In the decade following the Armistice, war exhibitions and travelling shows consolidated national narratives about the war emerging in Britain, Canada, and Australia. More importantly, the period saw the formal institutionalisation of what may be termed national or imperial memory in London and Canberra. In opening the Imperial War Museum (IWM) in 1936 in its current site in Lambeth, and inaugurating the Australian War Memorial (AWM) in Canberra in 1941, Britain and Australia successfully established the national war museums conceived during the war. They provided permanent homes for collections that had been exhibited in multiple locations in the 1920s and 1930s. Though both countries comprehensively depicted the war experience, the resulting portrayals in these two institutions contrasted greatly, reflecting and shaping the diverging understandings of what the war meant in British and Australian society. Canadian developments followed a different pathway entirely.

In Canada, with major players who had envisioned a national museum variously in Britain, otherwise occupied, or dying during the 1920s, the project went into abeyance for several years. Other commemorative projects dominated during the 1920s and early 1930s, and a national museum was not established before the Second World War. Accordingly, this chapter will focus on the contrasting cases of Britain and Australia: how a museum was founded in each case, the varying ways in which they were constructed, and the different cultural roles they came to play. The Imperial War Museum was constructed along the exhaustive classificatory lines of a nineteenth-century science or natural history museum, and among the numerous cultural attractions of London, never achieved the same degree of dominance as the Australian museum. Although Australia had no national museum in the years immediately following the First World War, its organisers deliberately constructed the Australian War Museum according to a coherent narrative of nation, and created displays in which the war was intended to form the foundation of a national story. It also became the national memorial; the IWM did not. Constructed along these lines, in a less varied cultural
environment, the Australian museum achieved a greater degree of success than did its imperial equivalent.

Creating National War Museums

In Britain, the War Cabinet approved the formation of the National War Museum in March 1917, spurred by ‘the need and common anxiety, evident from the earliest stages of the war, for the war to be chronicled and remembered’. As described in Chapter 4, the expansion of official collecting and exhibiting efforts in 1917 and 1918 allowed more ‘comprehensive’ war exhibitions to take place, in which government-controlled captured weapons, ephemera donated by members of the armed forces and the public, official photography, and commissioned models and art were displayed together in an attempt to fully describe the war. By 1918, the now renamed IWM existed in institutional (if not physical) form, and was coordinating dozens of loan exhibitions. At the same time, the Museum’s various collecting sub-committees worked to amass exhaustive collections of images and objects created or used during the war. The war art collection of the Ministry of Information was incorporated into the IWM’s collection in 1918, and exhibited at the Royal Academy, Burlington House, in December 1919 and January 1920. Specimens of different weapons and pieces of war technology were collected according to the direction of IWM’s first curator and secretary, Charles ffoulkes, already curator of the Tower armouries. ffoulkes had a long-standing fascination with and career in studying arms and armour: he had published extensively on the subject, and so great was his attachment to this role that when he had his portrait painted in 1937 he chose to wear the uniform of the Master of the Tower Armouries. ffoulkes emphasised the comprehensive collecting of weaponry at different stages in their

2 Although the contents of the travelling exhibitions were determined by the IWM, these officially controlled materials were also what was demanded by local bodies in the belief that their popularity with the general public would ensure a profit, revealing the interaction between official supply of and control over content, and the demand for and arrangement of material by local bodies or ‘civil society’.
development, demonstrating the minutiae of their technological advancement throughout the war. In early incarnations of the museum, various pieces of materiel were arranged for display in scientific categories. Financial constraints stemming from Britain’s financial difficulties after the war meant that the Museum Committee’s original plans for building a museum to house the collections it had been amassing were rejected. The Committee was thus forced to accept an offer of accommodation for the museum in the glass and iron Crystal Palace. Built in South London to house the Great Exhibition of 1851, the Crystal Palace was by 1920 ‘struggling to maintain itself as what would now be called a “leisure attraction”’. King George V opened the new museum on 9 June 1920. By the mid-1920s, the IWM was established as the centre of exhibiting war, and of the maintenance of the history and memory of the war in Britain. In its Crystal Palace (1920–4), Kensington (1924–35), and Lambeth (from 1936) locations, it became one of the established great public museums of London. It was publicly funded, run by an independent but well-connected board, and had solid visitor numbers. The war trophies that were displayed during and immediately after the war as objects of triumph (captured artillery on the Embankment, for example) or as enticements to promote war bonds were now distributed for use as memorials, destroyed, or brought inside museums. The meanings of all manner of war detritus and representations had by the late 1920s been adjusted by both the passage of time and the consolidation of the war museum as form.

As we have seen, the Australian War Museum opened its first exhibition, of aircraft, in its temporary location in Melbourne in 1920, and its first photographic exhibition in the Melbourne Exhibition Building on 20 August 1921. The initial exhibitions of the Australian War Museum were heavily technologically based, focusing on aeroplanes, trophies of war, and weapons as science. Trophies were loaned by the Museum to official and municipal bodies, such as to the states for the Peace celebrations in 1919, and to town councils for assistance in raising contributions to the Peace Loan. The Australian War Museum opened its first full

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5 For guns displayed in the Mall in 1918, see ‘List of Guns Captured by the A.I.F. now on Exhibition in the Mall’. Bean Papers. AWM 38 3 DRL 6673/66. German field guns were also given to all British universities after the war. For how they were used in one university, Trinity College Dublin, in acts of both remembrance and political provocation, see Tomás Irish, Trinity in War and Revolution 1912–1923 (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2015), 258.
Creating National Museums and Narratives of War

exhibition in Melbourne on Anzac Day, 25 April 1922 – the already widely observed anniversary of the landing of Australian and New Zealand forces on the Gallipoli Peninsula in 1915. C. E. W. Bean wrote the guide-book for the exhibition, which throughout ‘tried to impress on visitors the sacred and memorial nature of the collection’. The Melbourne Australian War Museum Exhibition ran from 1922 to 1925. In 1925, the Museum was designated the national Memorial and renamed to reflect this. The Sydney War Memorial Museum exhibition was set up in 1925 and remained there until 1935, although additional items and artworks and dioramas commissioned by the Memorial Museum were displayed in Melbourne in 1927 and 1928.

The exhibition of the First World War in Australia in the 1920s was highly centralised. The War Memorial had control of the great majority of the objects and images which directly represented or manifested the war. Hundreds of war trophies were distributed as war memorials all over the country in the early 1920s, and the committee that oversaw this came under AWM control. On occasion, this would attract controversy: some municipal authorities ‘complained they were being insulted by the offer of a mere machine gun when their municipality warranted at least a mortar’, while others ‘refused to accept objects which had been instruments of war and would remain forever its symbols, emitting a message of militarism to the world in a hard-won and precarious state of peace’. The pick of the trophies, those worthy

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6 Letter from Arthur Bazley to John Treloar, 30 April 1922, covering Bean’s draft of the 1922 guidebook. MS of ‘Short Guide to the AWM’ by C. E. W. Bean and covering letters, 1922. AWM 38 3DRL 6673/712.

7 *Australian War Memorial Act* 1925 (No 18 of 1925) (Commonwealth of Australia). An Act to provide for the Establishment of the Australian War Memorial and for other purposes. [Assented to 26 September 1925.] Section three provides:

3. (1) There shall be a Commonwealth Memorial of the Australians who died in the war.

