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World War I posters from the State Library Victoria collection

Posters were used for various government propaganda campaigns over the course of World War I, most significantly to encourage enlistment, but also to raise money for war charities, to encourage saving and frugality and to rally the home front.

State Library Victoria has a significant collection of these World War I posters. The provenance of the posters varies; many were acquired directly from the agencies that commissioned them and were displayed in the Library during the war, others were donated much later by private individuals. There are Australian posters – both original designs (including a full set of the now famous posters by Norman Lindsay) and customised copies from British designs. There are also many British posters, as well as a small but important collection of French posters.¹

The earliest recruitment posters

The earliest World War I posters in the State Library's collections are recruitment ones produced in Great Britain. Though not acquired by the Library until 1917, they were produced in the first 12 months of the war by the British Parliamentary Recruitment Committee, which issued posters until September 1915. The output was enormous: 5.7 million posters representing 164 poster designs. When conscription was introduced in Britain in 1916 the enlistment drives ceased, and one million stockpiled posters remained unused



Australia has promised Britain 50,000 More Men. Will YOU Help Us Keep That Promise, 1916, lithograph, Pictures Collection H30357

and unwanted.² To reduce the stockpile, ‘many tons’ of posters were sent overseas to support recruitment campaigns in countries where war service was voluntary, like Canada, India, South Africa and Australia.

It was at this time that the State Library acquired most of its British war posters. The minutes of meetings of the Library’s trustees reveal that its operations were significantly affected by the war. Staffing shortages resulted from the enlistment of many library officers,³ budgets were cut, or the money diverted to war loans and the supply of books from Europe was also interrupted.⁴ In response to the public’s insatiable appetite for news about the war, reading rooms were arranged so that extra copies of daily newspapers were available, and books about the war were put on open access. Numerous series of war lectures were also hosted.⁵

Soon after these British posters were acquired they were exhibited in the entrance hall of the building.⁶ The posters were accessioned in the Library’s Miscellaneous Register in 1918, where it is noted that they were a gift of the Great Britain Parliamentary Recruiting Committee. Many Australian posters were also acquired during the war, and formally accessioned in 1919.

Because all the posters from the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee (PRC) had a Stationery Office imprint consisting of a warrant number, print run and the date of printing,⁷ it is possible to identify the earliest edition in the Library’s collection. The text-only publication, *The Scrap of Paper*, discusses

how Germany, despite being a signatory to a treaty recognising Belgium's neutrality, had even so invaded it.⁸ Numbered seven, it was produced in November 1914, just a few months after the outbreak of war.

The first 10 designs produced for the PRC were text only – mainly slogans. *The Scrap of Paper* was produced at a time when enlistment numbers in Britain were so high that elaborate, illustrated poster designs were unnecessary. By the time the first pictorial poster was produced – *Follow me – your country needs you*⁹ – one million men had already volunteered.¹⁰ But, as enlistment numbers dropped, and the war no longer looked like being over by Christmas, the War Office asked the PRC to help restore previous levels of enlistment. And thus began the British Government's relationship with the advertising world.¹¹

The official recruiting posters produced in Britain from December 1914 to September 1915, and the early Australian posters, were stylistically indistinguishable from contemporary advertisements.¹² The modern advertising poster was used on a grand and unprecedented scale to sustain the war. As the first total war involving every major power in Europe, World War I was fought by soldiers on the frontline, and involved whole civilian populations on the home front. These factors prolonged the war, necessitating direct communication and persuasion from governments to provide the forces and social enthusiasm to complete the task.

As the war progressed, changes in the posters emerge. Symbolic depictions of combat evolved into graphic representations. Depictions of happy heroes, off to join their mates at the Front, changed to images of guilt for not helping. Recruitment campaigns changed to fundraising campaigns. Women, who were originally depicted as virginal nurses or mythical goddesses, became figures bringing down harsh judgement on men for not enlisting. Clean faces became sooty faces.

