁰ such collecting foresight laid the foundation of the Public Library as one of Australia premier research institutions. A perusal of the meticulously documented accession registers of the latter decades of the 19th century and early decades of the 20th century reveals the level of engagement with international literatures, especially those from France and Germany.³¹ It was in these countries that great advancements in literature, philosophy, science and technology was being made, and where the availability of this information was world leading; the Library's commitment to collecting works that document this advancement of knowledge is impressive and shows considerable foresight.



The opening of the Domed Reading Room in 1913 was seen as a fitting tribute to the premier library in Australia's capital. Twelve months later Australia was at war, budgets were tightened and the acquisition of library materials became difficult. As Edmund La Touche Armstrong noted of 1914:

The European war affected the supply of foreign books and periodicals. Nothing was received from Germany after the outbreak of hostilities, and the publication of many French and other foreign periodicals was stopped or seriously interrupted. The demand for newspapers published abroad was largely increased, and several files of newspapers had to be duplicated.³²

As to how the Public Library responded to the outbreak of what Armstrong continually refers to as the 'European war', and the decisions that were made behind the scenes to respond to these unprecedented events and their technological and human scale, is still largely unknown. One suspects that there was a growing realisation that something historically unprecedented was unfolding on the world stage and that the Library's role should be to understand what this was, to have it documented and make it available to the public in Australia. In 1915 the Library was approached by the well-known English publishers Sotheran & Co. with an offer to supply the Library with the latest books on the war. The Library's Book Committee accepted the offer and Armstrong's brief comments in the published version of the 1916 Trustees Report noted this new departure: "The Trustees decided to obtain through Messrs Sotheran and Co. a universal collection of literature on the European war."³³ Again, the discussions that took place amongst the Trustees, and what detailed instructions were given to Sotheran & Co.³⁴ in terms of

acquiring German, French and other European works on the war (including Scandinavian) is not known. Victor Gray, in his history of Sotheran, notes that institutions like the University of Chicago gave the firm a blank order to collect everything new printed on the European war. It is probable that the Melbourne Public Library gave similar instructions to Sotheran, within the limits of its available budget over the war years.³⁵ Whatever the case, the Melbourne Public Library was the only library in Australia that made the decision to establish a comprehensive collection of contemporary material dealing with the European war. As a result, the latest works in English, German, French, Italian and other languages found their way to the Public Library collections, with the acquisition of war-related books and pamphlets continuing through the 1920s.

In a paper to the Library Association of England in London in late 1915, the Honorary Secretary L Stanley Jast detailed the ideal role of a public library during war. Printed as a pamphlet that was accessioned into the Melbourne Public Library's collection in May 1916, Jast outlined a prevailing feeling about the role of libraries in the current Great War:

The public library is one great agency which can help us in fighting the Intellectual Germany, with which equally with the Material Germany, we are at war, by providing literature which will enable people to understand the causes of the present conflict, the meaning of the civilization for which the Allies stand, and the values of the various ideas and conceptions of the human mind. The library can also help in the vital way of supplying people with the books which deal in a not too technical fashion with the fundamental principles of military and naval strategy and tactics, which will enable us to see the happenings of the moment in something like a true perspective, and so to defeat the campaign of mental suggestion which Germany is carrying on with a thoroughness and on a scale never before attempted in the world.³⁶

Written in 1915, when German successes were mounting, Jast emphasised the need to avoid creating confusion and fear amongst readers by the oversupply of too many works on a topic; as he notes: 'the most important part of bibliography is selective bibliography ... what the ordinary citizen wants is a very select list of one or two only of the best and most suitable books dealing with all those and other questions to which I have just now referred.'³⁷ Despite being an arm of the state – and reflecting government events in a public spirit, such as the draping of the Swanston St entrance of the building in mourning 'on the occasion of the funeral of ... King Edward VII' in 1910,³⁸

**Public Library, Museums, & National
Gallery of Victoria.**

WINTER LECTURES, 1917

The following Lectures on the Influences of the War on some phases of our national life will be delivered in the Latrobe Gallery at 8 p.m., on the date specified in each case:—

Wednesday, 30th May—
The War and Literature - Henry Gyles Turner, F.R.G.S.

Wednesday, 27th June—
The War and Morals - - Henry Laurie, LL.D.

Wednesday, 25th July—
The War and Music - - A. E. Floyd, Mus. Bac.