(2) The Memorial shall be known as the Australian War Memorial and shall consist of the collection of the war relics of the Commonwealth and such building for the accommodation of those relics as is specified by the Governor-General by notice in the *Gazette*. (3) The war relics of the Commonwealth shall include the relics, records, models, pictures, photographs and other articles which at the commencement of this Act comprise the Australian War Museum and any other such articles, having relation to the war, which are acquired in pursuance of this Act

See also C. E. W. Bean Papers, correspondence relating to War Museum Committee’s proposal that War Museum should be recognised as Australian National War Memorial, Term ‘Memorial’ used instead of ‘Museum’, proceedings of Federal Capital Advisory Board, allocation of site in Canberra, estimates of space required, with plan and map, dated 1921–3. AWM 38 3DRL 6673/623.

of being ‘museum exhibits’, remained in government hands. In the early 1920s, the Museum lent exhibits such as photographs, machine guns, and small arms to community groups who requested them for temporary exhibitions, but this was reduced over time, and the practice had virtually ceased by the late 1920s. This was in line with the high level of centralised control over both the materiel and the narrative of the war exercised by those at the centre of the Museum project. Most members of the same small group of people who had been involved in collecting during the war continued to guide the institution during the interwar years. C. E. W. Bean, moreover, was heavily involved in collecting, lobbying for, and designing the collections of the museum at the same time as editing Australia’s twelve-volume official war history, and writing six of those volumes himself. After overseeing a collecting expedition to Gallipoli in 1919, Bean returned to Australia, where he set about working on his *Official History* of the war, publishing volumes throughout the 1920s. By January 1931, eight of the twelve volumes were complete. H. S. Gullett was similarly enmeshed in the two projects: a former war correspondent who in 1919 became briefly the Museum’s director, he completed the volume of the *Official History* on Australia’s role in Egypt and Palestine in 1922. In 1925, Gullett was elected to the Federal Parliament as a Nationalist Party MP, and subsequently held ministerial positions under conservative United Australia Party governments. He was killed in a plane crash in 1940.

The relative success of the organisers of the Australian museum in creating a coherent narrative of the war’s course and meaning stands in contrast to the British case. The organisers of the London museum did feel the same urgent desire to shape a national story from the war, and indeed, many of them hoped that the museum would illustrate a mass barbarism so catastrophic that it would be unthinkable in future, and would now be relegated to history. In contrast, the organisers of the Australian museum, and particularly Charles Bean, believed that Australia had, through martial valour and bloody sacrifice, entered into the continuum of British imperial and military history. This chapter will analyse the Australian case and then compare it to the British case to

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9 The museum did regularly lend out official war films, with numerous conditions attached, and also sent official war photographs on a couple of country tours – also under the control of their own staff, as seen in Chapter 2.


elucidate why the organisers of the Australian museum were more successful in promoting their narrative, and then briefly sketch the financial and personal reasons for Canada’s focus on non-museum memorial projects in the 1920s.


In a memorandum written in early 1918, Charles Bean clearly envisaged the War Museum as part of a project of building the great cultural institutions of a proud nation: ‘Australia will unquestionably need her own national museum, her national gallery, and her national library in future, in which the history of her race will be preserved and illustrated, just as the history of the A.I.F. will be preserved in the War Museum Gallery and Library’. The same document imagines Australia as a more equal state within the British Empire, and this status as necessitating these institutional trappings. Bean’s arguments regarding the importance of a specifically Australian national war museum reflect this belief in Australia’s more mature status as a Dominion within the imperial federation. Instead of a Dominions Sub-Committee under the umbrella of the IWM, Bean argued for a ‘Committee representing each of the States in the British Empire’ dealing directly with the War Office. In making this claim, he claimed that it was ‘distinctly in the interests of all parties that, while the Dominion Museums should not be inferior in rights to the Imperial Museum, there should be a most willing co-operation between all these museums as equals’. Bean was on good terms with the Canadian Lord Beaverbrook, and the two corresponded regarding Dominion rights over records and trophies. In Bean’s argument for the rights and status of the Dominions within the imperial structure, he further cited the views of ‘[t]he Canadians in London’, who ‘although their government originally promised the first choice of trophies to an Imperial museum, thoroughly agreed with this’. These views in turn reflected a strand of Dominion imperial nationalism, in which the British Dominions might be viewed as younger siblings – rather than children

12 C. E. W. Bean, Memorandum. ‘The Australian War Records. An Account of the Present Development Overseas and Suggestions of Course Necessary to be Taken at the End of the War’ (March 1918), 33. AWM 93 12/12/1.
13 McKernan, Here Is Their Spirit, 35.
Bean could only achieve his vision for the creation of this national institution through the energetic support of the Australian Imperial Force and the Federal government. It was with the support of senior A. I. F. officer Brudenell White that Bean in 1917 sought to persuade the Australian government to approve the formation of an Australian war museum, and again in 1918 approached the Minister for Defence, Senator George Pearce, with precise plans for the actions required of the government in order for the project to continue into the future. Pearce was a Labor Party parliamentarian until he fell out with the party over its anti-conscription stance during the war, subsequently becoming – over a long political career – a member of the National Labor Party, then the Nationalist Party, and finally the (conservative) United Australia Party. Bean had begun to cultivate Pearce’s interest in his record collection scheme and the need to house records in some kind of national museum (if not necessarily a war museum) as early as 1916, describing in detailed letters his efforts to record and have photographed the fighting at Pozières. Members of the A. I. F.’s leadership, such as the politically very conservative Brigadier-General Brudenell White, also supported Bean’s romantic belief that Australians had both demonstrated a special character, and achieved ‘a recognised place among the nations’ through their participation in the war. This viewpoint assisted Bean’s belief in the need for thoroughly preserving everything that could be part of a national record to gain traction on an official level, leading to the official constitution of the Australian War Records Section in early 1917 (Figure 5.1). John Treloar, the

15 For a more detailed discussion of the family metaphor and the Dominions in British politics, see Andrew Thompson, Imperial Britain: The Empire in British Politics, c. 1880–1932 (London: Routledge, 2014).
17 Pearce was a minister in numerous governments and a Senator for thirty-seven years. Relevantly to the topic and time period of this chapter, he was Minister for Defence 1908–9; 1910–13; 1914–21; Minister for Home and Territories 1921–6; Vice President of the Executive Council 1926–9; and again Minister for Defence 1932–4.
18 McKernan, Here Is Their Spirit, 35.
20 Australian Imperial Force. Memorandum to Commanding Officers. National Collections of War Trophies, etc. Issued under A. I. F. Order No. 842, dated 7 September 1917. See also C. E. W. Bean, Report on the Formation and Operations of the B.E.F. Subsection
cautious, methodical officer appointed to head the Section, was again part of a small, connected circle of men, having worked for Colonel (later Brigadier-General) Brudenell White as a clerk in the Defence Department before the war, and again for him as a staff sergeant in 1st Division headquarters in the early part of the war. Treloar, a born administrator, was interested in Britain’s record collecting schemes from a filial point of view, noting that ‘the Public Record Office (PRO) in London, which held the “records of the Motherland from the earliest times”, had commenced the task of “bringing together the records of the events in which the daughter dominion of Australia realised her nationhood”’.