Posters showed or alluded to atrocities committed by the Germans, and many references were made to the invasion of Belgium and the torpedoing of the ship *Lusitania*. Some showed women raped and mutilated (though in an allusive style – pictured in the distance or half-clothed). The inference was that if Germany could invade defenceless countries, then surely it could commit such atrocities on defenceless people, like women. Often the Germans were shown wearing the spiked helmet of the Hun, even though it had long been discarded as a piece of equipment by the German army.¹³

Other posters showed or alluded to combat. Usually combat was depicted subtly, using images that were not excessively disturbing for the public. Often heroic female figures were shown, leading the forces to victory. Where fighting was depicted, it was humanitarian: noble soldiers helping women and



Left: *Star & Garter Home for Totally Disabled Soldiers and Sailors*, 1915, lithograph, Pictures Collection H33861/13



Right: Charles Burchell, *Belgian Red Cross*, 1916, lithograph, Pictures Collection H33861/20

children. They defend and protect, not kill and maim. As the war progressed, though, posters began to show more of the realities of combat, including dying and wounded soldiers, bombed towns, and explosions. The purpose of these more explicit images was both to gain more recruits, and to show the population at home that the hardships they faced were nothing compared to what the soldiers endured. The Australian poster *'Get into Khaki' We are doing our bit* (1915) shows a soldier standing strong while, in the background there is death and destruction. The French posters *Journée du Poilu 1915* (1915) and *Aidez-nous à soigner nos blessés. Achetez les timbres à l'effigie de nos Generaux. Le Carnet de 20 timbres: 1 FR* (1915), are also good examples of this genre.¹⁴ Another Australian example, *The latest despatch* (ca 1915), shows a soldier pleading for reinforcements. Of interest here is how the cheerful waving hands of soldiers going off to war in the earlier recruitment posters have turned into pleading hand gestures.¹⁵

The British and Australian posters presented the view that individual soldiers can make a difference. While tragically ironic in retrospect – knowing that the war was about numbers, not individuals, and millions of young men were sent to their deaths in a war of attrition – the young men of Britain and

its colonies had grown up with ideas of battlefield heroism, so they eagerly enlisted in a quest for honour and glory.¹⁶ The war was presented as a sporting contest, and posters appealed to particular sporting groups and to young men's desire for adventure. There was a sense of urgency, and men rushed to enlist before the war was over, fearing they would miss out on the adventure. Posters in Australia appealed to pre-existing cultural practices and prejudices. Sport was an important part of Australian culture and the war was presented as 'the greater game'. A Sportsmen's Recruiting Committee was formed, aiming to raise the Sportsmen's Thousand.¹⁷ The Troedel printing company in Melbourne produced at least three posters for this campaign.¹⁸ Two of these show Albert Jacka, the first of nine Australian soldiers to be awarded a Victoria Cross medal during the Gallipoli campaign. He came to be known as the ultimate 'mate', and to embody the virtues of virility, sportsmanship, loyalty and honour. Later, Jacka appears in a poster advertising peace bonds.¹⁹

Posters moved from celebrating men who enlisted to being judgemental about those who had not yet joined up. Where enlisting had been equated to love of country and Empire, later posters equated enlistment with manhood. In these posters, criticism of the man who did not join the army came from women and children. Such appeals, as we see in the poster *Daddy, what did you do in the Great War?* attempted to make men feel guilty. This sort of approach was not popular and critics described it as 'bullying by poster'.²⁰

After the English coastal town of Scarborough was bombed by German forces in December 1914, appeals shifted from protecting Belgium to protecting Britain's women and children. An interesting observation is made by the social historian Meg Albrinck when discussing the poster *Men of Britain! Will you stand this?* The poster presents the statistics of women and children killed and wounded at Scarborough, but men are not mentioned. The author argues that, in this way, the civilian population was feminised.²¹

Britain relied on its colonies, who made their own decisions about war, to cooperate and send troops to support the war effort. Some British posters appealed directly to the colonies, tapping into feelings of loyalty and patriotism. The Parliamentary Recruiting Committee poster *The Empire needs men!*,²² for example, shows a lion standing tall, flanked to his right and left by younger lions. The caption reads: *Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand. All answer the call. Helped by the YOUNG LIONS, The OLD LION defies his Foes. Enlist Now.* This poster, obviously attempting to flatter the colonies, was widely posted and was featured by the *Argus* newspaper.²³