Wednesday, 29th August—
The War and Education - Professor Tucker, Litt.D.

Wednesday, 26th September—
The War and Science - - Professor Masson, D.Sc.

Wednesday, 31st October—
The War and Medicine - - R. R. Stawell, M.D.

The entrance will be from Latrobe Street, midway between Russell Street and Swanston Street—North Carlton, Toorak, and St. Kilda Road tramcars pass the building.

Admission Free

PUBLIC LIBRARY OF VICTORIA

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Flyer for the Winter Lecture Series, 1917. From a bound volume of collected lectures, entitled 'Addresses 1913-14 and 1916-17', Personal Papers, Henry Gyles Turner, Australian Manuscripts Collection MS 8062

it is to the Melbourne Public Library's credit that it does not appear to have succumbed to such xenophobic fears or to have moved towards a propagandist role in both its collecting practices and in what it made available to the public,³⁹ and it certainly continued to acquire German and related works throughout this period. Edmund La Touche Armstrong and the trustees do of course report, with satisfaction, that the number of single male staff members enlisting was extremely high, and they note with regret those members who lost their lives. But, beyond this, the display of war posters in the Library and the documenting of the winter lecture series on the war through 1916 and 1917, the Library's wartime role is subdued.⁴⁰ The major event of 1916 was not

the disastrous Battle of the Somme, but the 300th anniversary of the death of William Shakespeare. The Shakespeare Second Folio⁴¹ was acquired in 1915 and was a major addition to the Public Library's rare printed collections and one that conferred considerable prestige on its Shakespearian holdings, which included a copy of the Fourth Folio. In May 1916 an exhibition of the Library's Shakespearian collections was held in the La Trobe Gallery, showcasing both folios and related editions by Alexander Pope, James Boswell and Samuel Johnson; and including works used by Shakespeare in the writing of his plays. A Shakespeare lecture series was held at the Library with trustees Dr Alexander Leeper, Rev. Edward Sugden, Professor Ernest Scott, Edward Stevens and Dr J Wilson, providing papers.⁴² The exhibition was well canvassed in the Melbourne press and attracted an excellent attendance.

By late 1915, after its decision to source war material from Sotheran & Co., the Public Library experienced a rush on works relating to the war. The realisation by the Library trustees that its role was to make war-related information, and more of it, readily available to the public resulted in changes to accessibility. To this effect, the *Report of the Trustees* for 1916 noted that:

The Trustees are making a special collection of books on the European war, and they have already obtained several hundred volumes and pamphlets. The section devoted to the records of the war will, doubtless, be one of the largest in the Library. These works are at present being kept in the Inquiry Room for the convenience of the numerous readers who consult them.⁴³

The conversion of the Inquiry Room into a war-material information space and meeting room, one of the busiest places in the Library during the war years and where the latest newspapers were continuously in demand, has of course certain resonances with the current use of the ground floor as a networked information space and community hub. All books and pamphlets acquired by the Public Library were registered in one of the Library's many Stock Books – folio volumes that noted acquisitions and their source. Taking just one volume, covering books over 1916–18,⁴⁴ provides fascinating reading. Acquisitions were both eclectic and wide ranging, covering all aspects of the war from the Western Front to the Middle East, from the Rising in Ireland to the genocide of the Armenians, and including personal narratives, official histories, women and the war and the medical aspects of war. Works arriving from Sotheran & Co. included extensive German texts published over 1915 and 1916, such as works by Wilhelm Conrad Gomoll, *Im Kampf gegen Russland* (The Fight Against Russia; 1916); M Revai, *Das Endziel des Weltkrieges* (The Ultimate Goal of the Great War; 1916); W Marten, *Die Lüge im Solde Englands* (Lies Paid