![Figure 5.1](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/recollecctions-the-journal-of-the-national-museum-of-australia/vol-2-no-1/papers/imagining-a-collection)

*Figure 5.1* Photograph of the Modelling Subsection of the Australian War Records Section in the studio at Earl’s Court, London, June 1919

Source: Australian War Memorial, AWM negative no. D00622

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23  The work shown in progress is in connection with plan models, one of the three types being constructed. Back row, left to right (standing): 9957 Sergeant (Sgt) R. Rogers; 20856 Sapper (Spr) W. S. Rogers (dark uniform, at first small bench); 2075 Corporal (Cpl) A. Betts (behind bench); 15314 Cpl A. J. Higginbotham; 1848 Second Corporal Bernard Stern; 16890 Spr F. W. Allen (far right). Third row (light uniform): 20576 Cpl F. C. Britton; 13980 Cpl L. F. Gordon; 4561 Cpl J. B. Soutar (back to camera); 21758 Cpl W. Frandson (at big table). Second row (either side of big table): 50938 Cpl
Bean’s ‘official’ view became truly popular as it coincided with popular sentiment. As noted in Chapter 1, his *Official History* explicitly took a ‘front line view’, ‘questioning the men who were actually there’. A genuine affection for ordinary soldiers lay at the heart of his writing, as did an unswerving belief in the significance of their actions. As described in Chapters 1 and 4, soldiers responded to the official injunction to ‘souvenir’ things with great energy. ‘Some Australian commanders have appealed to each man to give at least one souvenir to the collection, and a letter was issued at Capt. Treloar’s suggestion, by General Birdwood asking each man in the Force if he would do this’. The government, in addition to sponsoring the collection of official documents and exhibits, also ‘particularly desired to add to the collection souvenirs that have been obtained by soldiers, their relatives and friends, and other members of the Community’. Bean’s conception of the Australian experience of the war is imprinted in multiple forms of interpretation: in his official narrative of events, in the artefacts and images chosen to represent them to the Australian people, and in the formation of the museum as at once a place for explaining historical events and a ‘holy place, a repository whose very relics, like those in shrines to saints, were “sacred things”’. Bean’s vision for the museum had become both visibly popular and truly official, and was articulated in a Department of Defence circular signed by Defence Minister Pearce in April 1918:

The Museum will be a place where soldiers, and relatives of soldiers, will visit with their friends and children, and there revive the past and see again the weapons with which they fought, the uniforms they wore, pictures and models of the trenches and dug-outs in which many weary hours were spent, or of positions which they carried, and ground every yard of it memorable to them. The occupations of their leisure hours will then be recalled, and the likenesses of the men who died for their country seen perhaps by the comrades besides whom they fell. Their children will pay similar visits in the future, and gathering around the exhibits tell again to their children the story they have learnt, and so on through the succeeding generations, keep for ever green the memory of the present stirring times.

F. W. Roth; 4147 Cpl J. S. Dunbar; 4243 Sgt S. M. White (standing). front row, foreground (corner of big table): 17203 Spr S. Redfern; 17002 Spr S. A. McLeod.


27 Inglis, *Sacred Places*, 335.

Here, Pearce officially reflects Bean’s vision of the Museum as building a simultaneously national and personal story around the experiences of soldiers that will be passed on, reverently, in posterity.

In 1919, trophies and other artefacts for the Museum began to arrive in Melbourne. Rows of captured weapons were stored outdoors in a fenced-off part of the Domain, Melbourne.29 When Bean arrived following his collecting expedition to Gallipoli, the War Museum Committee had already decided that an exhibition of some kind should be mounted as quickly as possible in order to kindle public interest.30 Indeed, the 1921 official war photograph exhibition described in Chapter 2 was originally planned for an earlier date, but the influenza pandemic prevented it opening as ‘all public gatherings were proscribed and the Exhibition Building itself had become a temporary hospital’.31 The Museum Committee and the Federal Government had also intended to split the collection into concurrent temporary exhibitions of relics, images, and war trophies in Sydney and Melbourne. Both State governments – of New South Wales and of Victoria – had originally agreed to this plan, and to partially fund staging the show.

However, domestic divisions over the war, and over failed attempts to introduce conscription during the war, soon halted this plan. In 1916, Prime Minister Billy Hughes’ belief that Australia needed to introduce conscription was put to a plebiscite; after a divisive debate, anti-conscriptionists emerged victorious. The Labor Party split over the issue, and Hughes was expelled from the Labor Party after he and a number of supporters walked out of the party caucus over the issue.32 In December 1917, Hughes, now Prime Minister under the Nationalist Party banner, presided over a second, even more bitter, plebiscite which also failed to introduce conscription. The fault lines exposed in the conscription debates – of class, political ideology, and religion (pro-conscription forces reserved special ire for supposedly

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29 ‘German Guns in Melbourne’ *The Scientific Australian* 25 1 (September 1919), 109–12.
30 McKernan, *Here Is Their Spirit*, 69. See also minutes of AWM Committee meeting held at Home and Territories Department, Melbourne, 3 February 1919, and also ‘Outline of Scheme for The Australian War Museum’, 1919. AWM Committee 1918–25. AWM 170 1/1.
disloyal Irish Catholics) – still rankled after the war. The pro-conscription Premier William Holman was defeated in the New South Wales election of 1920, and replaced by the Labor Party government of Premier John Storey. Storey told the Federal government that necessary expenditure cuts meant that Sydney would not take the exhibition. The New South Wales Public Librarian, W. H. Ifould, moreover, told Henry Gullett (at that time the Director of the Museum) that the New South Wales government did not want to have ‘any of those trophies for government museums or for display in public parks in Sydney’. Some Labor Party members of the Sydney City Council went a step further and suggested that, as pacifists, they thought the War Museum’s collection should be thrown into the sea.

This rhetoric, however, had the effect of further uniting Labor’s opponents in support of the museum. Concerted opposition was really only visible in the words or actions of labour movement-aligned groups. Irish Catholic, working-class, left wing, and Labor Party groups campaigned during the war against conscription, and after the war were the most uncomfortable with plans to memorialise or exhibit the conflict. At the dedication of the Tasmanian War Memorial in Hobart in December 1925, for example, the Labor premier and wartime anti-conscription

33 The Labor split over conscription in 1916 also made the party a more identifiably Catholic one – after pro-conscriptionists left the party, the proportion of Catholic federal Labor parliamentarians rose from 21 to 45 per cent. The Protestant majority could thus paint the ALP as ‘inherently unreliable’ and unable to act as a government tasked with ‘ensuring Australia’s security and defence’. Joan Beaumont, Broken Nation: Australians in the Great War (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2013), 247–8.

34 Treloar, Report of AWM Committee meeting 18 October 1920. More information on negotiations is found in, for example, Minutes, AWM Committee meeting 17 January 1921, and Memorandum, ‘Establishment of an Exhibition of Trophies and Relics in Sydney’ (1921). AWM Committee 1918–25. AWM 170 1/1.

35 Letter, Ifould to Gullett, 20 August 1920. AWM 93 6/1/13, cited in McKernan, Here Is Their Spirit, 70. McKernan observes that ‘At the War Museum in Melbourne there could be no doubt of the strength of the anti-war sentiment and of the difficulties this posed for the development of the museum’. Ibid.


37 As Mark Sheftall points out,

Their understanding of what the war had meant had meant for the Australian working man often induced them to contest what they saw as efforts to commemorate the conflict in a way that they believed re-inscribed the ideas of the hegemonic elites whom they accused of profiting from the subjugation and destruction of so many fellow citizens. One radical Sydney journal, for instance, argued that the war museum’s Prince Alfred Park exhibit should show less of the romance and more of the ghastly side of warfare, including the attendant filth, disease and horrific casualties.