Australian designs featured Australian iconography, like the kangaroo, the bushfire or mannerisms, such as the bushman's 'coo-ee'.²⁴ Others were copies



War I po



Left: Alfred Leete, *Britons [Kitchener] 'Wants You'*, 1915, lithograph, Pictures Collection H41472

Right: Savile Lumley, *Daddy, what did YOU do in the Great War?*, 1915, lithograph, Pictures Collection H33861/18

of British posters with slight variations, like *Another Call. 'More men and still more until the enemy is crushed'* (1915) and *Boys come over here you're wanted* (1915).²⁵ In one instance, a press report from 1915 tells us that 10,000 copies of a British poster showing the Union Jack (almost certainly *It's our flag. Fight for it. Work for it.*²⁶) were produced here in Australia. The British sample poster was too large, so a local printing firm copied it in a reduced format.²⁷

Some rare, surviving posters in the Library's collection

One of the rarest and most well-known of the World War I posters – only four copies are known to survive in public collections – is the poster *Britons [Kitchener] 'Wants You'* (1914).²⁸ The image was designed by Alfred Leete (1882–1933) in 1914 for the cover of the British magazine *London Opinion*, published on September 1914, and soon after released as a poster. It shows Lord Kitchener, the secretary of state for war, pointing at the viewer. Kitchener was already a respected and decorated war hero when he drowned at sea following the sinking of his ship by a German mine in 1916. Though some writers have claimed that the poster was published by the British Parliamentary

Recruiting Committee (PRC),²⁹ historian Nicholas Hiley discounts this as a myth and asserts that there is no evidence of any connection between the Leete poster and the PRC. The poster was purely a private production and was never regarded as an official poster by the PRC.³⁰ An oddity though, is the provenance of the copy in the State Library's collection: it was amongst the posters that were donated by the PRC in 1917 (as discussed above). This fact certainly suggests some official connection, though possibly the PRC had merely a distribution role.

Another extraordinary item in the State Library's collection is a lithographic proof of the famous poster by Frank William Brangwyn, *Britain's Call to Arms*.³¹ This poster was not donated by the PRC, but was purchased in 1916. The Library had committed to building a comprehensive collection of books and pamphlets relating to the war, and the purchase of this lithograph is evidence that it was also committed to collecting visual propaganda.

Frank Brangwyn (1867–1956) was a self-taught artist born in Belgium. Most of his war posters dealt with compassion – for the wounded, for the troops, and for refugees (over a million Belgians fled Belgium in 1914, a quarter of those seeking refuge in Britain).³² This poster was produced for the PRC, but was rejected as too stark in its portrayal of death and destruction. At that time, the PRC wanted posters that showed good humour, laughter and carelessness, and, on the whole, most posters did not show the horror of war.³³ When violence was shown, it was the violence and destruction inflicted by the enemy. Injury and suffering were not usually depicted. The PRC preferred it this way, and endorsed posters that had a light and jolly air about them.

Not all posters were produced under the auspices of the PRC, however, and many were privately produced by individuals and companies who took it upon themselves to campaign for the war. Cases in point are the posters commissioned by Frank Pick for the London Underground. Pick, who achieved a reputation for setting high standards in advertising graphics, rejected the posters of the PRC as having no artistic merit. He commissioned artists like Frank Brangwyn to produce war posters.

Maurice Rickards, one of the first theorists to discuss the aesthetics and social impact of the propaganda posters of World War I, describes the majority of recruitment posters as 'outstandingly undistinguished' as graphic art, and 'painfully inept' as propaganda.³⁴ In his passionate essay, he notes Brangwyn's work as an exception to this, and describes it as being in the grand tradition of European lithography. On the medium of lithography he writes,

Lithography is a medium admirably suited to the dash and urgency of war drawing. In the posters that exploit it there is a sense of personal



Frank Brangwyn, *Britain's Call to Arms*, 1914, lithograph, Pictures Collection H38599

commitment, a sense of actuality and immediacy that the more formalized styles of other media lack. For the auto-lithographer, it was as personal as handwriting.³⁵

Brangwyn was such an 'auto-lithographer', that is, he drew directly on the stone, producing works of great impact and pathos.