for by England; 1916); French works like Antoine Redier's *Meditations dans la tranchée* (1916); H Richard's *La Syrie et la Guerre* (1916); M d'Artoy's *Au Front* (1916); and English publications by Viscount Bryce, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire* (1916); W Boyd, *With a Field Ambulance at Ypres* (1916); John Gallishaw, *Trenching at Gallipoli: A Personal Narrative* (1916); AK Foxwell, *Munition Lasses* (1917); G Stone, *Women War Workers* (1917); WB Wells, *History of the Irish Rebellion of 1916* (1916); GH Knott, *Trial of Roger Casement* (1917); G Thibierge, *Syphilis and the Army* (1918), R Leriche, *The Treatment of Fractures* (1918); and, Phillip Gibbs, *From Bapaume to Passchendaele, 1917* (1918). By 1919–20, related acquisitions from Sotheran & Co. reflect the rapidly changing world order and include works by L Oppenheim, *The League of Nations and its Problems* (1919); DN Bannerjea, *India's Nation Builders* (1919); and works reflecting on the recent war, including MS Briggs's *Through Egypt in War Time* (1918); and Marshall Foch's *The Principles of War* (1918).⁴⁵ The vision was wide-ranging with only a small number of works known to be restricted, though this aspect of wartime censorship at the Public Library requires further investigation.⁴⁶ The only note of regret, sounded by Edmund La Touche Armstrong, was that original manuscript materials from the war front were not being deposited at the Library.⁴⁷



For a number of years the Public Library had organised a winter lecture series in the National Gallery (on the same site) and, over time, this proved increasingly popular. The 1914 series was so well patronised that, by 1915, it was decided to maintain the lectures on an on-going basis. The lecture series of 1915 covered modern sculpture, Greek art, Australian art and the arts and crafts movement. By 1916, however, thoughts had turned to war, which, apart from the Shakespeare week and associated exhibition, largely dominated the series over the next two years. Many of the speakers were trustees or prominent in the community, the university or in politics. While it displayed war-related hoardings on its grounds,⁴⁸ the Public Library appears to have been discreet in terms of its political allegiances. Untouched by the Irish Rebellion of 1916 and the political consequences of its aftermath in Victoria; the 1916 and 1917 conscription referenda and consequent split in the Labour Party; and the formation of the National Party under Billy Hughes, the politics of its trustees was never in doubt. Of the 1916–17 trustees, many could be considered servants of the Empire and forthright in the cause of the war and conscription though, where Edmund La Touche Armstrong stood as chief librarian and secretary of the trustees is somewhat ambiguous. To touch on several trustees,

perhaps the most strident member and one of the longest serving (1887–1928) was Alexander Leeper. Firmly imperialist and pro-conscription – against pacifists, IWW (International Workers of the World) members, Sinn Fein and Melbourne’s Bishop Daniel Mannix; and founder of the Citizen’s Loyalist Committee in Melbourne – Leeper had campaigned vigorously for the dismissal of German staff at the University of Melbourne and the deregulation of Lutheran schools in Victoria.⁴⁹ Leeper was a strong believer in the role of the Public Library, Museum and National Gallery, however, and worked tirelessly for the Library. The Rev. William Henry Fitchett, Wesleyan minister, teacher, journalist and novelist, founding president of the Methodist Ladies’ College and trustee for 35 years was best known throughout the British Empire for the classic works *Deeds that Won the Empire* (1897), *The Tale of the Great Mutiny* (1899), *How England Saved Europe* (1900), and *The Great Duke* (1911). Fitchett believed in the inevitability of war and the slow journey towards peace in civilised society. His 1913 Public Library lecture, ‘War in history’, focusing particularly upon the Napoleonic ‘Great War’, acknowledged that the Melbourne Public Library’s collections constituted it as one of the major public libraries in the world and called for the greater use of the Library by the residents of the city.⁵⁰ His fellow trustee the Rev. Edward Sugden, a Methodist non-conformist and liberal imperialist, volunteered for military service and ministered as a chaplain to troops stationed in camps around Melbourne; while the longest serving member of the trustees, Henry Gyles Turner, banker, historian and bibliophile, was well-known as an anti-imperialist, a supporter of Aboriginal rights, and as strongly against the White-Australia policy.

Turner is perhaps the representative example from the Board of Trustees over the war years. Described as a paradoxical character,⁵¹ Turner’s views on the European war largely reflected prevailing views of Germany as the great aggressor, of pacifists as misguided, and of war being inherent in the flawed human character, concealed only with a veneer of civilisation; however, it was the vast scientific technology of the current war and the wholesale level of destruction that both appalled and fascinated Turner.⁵² Besides being a free trade champion and fervent supporter of community services, Turner held a strong personal philosophy of individualism and human nature in the Spenserean–Darwinian mode, and this is evident in his keynote talk ‘War and literature’ for the 1917 Public Library, Museums & National Gallery of Victoria Winter Lectures. It is perhaps indicative of Turner’s standing that his talk was attended by the governor-general and other Melbourne notables, and it was here, in a talk devoted to war and literature, that he addressed directly the Library’s role in collecting the literature of war:

Soon after the war broke out the Trustees of this Library decided that for the benefit of students, and for the use of possible future historians, it was desirable to secure all books dealing with this overwhelming topic. They commissioned a leading firm of London booksellers to send us everything as soon as it was published. The result is that we have received to date [1917] 3000 volumes and 2200 pamphlets, dealing with the origin, the conduct, and the consequence of the devastating war now in progress. Of course these are not all by British authors. There is a fair proportion of German, French and Italian books either in the original or in translation; but for the last two years we have imported no books from Germany since it would be trading with the enemy and illegal.⁵³

German books and pamphlets were of course arriving, perhaps many from back stock held by Sotheran & Co., or being acquired through other sources, and the Stock Book entries for 1917 record the arrival of many German works published over 1915–16.⁵⁴ Turner, the bibliophile, notes the great proliferation of writing on the war in all countries and the fact that the imported newspaper and magazine press was generally devoting over 50 per cent of its copy to the war. He also documents reading trends: in the first years of the war, books on the cause of the war were popular; in the second year, people were seeking out personal narratives; he notes the falling off of fiction (war fiction) as the horrors of the war progressed; and, from 1914–16, the halving of biographical and historical output but a rise in the reading and publication of poetry, before passing on to the role of theology and religious works as genres that became more important for many, at a personal level, as the war years carried on. The Public Library's winter war lectures of 1917 engaged directly with the present war and covered the impact of war on literature, morals, science, education and medicine, while the 1918 lecture series dealt largely with world events and loyalty, with titles including 'Australia and the Pacific', 'Russia and ourselves' and, of course, Dr Leeper on the 'Value of the monarchy'.⁵⁵



This survey of the Melbourne Public Library over the war years has raised a number of points for consideration. Firstly, the collecting policy of the Library was of major importance in keeping the citizens of Victoria informed on the war, and the trustees were united in supporting this as a key outcome during the war years; as they noted, very few shipments were ever lost at sea. Such a position is, of course, premised on the Public Library's long-standing ethos, first formulated by Redmond Barry, that information should be free

and accessible to the citizens of Victoria. The availability of information on the war in the Library's Inquiry Room was, one must assume, unrestricted and uncensored, and would have included pro-conscription, pro-war newspapers such as the Melbourne *Argus*, as well as anti-conscription, left-wing, and labour newspapers like *Labor Call* and the Ballarat *Evening Echo*. There is no hint in either the trustees reports or the public newspaper press of the period that the Public Library deviated in any way from this course.

As to the trustees, their role as government appointees should not be overlooked; many of them were clergymen, committed Christians and imperialists, coming particularly from the colleges of the University of Melbourne. The Library was not an agent of change over the war years, or active in hosting views of speakers or supporting events that challenged government policy, the war effort, society's social and religious fabric, or the Empire. Indications suggest that Edmund La Touche Armstrong and Henry Gyles Turner followed the standard line on German aggression. Both could be considered representative examples from Melbourne's Protestant and middle classes, the section of the population that initially showed great public support for the war.⁵⁶ The Public Library's winter lectures over 1916 and 1917 is a good indication of the type of measured debates and reflections on the war that the Library was fostering over this period. In the final analysis the Public Library's user base was not threatened by obvious information restrictions on newspapers and related reading materials, nor was government policy challenged or endangered by unregulated or unpatriotic public exhibitions or debates.

Staff shortages, which resulted in members of the police force performing a walk-through of the Library when Sunday openings did finally begin, and the inability of recipients to undertake National Gallery travelling fellowships overseas, were just some of the hindrances to the Library's regular work over 1914–18 that were recorded in Armstrong's *Book of the Public Library 1906–1931*. Further, while the Library acquired a substantial and nationally significant collection of material on the European war over this period, the event itself left little visible impact on the institution. Only at the end of the Great War did the Public Library feel free to engage its spaces for public memorialising, offering a prize for the design of the war memorial mural outside Queen's Hall in 1922, and later honouring the commitment of its staff to the war, and loss of life of some of its members, with the commissioning of the Library's 1914–18 honour board.⁵⁷ The Public Library's final war event took place in 1937 with the installation of two Great War memorial sculptures, *The Wipers*, and the haunting statue, *The Driver*, both sculpted by British war artist Charles Sargeant Jagger, and placed on the inner forecourt of the Library.⁵⁸