Sheftall, Altered Memories of the Great War, ibid., 137.
campaign leader Joseph Lyons sat on the platform but did not speak.\(^{38}\) (Lyons became Labor premier of Tasmania after leading the No campaign (against conscription) there in 1916.) On this occasion too, the Governor of Tasmania, Sir James O’Grady, an Irish Catholic and former Labour MP in Britain who had been appointed governor by Ramsay MacDonald’s Labour ministry in 1924, spoke with unusual sympathy about opponents of war memorials. He spoke of those ‘whom I conscientiously respect – who feel that the building of such memorials as this might be the cause of inculcating a spirit of militarism in the boys and girls of today’.\(^{39}\) ‘The One-Eyed Gunner’, writing in *Labor Call* in January 1926, was more blunt: he described ‘two gruesome scrap-heaps’ in Melbourne as a result of the Great War. These were the Caulfield Military Hospital – ‘the living proof of the never-properly-told horrors of war’ – and the War Museum – ‘the ghastly collection of scrap-iron’ at the Exhibition Building, which was to ‘the people’s playground what the serpent was to paradise’.\(^{40}\) The Exhibition in Melbourne, including necessary assistance with renovating and renting the Exhibition Buildings, was organised with the cooperation of the State government of Victoria.\(^{41}\) That cooperation, however, came about only after ‘strong pressure from the Commonwealth Government and the A.I.F.’.\(^{42}\)

Between 1919 and 1922, the Museum oversaw the distribution of war trophies to municipalities for exhibition and for use as war memorials.\(^{43}\) The War Museum also arranged numerous exhibitions and programmes, as well as commissioning further artworks for the Museum and selecting and shaping the Museum displays. As well as mounting the aircraft exhibition in Melbourne, and the war photograph exhibitions in Melbourne, Sydney, country New South Wales, and Tasmania, the War Museum sponsored a series of illustrated battle lectures.\(^{44}\)

38 Inglis, *Sacred Places*, 271. Campaigning against conscription ‘[a]t Deloraine, a band of conscriptionists had tried to throw him in the river’. Ibid., 213.

39 Ibid., 213. O’Grady was also the first Irish Catholic and first former Labour member of the House of Commons to be a state governor. For other dissenters to the memorialisation of war, see ibid., 213–22.


41 Treloar, Report, AWM Committee meeting 18 October 1920. AWM Committee 1918–25. AWM 170 1/1.

42 McKernan, *Here Is Their Spirit*, 73, citing Gullett, letter to Donald McKinnon (Victorian minister) 3 November 1919, 30 December 1919 and 19 April 1920, AWM 93 2/1/24.

43 This was directed by a committee under the War Museum. Trophies were first selected for the Museum to keep, and those left over were then distributed.

44 Estimates. Programme of battle lectures and exhibitions, 1921. AWM 93 8/1/28; Brisbane Season of Battle Lectures 1921. AWM 93 3/1/63; Exhibition of Battle Photographs, Lectures, etc. Tasmania AWM 93 17/1/94.
coordinated the loan of official war films and photographs, and AWM collection artefacts to community groups in Victoria and New South Wales. Some examples of these groups included branches of the Returned Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Imperial League of Australia (R.S.S.I.L.A.), such as the Castlemaine sub-branch, which loaned lantern-slides and films to accompany a night of lectures by General Brand, the Tubercular Soldiers and Sailors Society, and Repatriation committees.\footnote{AWM 93 7/4/400: Request for loan of war relics to Echuca Sub-Branch, RSSILA, Victoria. AWM 93 7/4/255: Loan of Exhibits by A.W.M.; AWM 93 3/2/171: Tubercular Sailors and Soldiers’ Welfare Committee. Port Melbourne. Application for loan of war films; AWM 93 3/2/161: Application for loan of Official Films; Sale of Reproductions of war pictures. Chiswick Fallen Soldiers’ Committee; AWM 93 3/2/99: Loan of film to Caulfield Repatriation Committee.} The Museum retained a high degree of control over such loans, and for example often insisted on sending its own projectionist along with films for display. In the case of larger loans, such as the small fundraising photograph, relic, and trophy ‘museum’ set up in Benalla, Victoria, in 1921, the Museum insisted that the on-loan exhibition was accompanied by a member of Museum staff to supervise the exhibition, and that the Museum provided the captions and determined the arrangement of the objects sent (Figure 5.2). In order to help with this local event, in which a ‘museum’ and a sports carnival were held together in order to raise funds for a local memorial hall, the museum sent a staff member along with ‘several Field Pieces captured by Australians in France and also a selection of fifty enlargements of Official War Photographs taken during the war on the Western Front and also in Palestine’.\footnote{‘Anzac Day Sports Carnival. The Australian War Museum Assists’. Statement prepared by the Museum for distribution to the Benalla press. It duly appeared in the \textit{Standard} on 19 and 22 April 1921. AWM 93 17/1/91: Benalla Soldiers Memorial Hall Sports Committee sale of photographs and loan of exhibits. See also the case of the advice given regarding the proposed Ballarat memorial museum: AWM 93 6/1/3: The School of Mines and Industries, Ballarat. Information for the School Museum; AWM 93 6/1/23: Ballarat War Memorial Museum. Request for Advice in connection with equipment and arrangement.}

At the same time, arrangements for the comprehensive exhibition of the Museum’s collections in Melbourne continued. War artists continued working on their commissions, and a War Art Committee (of which Bean and Treloar were, predictably enough, members) continued to commission new works designed to illustrate specific events. In a 1919 ‘Outline’ of how work to create the museum should proceed, Bean emphasised the continuing effort involved in creating the ‘plan models’ and ‘picture models’, or relief maps and dioramas of different
battles in which Australians had fought. (The idea for the construction of these again came from Bean, who had, as a child, been deeply impressed by ‘plan models’ (or sculpted maps) and ‘picture models’ (dioramas) of the Battle of Waterloo his military history-buff father had taken him to see at the Royal United Services Institution in London.47) In his ‘Outline’ for the Museum Committee, Bean spoke of how the sculptors had been ‘on every important battlefield making

47 K. S. Inglis, Sacred Places, 335.
minute drawings and plans’ and how the dioramas would be ‘not merely raised plans, but a medium of high art, giving the real impression of the country as it was, the devastation, the sense of danger’.

In 1918, Bean had sent artists to France to survey important battlefields as preparation for constructing dioramas, or ‘picture models’ for the Australian War Museum. Two of the artists, the sculptor C. Web Gilbert and the painter Louis McCubbin, began to make preliminary models of scenes along the line in France as early as mid-1918. Bean secured support from the Museum Committee for model-making, and Treloar – by 1920 the Director of the Museum – established a foundry at the Museum. Bean explained to the Defence Minister, Senator Pearce, that ‘if the museum was to be “as valuable and as interesting as we can make it” the picture models were essential, “only the War Diaries preceding them in importance”’.

The organisers of the War Museum had very high hopes for it, intending to create not only a national institution, but an exemplar of its kind. Bean wrote that he believed that ‘[t]he Australian War Museum will, though small, be in some ways the finest institution of its sort anywhere, and will its own way rank with the famous galleries of Rome, Florence, Dresden, Paris, and London, as one of those institutions which it is worth visiting a country to see’. In this sense, it is clear that for Bean the Museum was meant to be a defining feature of Australian culture, in much the same way as he intended for it to define and shape the narrative