Britain's Call to Arms had considerable impact. Although rejected by the PRC, Frank Pick displayed it on the walls of the London Underground where it was seen by many thousands of people each day. In response to a War Office request that the poster be withdrawn, a cropped version was produced, with the right side of the design missing, and with the addition of a slogan, probably added by the printing company.³⁶ Rickards argues that the cropped version serves to create an imbalance in the design and calls it maltreatment, but I would argue that by cropping out the suffering figures on the right, the soldier, standing and pointing, takes prime position, and alters the semiotics of the work. In the cropped version, we see a strong, upright man, armed and healthy, pointing to the destruction happening 'over there'. Cropped this way, the poster is an appeal to join and serve in the war, *as well as* an appeal for compassion. The same cannot be said for the full design, which is overwhelmingly bleak, and could possibly have deterred young men from fighting, and mothers from letting their sons join.

The French posters

The French posters in the State Library's collection show a similar 'touch of truth'.³⁷ Most are chalk lithographs that, again, reveal the immediacy of the medium coming to contact with paper. It is a small collection of only seven works that are notable for the fact they are all by renowned artists. These include Maurice-Louis Henri Neumont (1868–1930), lithographer and painter, and a member of the Patriotic School (a group of artists whose propaganda posters helped mobilise the French nation in its fight against Germany in World War I); Charles Lucien Léandre (1862–1934), caricaturist, lithographer and painter; Adolphe Leon Willette (1857–1926), master original lithographer, satirist and caricaturist; Fansisque Poulbot (1879–1946), cartoonist; and the two most famous, Lucien Jonas (1880–1947), official war artist, and Theophile Alexandre Steinlen (1859–1926), an illustrator and lithographer with strong social convictions.³⁸

Most of these posters share the title *Journée du Poilu 1915* (Day of the Common Soldier), and they were aimed at raising funds for the troops at the front, who were given a day off in December 1915. 'Poilu' means hairy, which was the affectionate term used to refer to the common trench infantryman. The posters reflect the tendency of French artists to stress the determination, heroism and suffering of their troops. They also reflect traits of the French self-image that pre-existed the war: individualism, quickness, enthusiasm and esprit.³⁹ The posters have a rawness about them – none of the slick design and layout pursued by the commercial artists of the advertising world. Like Frank Brangwyn in Britain, these French artists used illustrative styles that are more in keeping with high art than advertising. The medium of lithography achieves this by conveying an honesty and grit that is lacking in the British examples produced by printers and advertisers.

Posters everywhere

Even though there is almost no photographic evidence of war posters on display, we learn of their many uses from newspaper reports. They were posted on walls and hoardings; they decorated trams, trains and taxis and were displayed in windscreens of cars;⁴⁰ they were towed as floats behind cars or trucks; and they were shown in shop windows, in schools, banks, churches, libraries, factories, town halls, recruiting stations and homes. They were also incorporated into larger pageants, including recruitment drives, parades and rallies, functioning as backdrops to grander spectacles. With some exceptions, the posters were relatively small – 30 x 20 inches (about 75 x 50 centimetres) – compared to the multi-sheet posters that advertising companies usually produced, and so lent themselves

easily to display in small, intimate spaces. It is interesting that the small size of the posters was their key feature in selling the war – as small objects, they entered private spaces not usually given over to advertising.