49 Caption to photo of ‘modellers’ camped at Messines in McKernan, *Here Is Their Spirit*, 67.
50 Inglis, *Sacred Places*, 335. For accounts of the processes of creating the dioramas, see Laura Back and Laura Webster, *Moments in Time: Dioramas at the Australian War Memorial* (Sydney: New Holland Publishers, 2008), Anne-Marie Condé, ‘“War’s Wrinkled Front”: Battle Dioramas and Australian Military Memory’, Conference paper given at The Digger and the Larrikin Live On: Anzac Weekend at the Imperial War Museum 26–27 April 2008, and Tom Hewitt, ‘Diorama Presentation’ *Journal of the Australian War Memorial* 5 (October 1984): 29–35. When the sculptor C. Web Gilbert died in October 1925, work was taken over by Leslie Bowles and Wallace Anderson. Gilbert also produced some sculptures for war memorials featuring soldiers in dramatic acts of aggression, such as the Broken Hill Memorial’s bomb-thrower, and notably the 2nd Division AIF memorial at Mont St Quentin, France, which featured an Australian soldier in the act of bayonetting a German eagle, and which was unsurprisingly destroyed by the German army in 1940.
51 AWM 38 3DRL 6673/803: Modelling Scheme and Appointment of a Founder to the Modelling Staff. In 1920 Treloar, aged twenty-six, took over from Gullett as Director of the museum, and with a few breaks remained director until his death in 1952.
52 McKernan, *Here Is Their Spirit*, 65, citing letter from Bean to Pearce 12 June 1922, Bean papers AWM 38 3DRL 6673/803.
Creating National Museums and Narratives of War

of the war. In turn, the narrative contained in the museum was shaped to convey a coherent vision of Australian character and achievement. It was possible to create such a coherent vision partially because only a handful of people – predominantly Bean and Treloar – designed the narrative of the exhibition. Treloar, who found delegating difficult, personally wrote all of the ‘tickets’ or captions for each item in the museum. He also decided what artefacts to include in the exhibition, and supervised the layout of the museum. It was Treloar’s idea ‘to structure the exhibition chronologically and to devote small courts to each phase of the war’, a structure that ‘would be followed in each of the museum’s subsequent locations’.\(^54\) Bean wrote the guidebook, which museum visitors could use to direct them through the exhibition.\(^55\)

The museum opened for Anzac Day, 25 April 1922. Treloar, who had a talent for publicity, had worked to inflame interest in the exhibition by regularly feeding information to the press throughout 1921 and early 1922.\(^56\) Opening the exhibition, the Governor of Victoria, the Earl of Stradbroke, declared ‘the museum was a witness to present and future generations of what Australians who took part in the war had to face’ and that ‘[a]n inspection of the museum would show to those who had not been in the field the bravery, dogged determination, and discipline the men of the A.I.F. displayed’.\(^57\) This message, in articles containing precisely the same paragraphs and only differing in the headlines chosen, appeared in numerous newspapers around the country. Two versions of it, published in Tasmania, declared in their headings that the objects on display at the museum were ‘Inanimate Witnesses’ to ‘Australian Bravery in the War’.\(^58\)

This sense that the objects on display were inanimate witnesses to the realities of war, and that seeing them enabled their audience to connect with that reality (and thus to Australians’ courageous actions), was emphasised throughout the museum. In Bean’s draft of the guidebook, he describes what the visitor saw upon entering the museum in these

\(^{54}\) McKernan, \textit{Here Is Their Spirit}, 73.

\(^{55}\) Bean papers. MS of ‘Short Guide to the AWM’ by C. E. W. Bean and covering letters, dated 1922. AWM 38 3DRL 6673/712.

\(^{56}\) McKernan, \textit{Here Is Their Spirit}, 73.


terms of intimacy with and connection to Australian soldiers and their experiences.

In the glass case besides this are figures of Australian soldiers, seamen, and a nurse. The soldier on the right is prepared for a raid on the German trenches. His face and hands are blacked so that they will be less visible if flares are thrown by the enemy; and, in order that the enemy if they capture him (alive or dead) may not discover to what unit he belongs, he wears an English tunic without any regimental number or name upon it. In order to show the appearance of an Australian infantryman in battle there has been preserved (on the figure at the other end of the same case) the actual uniform in which an Australian soldier fought at Morlancourt. The actual mud of that battlefield is still thick upon his clothes and helmet (which were carefully preserved by the Museum in the condition in which he came out of the fight) and the rents made by the barbed wire can be seen near his knees.59

The dressed mannequin – and the Australian soldier – is given an active agency in the description: he is ‘prepared for a raid’ with his ‘face and hands blacked’. What the viewer saw – the vagaries of different uniforms of disguises – was given a distinct purpose in the account provided by the guidebook. This sense of purpose validated and made meaningful the actions of Australian soldiers. It was underscored by objects and text presented in such a way as to encourage a sense of imagined closeness between the viewer and the event depicted. Bean’s guidebook likewise described the uniform in which an Australian soldier fought at Morlancourt in terms of reality and physical specificity: it is, the reader is told, an ‘actual uniform’, thick with the ‘actual mud of the battlefield’ and marked by ‘rents made by the barbed wire’. Robert Dixon describes this process as ‘the personalisation of objects’ in which ‘the provision of highly individualised information about particular relics serving more immediately to bridge the distance in time and space between the visitor and the person involved in the originary event’.60 That is, ‘a striving to bridge the distance in time and space between visitors in Melbourne in 1922 and the actual events of battle in 1916’.61


61 Ibid., 61.
The visitor now comes to a large case . . . containing relics connected with prominent members of the A.I.F. Here are shown . . . The tunic which General Birdwood wore in Gallipoli and France, and a walking stick he carried at Anzac, where it was suddenly knocked out of his hand by a bullet, which was discovered long afterwards, embedded just above the ferrule.62

The muddied uniform, or the embedded bullet on General Birdwood’s walking stick, seemingly made the war present and ‘actual’ to the viewer – almost ‘magically’ providing ‘a physical link between the . . . events of battle and the moment of exhibition’.63

These objects and images, presented in such a way as to create an imaginative link between the war and the visitor, were arranged within a broader overall structure designed to impress upon the viewer the singularity of the Australian character and the value of their achievements. As the *West Australian* put it, ‘Guns, rifles, bombs, raiding tools, hospital equipment, and aerial weapons are included in the museum, and hundreds of small exhibitions form ““pegs on which to hang the story”’.64 The illustrated guidebook and the exhibition arrangement were designed to walk the visitor through a narrative of Australia’s involvement in the war. A large fold-out floor plan and explanatory essay further expanded ‘the spatial and narrative logic of the exhibition’.65 Visitors moved through a series of ‘courts’ (Figure 5.3). Each one illustrated a particular campaign, with relics and trophies displayed on stands or in museum display cases amongst artworks, models, and photographs depicting the same campaign. Or, in the wording of the contemporary reports, ‘weapons, munitions, pictures, photographs, models of battlefields, and all the flotsam and jetsam of war from all fronts’ were in each court, telling the story of that Australian battle or campaign.66 These courts were then arranged chronologically, creating a narrative which moved from heroic defeat at Gallipoli to a series of Australian victories in 1918. After beginning with the ‘Naval Court’, the guidebook directed the visitor to view in turn the ‘Gallipoli Court’, ‘Palestine Court’, ‘Pozières Court’, ‘Camouflaged Trees, Etc.’, ‘Ypres Court’, ‘Amiens Court’, ‘Battle of

64 The *West Australian* (Perth), 20 April 1922, 8. This piece also uses a truly awful euphemism for deadly weapons: ‘appliances of active service’ – ‘The visitor is shown so many weapons of war and appliances of active service that an idea is obtained of the huge organisation which was necessary to wage war’.
Amiens Court’, ‘Hindenburg Line Court’, and, before finishing with a viewing of ‘Important Australian Relics’ of the war generally, to examine a series of models of campaigns or battles in which Australians had fought in France in 1918. In 1922, these were a large circular model of Villers-Bretonneux, a diorama of Mont St Quentin, and a model of the terrain at Péronne.67 This victory-oriented view was the dominant one in the War Museum’s presentation of the war: in this 1922 Melbourne exhibition, nine of the twenty-one campaign display cases were devoted to the successes of 1918.68

Various displays offered visions of Australian singularity, or the supposedly special features of the national character, and of their importance within the British forces. The very first thing that visitors were directed to look at by Bean’s guidebook upon entering the Exhibition was the bronze sculpture of a shirtless, muscled Anzac, eyes staring determinedly into the distance while hefting petrol cans filled with water (Figure 5.4). ‘Immediately inside the entrance, on the right, is a life-size