Some photographs of recruitment stations, rallies, trains or trams offer glimpses of a poster, and the *Australasian* reproduced an excellent picture of posters exhibited outside the Melbourne Town Hall in June 1915.⁴¹ While there is little other visual record, there is evidence, however, that as early as May 1915, individuals in Australia sought to obtain and display British recruitment posters. A draper in Bendigo devoted two of his shop windows to war posters that he had ordered from England.⁴² Local recruiting committees sought sites to display the posters, urging patriotic shopkeepers to devote window space⁴³ and, in one recruitment office, posters were used in lieu of wallpaper.⁴⁴ This groundswell of patriotism grew to such an extent that people felt empowered to question and shame institutions and local businesses who weren't displaying war posters on their premises.⁴⁵

Australian newspapers gave wide exposure to posters. Posters produced in Britain, and even some from France, Italy and America, were reproduced in various Australian newspapers. The earliest known reproduction is from the *Queenslander* of 6 February 1915, which printed the poster *Remember Belgium*.⁴⁶ The *Argus* reproduced posters regularly from April to December 1915, usually headed 'Recruiting poster outside the Town Hall, Melbourne'. Other newspapers reproduced posters more sporadically until early 1916. Often posters were reproduced as parts of full-page illustrated spreads, which included photographs.⁴⁷ The *Australasian* showed the French poster *Journée du Poilu 1915*⁴⁸ as late as June 1918 with the caption: 'Sent out by the Victorian artist Miss Jessie Traill'.⁴⁹

Lantern slides, which are glass transparencies that were used to project images during lectures and presentations, and also to show advertisements and tell stories in movie theatres before the main show, were also used to display war posters.⁵⁰ The State Library holds a set of lantern slides showing reproductions of recruitment posters as well as other images designed to evoke patriotism.⁵¹

Cigarette cards also maximised the impact of the posters. The British cigarette company WD & HO Wills released 11 cigarette cards based on the most popular Parliamentary Recruiting Committee (PRC) posters in August 1915.⁵² We know these made their way to Australia because the Library's Pictures Collection has five of them in the Eric Thake collection of cigarette cards.⁵³ There is a total of 10 other reproductions of PRC posters in this collection that were possibly produced by card makers other than the Wills

cigarette company, or released just for the colonies. As cigarette cards, the political messages of governments found a place in the pockets of the very men who were needed to enlist, as well as permeating the daily lives of those at home with images of war and patriotism.

War loans, charity campaigns and the home front

The State Library holds a significant collection of war posters advertising programs of war loans or peace bonds. Some of these are British, but most are Australian. Every country launched these programs for which investors were asked to buy bonds of varying worth, to be repaid by the government with interest. Enormous sums were raised to help governments fund the war and repatriate returned soldiers. The posters emphasised the opportunity to aid the war effort rather than explain the financial details and investment value of the program. As well as raising money, governments produced posters to get people to save money, not waste resources and to produce their own food.⁵⁴

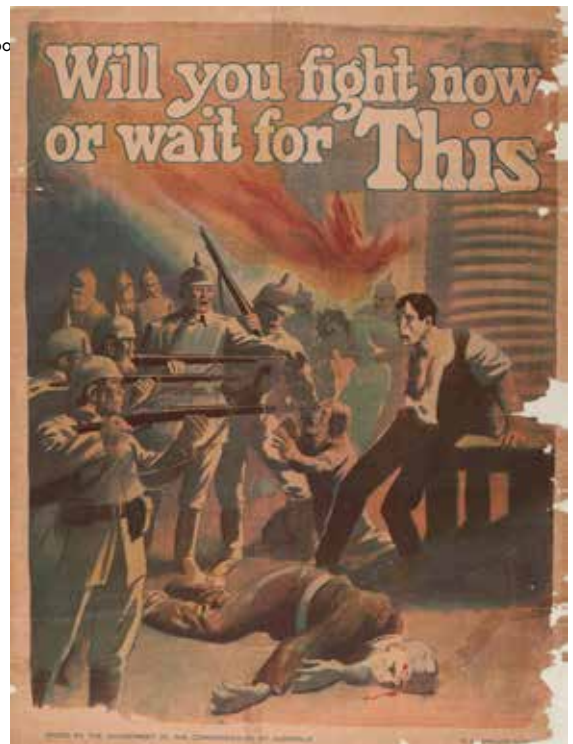
Money was also raised to aid refugees and wounded soldiers. The posters produced for these charity campaigns portrayed Germany as brutal and barbaric, and the victims as pitiful, as shown in a number of appeals for the Belgian refugees.⁵⁵ The maimed and injured servicemen, however, were never shown as pitiful. Rather, they were illustrated as chirpy and heroic, or stoic and determined, with pretty nurses or family members at home to take care of them. The poster by Tom Purvis (1888–1959), *'Our' Day to help at the Front our wounded from Home & Overseas*,⁵⁶ is a good example of this.