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67 Bean papers. MS of ‘Short Guide to the AWM’ by C. E. W. Bean and covering letters, dated 1922. AWM 38 3DRL 6673/712.
figure of a man in the “Anzac” uniform – i.e. clothed as many used to be at Anzac. He is carrying water in two petrol tins which it was men’s constant duty to carry up the steep heights of the firing line.\textsuperscript{69}

Here is the vision of the Australian soldier as exemplifying physical perfection – lean, well-muscled, and certainly showing no sign of the dysentery common on Gallipoli, or of the effects of the inadequate

\textsuperscript{69} Bean papers. MS of ‘Short Guide to the AWM’ by C. E. W. Bean and covering letters, dated 1922. AWM 38 3DRL 6673/712.
ations – as well as of the notion of the Australian soldier as casual, practical, and adaptable, eschewing the formality of the British officer class. Mirroring this stereotypical vision, newspaper reports emphasised the supposedly popular basis for the museum – ‘Exhibits were sent to the museum by hundreds of Australian soldiers’ – as well as making claims to popular humour as being peculiarly Australian. ‘The casual humour of Australians is revealed in the notice boards which directed newcomers to their dugouts. “Roo de Kanga” and “Dinkum Alley” are in sharp contrast with humourless German signposts such as “Hohenzollern Street” and “Tirpitz Avenue”’. The overall narrative of victory and Australia’s ‘coming of age as a nation – an armed nation – within the imperial federation’ was built on a multitude of images or exhibits which indicated that this victory was, in part, due to the superior moral character of the Australian and Allied forces. Schoolboy George Palmer of Surrey Hills certainly absorbed this message, taking especial note of an exhibit designed to emphasise German hubris in his entry in an essay competition run by the Museum: ‘There was one thing that struck me forcibly of the certainty of the Germans thinking that they would win the War. It was an acorn wreath which had been intercepted on the way to Australia. It was to have been used in the procession in Melbourne that would mark the defeat of Britain’. It was the diorama project, the beginnings of which are described above, that was the final, and most distinctive, creative form used in the creation of the War Museum’s narrative of Australia’s war experience. Conceived by Bean during the war, the project aimed to create three-dimensional

70 The West Australian (Perth), 20 April 1922, 8.
models of what Australian troops had experienced and achieved in the war, allowing the museum visitor to imaginatively explore the scene. As they were originally arrayed, these models were supposed to have an educational purpose. Bean entered into correspondence with various artists regarding the subject matter of the dioramas (and directed the artists where to go in order to make preliminary sketches and models), and he also substantially edited the descriptive cards displayed with them when they were exhibited. At the opening of the Melbourne exhibition in 1922, a diorama of Mont St Quentin was displayed in close proximity to some ‘plan models’ (topographically correct bird’s eye view battlefield models). The 1922 and 1925 Guides to the Melbourne and Sydney museums (composed by Bean) all instructed visitors to begin their exploration of the Western Front galleries at the scale ‘plan model’ of the Somme battlefield for a ‘comprehensive presentation’. (There were also scale models of Mont St Quentin and Péronne.) When the Museum moved to Sydney in 1925, one of the principal differences in display was the inclusion of further dioramas: these ‘picture models’ of scenes of combat continued to be produced throughout the 1920s (Figure 5.5). Indeed, the creation of still more that could not be displayed in Sydney led to the opening of a second Melbourne exhibition in 1927–8, featuring newly created dioramas, artworks, and war film screenings.

The museum was named the ‘Memorial’ in the authorising Act of Parliament in 1925, and that same year the Melbourne exhibition was moved to Sydney and re-opened on 3 April 1925 as the ‘Australian War Memorial Museum’. The exhibition was consistently popular. Having received over 780,000 visitors in Melbourne, it attracted over 10,000 on its first weekend in Sydney. Staff kept meticulous attendance figures, and created tables demonstrating the Australian museum’s greater popularity than the IWM. The exhibition remained in Sydney until 1935, when it was dismantled and moved to Canberra prior to the 1941

74 Further memoir, Together with Appendices, by C. E. W. Bean, Official Historian, Australian Imperial Force, Concerning the Official Records and History of the Australian Imperial Force; and the Establishment of a Memorial 16 April 1919 AWM 93 2/5/7 [A]. This file sets out the ‘models’ scheme and lists what dioramas are to be made in appendices M–N.


76 For images, maps, etc., see AWM 93 6/1/24. Note: there are two files with this file number.

77 Inglis, Sacred Places, 334; McKernan, Here Is Their Spirit, 83–91. As noted above, the name of the Act was the Australian War Memorial Act 1925 (Cth).

78 AWM 265 17/2/2: Attendances. See for example report to the AWM Board by John Treloar, dated 8 November 1926, which compares AWM attendance figures to the 9 Annual Report of the Imperial War Museum (IWM annual attendance 224,683; AWM 333,857).
opening of the newly completed AWM. The move to Canberra made the memorial character of the institution remarkably more pronounced: now, the museum was arrayed around a commemorative court (its earlier iterations were of a more strictly ‘museum’ character); there was room for the inclusion of more artworks and dioramas than in Sydney and Melbourne; and the specially designed Memorial and museum sat amongst the new buildings of a purpose-built national capital.

Bean had originally wanted more of the ‘plan models’ for educational purposes, but in light of an unfavourable view toward some exhibits by the Memorial Committee, he agreed to compromise by sacrificing some of these sculpted maps. The interest in models of more topographical...
and tactical interest, he conceded in a 1922 letter to John Treloar, the Memorial’s Director, was ‘less obvious, and if military leaders like Chauvel think that they are worthless to students, I would let them go, except possibly in the case of very important battles’. The dioramas would stay, as Bean believed that ‘they appeal to the public as showing the sacrifice of and sufferings of the men whose memorial this is’, showing ‘phases of war which the civilian cannot possibly recognise for himself’.

The need to understand ‘the sacrifice and sufferings’ of soldiers in an experiential sense, to empathise with the conditions in which Australian soldiers found themselves, was in the end seen as more important than explaining the broader tactical picture. From Bean’s point of view, ‘memory’ or the museum’s memorial purpose, trumped ‘history’, or the need to educate the public about the ‘bird’s eye’ narrative of the war. Viewers were supposed to gain, above all, a sense of the achievement and sacrifices of the Australian forces – and to empathise with or respect them. Interestingly, visitors appeared to focus on the memory of the dead and on empathy with the soldier’s experience without necessarily being guided in that direction by any museum-editorial input. People spontaneously used the ‘educational’ floor maps for memorialising and grieving purposes: when the plan models were on display in Melbourne and Sydney in the 1920s and 1930s, ‘from time to time, . . . a returned man would bring along the mother of a fallen mate and would show her on the model not only where her son was hit but where he was buried’. Looking at a map could substitute for visiting a grave. Seeing a representation understood to be accurate could be a kind of knowing crucial to healing.

The large dioramas all depicted sites of violence and death. They were geographically explicit depictions of the location of mass deaths, paused in the midst of an event (usually a battle). They relied on ‘the theatrical trick of perspective to create a three-dimensional illusion so that the viewer was not so much a spectator but became part of the action’. Within that ‘captured’ moment, the viewer’s eyes were able to range, not hurried along by narrative structure. They may have paused on the face of each figure, or none. The viewer might imagine what happens next, or might stay in the moment: the scene, perpetually frozen at a particular

82 Letter from C. E. W. Bean to John Treloar, Director, AWM, 28 June, 1922. AWM 38, 3DRL 6673/802.
83 McKernan, Here Is Their Spirit, 23–4.
84 Ibid., 23.
moment, did not really direct a specific movement for the action. This effect was quite visceral, enhanced by the remarkable specificity of the location: these hills, those trees, these ruins seemingly illustrated a place where the war happened, where people struggled and died. The viewer was thus involved by the artists as ‘part of the action’, not merely a spectator. These scenes prompted emotional connection rather than mere intellectual comprehension of the causal flow of the event, the ‘what happened’, the ‘then what’, the ‘how did that come about?’. That is, in attempting to capture a particular moment and place, the sculptors and artists acted in some ways like a camera: attempting to record the reality of an instant. Susan Sontag’s criticism of photography may, then, be applied:

In contrast to the amorous relation, which is based on how something looks, understanding is based on how it functions. And functioning takes place in time. Only that which narrates can make us understand.85

The diorama stimulated the viewer to emote, but not to understand. In order to discover the context of the instant displayed before them, the visitor resorted to text: to captions explaining what is going on positioned below the scene, to guidebooks, to the spoken words of tour guides, to written histories. The diorama, rather than inviting historical inquiry, commanded its viewer to imagine, and to remember: that is, to recreate the moment through imaginative remembrance.

While all the dioramas were concerned with war, with soldiers’ physical experience, and with death, each diorama had a specific emotional charge behind its construction and inclusion in the War Memorial’s collection. Generally, these may be traced back to one or both of the elements that (in different proportions, but usually entangled in some way) informed both the official and broader public reaction to the war: grief and mourning, and patriotic pride that construed the ‘struggle’ as having ‘a powerful agency in moulding the people of Australia’.86

The first diorama to be constructed, for example, portrayed the fighting at Mont St Quentin – an Australian victory in August–September 1918 (Figures 5.6 and 5.7). Its construction began with preliminary sketches and a proto-model in 1918, and it went on display in the original Melbourne exhibition in 1922, due to the popular demands of returned servicemen.

Figure 5.6 Photograph of C. Web Gilbert, Diorama, ‘Attack on Mont St Quentin’, on display at the Melbourne exhibition of the Australian War Museum, Exhibition Building, Melbourne, 1923
Source: Australian War Memorial, AWM negative no. J00379

Figure 5.7 Detail, Mont St Quentin Diorama, Australian War Memorial
Source: Photograph by the author
Soldiers at the front of the diorama are depicted in the act of ‘going over the top’. Poised on the edge of the trench, some turn around to help others climb out. The moment of victory still lies ahead; the scene is filled with possibility. The possibility of death is not denied – a man with a stomach wound lies propped up against the trench wall at the front of the diorama, and there are other dead figures in the scene. The scene, however, is still open to the possibility of victory (‘timed’ as it is in a moment of something’s about to happen), and immediate post-war audiences in particular would have been aware that an Australian victory was what happened. As noted above, this victory-oriented view of the war was the dominant one in the War Museums’ presentation of the war in the early 1920s. A ‘patriotic’ reaction, then, might have been expected by the servicemen who insisted on its expedited construction, and by immediate post-war visitors.

The later 1920s saw a more solemnly commemorative mood take hold in the museum – seen, for example, in the 1929 removal or rewriting of placards containing the word ‘Hun’. With distance came the dimming of hatreds, but without diminishing the sense of the importance of the soldiers’ sacrifices. At this time, Bean and Treloar corresponded over the matter, and Treloar wrote to Bean in December 1929 that ‘the mental attitude of 1920/21 is now out of date and undesirable’. Tellingly, some dioramas and artworks created in the later 1920s were also more dominated by simple emotional charge, not asking their viewers to place them within a battle narrative, but more simply inviting the viewer to feel sorrow and loss. (That is not to say that all elements of heroism and endurance were absent from these later representations; rather, their primary emphasis was altered.) One such example is the Pozières diorama, created in 1928–9, but not put on display until the Memorial opened.

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87 For this argument see generally Melrose, ‘A Praise That Never Ages’.

88 ‘With reference to the examples mentioned by you, I was surprised to learn that word “Hun” may still frequently be seen. Although the title was bestowed by the Kaiser, I know that you pointed out the undesirability of using it and steps were taken immediately after the War Museum opened in Sydney to make alterations. Apparently it was not done thoroughly’. Letter Bean to Treloar 4 December 1929. AWM 265 21/4/5 Pt 7. Exhibits – Revision of Titles & Omission of word ‘Hun’.


90 See letter Bean to Treloar 4 December 1929, and Treloar’s reply of 10 December 1929, in which he notes that ‘the mental attitude of 1920/21 is now out of date and undesirable’. AWM 265 21/4/5 Pt. 7. Exhibits – Revision of Titles & Omission of word ‘Hun’.
in Canberra in 1941 (Figure 5.8). Despite the lengthy narrative Bean wrote in 1929 to be displayed alongside it, the impact was one of a static moment, where the broader ‘action’ was invisible, but the horrific effects of artillery and gunfire were evident.

The only troops visible are Australian soldiers in and around a crater in the middle of the conflict. Most of these soldiers are clearly dead. The rest of the fighting is invisible, but clouds above out-of-vision explosions are painted on to the background. Of the soldiers, four are still alive: two crouched in the hole and two leaning against the front slope of the crater. Two of the dead soldiers to the left of the crater lie in a kind of embrace, the arms of the soldier on the left-hand side thrown over the other, his hand resting on his comrade’s thigh. Another, lying head-down on the right-hand side of the hole, has had a leg and an arm blown off, and is shirtless, revealing a young, healthy-looking torso. All of this appears to be taking place in some kind of moonscape, a monotonous sea of earth and hints of the remains of items that might have been there before (there is some evidence of fence-posts for example). The impact of war is clear without recourse to narrative, or need of broader explanation: war, the diorama implies, is awful. It destroys. Mourn these men.

This emotive punch was created through the deliberate refusal of narrative. The scene depicted is one referred to in Volume III of Bean’s *Official History*. Bean, however, insisted that although the place depicted

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could be plotted to precise coordinates, narrowed to an exact time and date (early morning, 6 August 1916), and verified through the testimony of specific people (Sergeant D.A. Twining, pictured leaning up against the front of the crater in shirtsleeves), these facts should be used only selectively, and any details ignored which detracted from the ‘feeling of mystery which No-man’s Land used to inspire’.92

Bean’s own official history describes the same time and place as a succession of events, of tactical decisions, as well as of destruction. The narration of events over time, and an engagement with the broader pattern of events, creates a crucially different vision of Pozières than the diorama. In the official history, the independent action of the soldiers depicted in the diorama is emphasised:

This day, however, German stretcher-bearers again came out from the Bapaume Road. The movements of one pair, who persisted in approaching the line near the windmill, strongly aroused the suspicion of Sergeant Twining. After signalling to them in vain to retire, he shot one bearer and there dropped from the stretcher, not a wounded German, but a bag. This afforded some evidence that the enemy stretcher-bearers were not all genuine, but that some were scouting.93

These descriptions have the cumulative effect of asserting the utility of the attack: the methods, plans, and location seem, above all, to be logical. Australian soldiers move, decide, have agency. That is not to say that Bean eschews the reality of danger and death; it is simply that deaths are made, through the structure of the narrative, to appear instrumental, part of a useful cause, in a way the bleak, isolated scene of the diorama does not.