Most charity campaigns in Britain and Australia were private initiatives, and often had Royal or aristocratic patronage to add weight and authority to their quest. The posters and other propaganda had a dual effect: they raised money or coordinated the manufacture of goods (like socks) so that they could be supplied to the soldiers at the front and in hospitals. Additionally, and of equal importance, displayed also for the men at the Front, they served as a reminder of home. The patriarchal ideals of women shown in many charity posters, and the comfort items, were reminders of a beloved lifestyle.⁵⁷ So, while private in origin, these initiatives supplemented the efforts of governments to maintain support for the war.

Posters (and other forms of propaganda) helped to reinforce the sense that the whole society and not just government was at war.⁵⁸ Citizens learnt to see themselves as having a role to play on the home front. Their work, leisure and consumption (or conservation) of goods, was all part of the war effort. Governments used this propaganda to maintain enthusiasm for the war, and it has been argued that, without the concept of the home front, the war could



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Two posters by Norman Lindsay, left, *?*, 1918, lithograph, Pictures Collection H141840 and right, Norman Lindsay, *Will you fight now or wait for This*, 1918, lithograph, Pictures Collection H141838. Courtesy H,C&A Glad

not have lasted as long as it did.⁵⁹ Posters played a vital role by disseminating images of what governments *wanted* the war to look like.

A case in point is how women in the workforce were depicted (or made invisible) by this propaganda. Posters acknowledged the worth of work done in essential industries on the home front, but usually showed the worker as a man, not a woman, when it is recognised today that women stepped in to perform many of these roles in the absence of a large part of the male workforce.⁶⁰ In this way, the posters tell a story not of how life is, but of how it was wished to be. The underlying message was always that the war was about preserving a way of life.⁶¹

The last recruitment posters

Norman Lindsay (1879–1969) designed a set of six posters for the Australian Government's last recruiting campaign in 1918. In early October 1918,⁶² aiming to surprise and shock, the posters were distributed at night, one design at a time, at 7–10 day intervals. Aesthetically the posters resemble the chalk lithographs done by the French artists rather than posters produced by commercial artists and printing companies. In Lindsay's work we see the artist's hand; the authorial touch. They were pasted on train and tram windows, shop windows and

hoardings. This poster campaign was accompanied by a leaflet mail-out to all eligible men. Ultimately, only four of the six posters were released; the campaign was abandoned when the armistice was signed on 11 November 1918.

The posters (along with leaflets) were commissioned early in 1918, and we know from a letter that Norman Lindsay wrote to the bookseller and publisher George Robertson, dated May 1918, that Lindsay felt 'overloaded' with recruiting work.⁶³ Lindsay's biographer, John Hetherington, writes that he did not relish the task of helping with the recruiting campaign, and had 'qualms about exhorting other men to risk their lives in battle' while he was safe in Australia. Lindsay's brother, Reginald, had been killed on the Somme in 1917, and this had a profound effect on him. But, rather than engender feelings of pacifism, Lindsay became even more convinced that Germany must be defeated.⁶⁴ The first of the six posters was the untitled, '?', which shows an ape-like figure, wearing a German helmet, with bloodstained hands and forearms, reaching forward to engulf the world. Its impact comes solely from the image, with just an interrogation mark to prompt us. The poster was criticised in federal parliament for inciting bloodshed, however, given the savagery of the war, the irony of this sentiment is astounding.⁶⁵ Lindsay was pro-conscription and believed the violent imagery of his work was justified.

Two questions emerge about Lindsay's posters that have hitherto not been addressed in the literature. Firstly, scholars have described Lindsay's posters as hysterical and melodramatic, more like sensationalist contemporary cinema and theatre posters.⁶⁶ The Germans are demonised and made to look like apes, or else rendered with slightly Asian features, conceivably sending shivers down the spine of the racial purists with White Australia sentiments. Critics point to posters like *Will you fight now or wait for This*,⁶⁷ and argue that Lindsay's suggestion that Australia was actually at risk of being invaded was ludicrous. Was Lindsay really telling us that Australia would be invaded by Germany?

In answer to this, I argue that Lindsay's intent was not to show the realities of war; he was aiming for something more essential and abstract. Lindsay feared that Germany was the 'only nation fighting with the fixed intention to sacrifice everything to one end', and if we did not do the same, the war would be lost.⁶⁸ By 1918 people in Australia had a clear understanding of the horror of war. Documentary film showed trench warfare at the Somme,⁶⁹ Australians watched newsreels at the cinema, they read newspapers and received letters with news of the horrors and hardships. Local papers published heartbreaking letters from soldiers, like Private W Grimer's

letter to his parents conveying the news that he had lost his left arm in battle.⁷⁰ Many war wounded had come home, and casualty lists appeared in the newspapers.⁷¹

Lindsay knew all this, too. He was obsessed with the war, and followed the news voraciously. He recognised the viciousness of the war and did not celebrate it as heroic. And this is the key to understanding Lindsay's posters: his aim was not to show the fight between actual countries, instead he was showing a contest between good and evil. He wanted to polarise society and for his viewers to choose between good and evil so that evil (Germany) could be destroyed.

The second question that arises is: why did the Australian authorities persevere with this recruiting campaign so late in the war? The newspapers of 17 October 1918 report that the Minister for Recruiting, RB Orchard, said in parliament that the recruiting posters could be withdrawn: 'They had been printed before the war position was so favorable'.⁷² Indeed, we know that Lindsay was working on this commission as early as May that year. The Germans had launched their Spring Offensive in March and had gained ground on the Western Front. So, it was in response to this that the last recruitment campaign was conceived. But, by July, the Germans had lost momentum, and the Allies broke through German lines in August and October. Reports of Germany's retreat were widespread in the news, and surrender conditions were being discussed. And yet the posters were not taken down, and the leaflets continued to be mailed out to eligible men. The National Library of Australia holds a photograph showing Lindsay's '?' poster on the news board outside the *Age* building, *alongside* headlines of peace talks with Germany.⁷³ Further, there are copies of the leaflets produced to accompany Lyndsay's posters in the State Library Victoria collection that are postmarked as late as 29 October 1918.⁷⁴

It seems therefore, that the campaign was continuing despite the lessening of hostilities. It could be argued that the graphics of Lindsay's posters and leaflets were being used by the authorities to serve a different purpose, and that is why they appear so late in the war. Even though new recruits were not needed, it is possible that the government wanted to disseminate a different and more persistent message; a message that it was vital the Australian population absorbed and believed well after the war was over. And that message might have been: *The enemy was formidable. The sacrifices had to be made. It was worth it.* Lindsay's posters, with their overt and symbolic content, would have served this purpose well.

Conclusion

The posters in the State Library's collection don't tell us what war was like. We learn little about the conditions, the pain and loss, and the political manoeuvring of wartime. But they are painfully moving, nonetheless, because we, unlike the audiences to whom they spoke, know how the story of World War I ends. We know the horrors of trench warfare and of efficient killing and wounding technologies. We know the gruesome statistics: four years of fighting; more than 9.5 million dead; 20 million severely wounded; eight million veterans returned home permanently disabled because of injury or disease.⁷⁵ How poignant those images of smiling men, leaving for war; of mothers and girlfriends persuading their men to enlist; of children appealing to their fathers to protect their country and way of life. The propaganda of the past has enormous power to move us, as well as inform us. But what we learn from these posters is about the power of well-aimed messages, not about the violence of war.

The posters have had high exposure over the years, exhibited by various institutions and published in many books. In the last few years, in preparation for the centenary of World War I, all of the war posters in the State Library's collection were digitised. At the time of writing, posters from the collection were on exhibition at the Geelong Art Gallery⁷⁶ and at the State Library.⁷⁷ The keeping and exhibiting of these posters gives people an opportunity to interact with them as material objects. As visual artefacts, they have the power to move us more than words.