Bean, however, specifically instructed Lynch not to include a number of things in the Pozières diorama he knew to have occurred at that time and place. The head of the Memorial, John Treloar, suggested that Twining (the man in shirtsleeves) be contacted in order to provide Lynch with factual details for his sculpture. In June 1929 Twining supplied a number of details, including Australian blunders which resulted in the deaths of the men pictured in the diorama:

A square piece of tin was attached to each man’s back for the purpose of allowing our airmen to pick out our troops easily. This particularly stupid idea allowed enemy airmen to pick us up and the artillery of the enemy promptly caused the casualties.94

92 AWM 38 3DRL 6673/331.
94 Letter Twining to Treloar, 27 June 1929. AWM 38 3DRL 6673/331.
This fact appears in neither the official history nor the diorama. So, the diorama emphasises memory, rather than narrating the history – the ‘what happened’ – of battle. But whose memory? Here Twining’s memory of actual events was replaced with Bean’s idealised one of Australian sacrifice. From the 1970s until 2014, the diorama was displayed above a plaque stating that the diorama was constructed with the assistance of one of the men pictured in it, David Twining, who advised the artists of what the area looked like from his memory. The plaque did not mention that in August 1931, at Keswick Barracks in Adelaide, Twining pulled his army greatcoat over his head, placed his face over a gas ring, and committed suicide.95

The dioramas were all deliberate evocations of sites where combat, hardship, suffering, and death occurred. All, through tricks of construction and perspective, invited the viewers to immerse themselves imaginatively in the scene, and to connect with the moment portrayed. The apparent specificity of the sites that the dioramas rendered, and the dominant impulse to remember and emote conveyed by them, meant that for Australians, coming to view them could be a stand-in for visiting distant battlefields and grave sites. Actual battlefields were transformed into sites of pilgrimage after the war; an encounter with a facsimile of the place where a visitor understood a relative or friend had been killed had a similarly sacral quality.96 Both encouraged memory and connection with the idea of an event, both evoked loss and death, and neither really required narrative chronology in order to conjure emotion or prompt a conscious desire to remember the dead.

As explained above, the Pozières diorama, while produced in the 1920s, was not displayed until it was exhibited in the new AWM in Canberra in 1941. Its production in the late 1920s, however, in some ways symbolises the shift from a focus on celebrating victory to an emphasis on commemorating (and celebrating) the dead. The War Museum had always been intended as a monument to the A. I. F., and as time went on that focus intensified, along with the perceived need to keep that memory alive. This memorial impulse was further entwined with nation-building efforts through the 1920s. The architectural competition to determine the design for the War Memorial and museum building in the new national capital of Canberra was held in 1926, and the winners were

95 Peter Burness, ‘Pozieres Hell’, Wartime (22) 2003: 19; Adelaide Advertiser, 28 August 1931.
announced in February 1927. Also in 1927 the new Federal Parliament House opened, and the Australian Parliament, which had previously been sitting in Melbourne, sat in Canberra for the first time. Interest in the Museum remained strong throughout the 1920s. As of the beginning of July 1927, 1,035,455 people had visited the AWM Museum, a remarkable feat considering that the total population of the Australian continent at this time was 5.5 million. As noted above, interest was strong enough in Melbourne in 1927 for the Museum to open an exhibition of pictures and models (dioramas), and an attached cinema showing official war films in the Exhibition Buildings Annexe, while the main museum remained on display in Sydney.

The Imperial War Museum: Displaying the Empire’s War Effort

The organisers of the IWM meticulously compiled a comprehensive collection of artefacts, weapons, artworks, photographs, film, and books related to the war. They were not, however, as successful as the organisers of the Australian museum in creating a coherent, persuasive narrative of the war’s course and meaning. This apparent lack, however, left greater space for varied interpretations of the war’s significance.97

From its inception, the IWM was multiply authored in a way the Australian museum was not. Following the war, the same networks of largely conservative figures remained dominant in political and cultural circles. The idea of a national war museum occurred during the war through ‘a series of individual initiatives’ from Charles ffoulkes, Curator of the Tower Armouries and authority on medieval arms and armour, and from Ian Malcolm, a Conservative MP.98 These individual suggestions and plans motivated Lord Harcourt to put the idea to Sir Alfred Mond, who was his successor as First Commissioner of Works. The War Cabinet approved the proposal on 5 March 1917 – an outcome that was possible because Mond had ‘both the power and position

97 Additionally, given the upheaval in Ireland beginning with the Easter 1916 rising and continuing into the Irish revolution and civil war, the nature of the polity describing its own wartime history was in flux. Any attempt to depict the war experience in what had been the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland was never going to be as easily constructed as in Australia.

98 Kavanagh, ‘Museum as Memorial’, 80.
to take the idea further’. The War Cabinet authorised Mond, in his capacity as First Commissioner of Works, ‘subject to the concurrence of the Admiralty, War Office and Ministry of Munitions’, to proceed with forming a museum committee to oversee the formation of a National War Museum. Accordingly, Mond’s friend Sir Martin Conway, the art critic and mountaineer, was appointed Director-General, and Charles ffoulkes was appointed Secretary and Curator. Retired commander C. N. Walcott was appointed to oversee the construction of a Naval Section, B. B. Cubbitt was appointed to represent the War Office, the Oxford military historian (and later conservative MP) Professor C. W. C. Oman was appointed to oversee the museum Library, and Ian Malcolm (also a Conservative MP) was put in charge of Art. Lady Norman, a Liberal advocate of women’s suffrage who had previously helped run a hospital in France, was appointed to run a ‘Women’s Section’. Major Beckles Willson, a Canadian whose activities were discussed in Chapter 4, was appointed to collect objects in the field. A Dominions sub-committee was soon established, as were sections for the collection of toys, items related to religious work, and so on. Each sub-committee head exercised a fair degree of autonomy over what was collected. Authority for different types of collecting was thus quite diffuse.

The official aims of the museum, while similar, differed from those of the Australian museum in significant ways. Sir Alfred Mond, in his speech at the opening of the IWM’s first iteration at the Crystal Palace

99 Ibid. The War Cabinet decision was War Cabinet, 87. Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, on Monday, 5 March 1917, at 11.30 a.m. Copy filed in IWM EN1/1/COM/2/1 A1/3: Agenda and Minutes of Committee appointment by War Cabinet on IWM 1917–20.

100 First Commissioner of Works (Chairman, ex officio), a Director-General, a representative of the Admiralty, a representative of the War Office, a representative of the Minister of Munitions, a representative of the Literary and Art side of the question, and an Honorary Secretary. War Cabinet, 87. Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, on Monday, 5 March 1917, at 11.30 a.m. Copy filed in IWM EN1/1/COM/2/1 A1/3: Agenda and Minutes of Committee appointment by War Cabinet on IWM 1917–20.

101 Alfred Mond, ‘Imperial War Museum’. Memorandum. 10 July 1919. IWM EN1/1/COM/2/1 A1/3: Agenda and Minutes of Committee appointment by War Cabinet on IWM 1917–20. ‘I was fortunate enough to secure the generous and honorary assistance of my friend Sir Martin Conway as Director-General’. See also Alfred Mond, Appendix VI “National War Museum”. Memorandum. EN1/1/MUS/25/1 A3/3 IWM – The Origin of the IWM 1917.

102 There was some movement in who actually filled each position on the Committee over the next few years – for example, Admiral Sir Guy Gaunt replaced Commander Walcott on the IWM Committee in 1918. Imperial War Museum. Minutes of the 49th Committee Meeting. 31 October 1918. The major people – Chair, Secretary, Director-General – remained constant.
in June 1920, described the museum’s collection and purposes in the following words:

The Collection here thus comprises upward of one hundred thousand exhibits illustrating the Naval, Military, Aerial and Civil labours of men and women throughout the Empire during the period of the War. It is hoped to make it so complete that every individual, man or woman, sailor, soldier, airman or civilian who contributed, however obscurely, to the final result, may be able to find in these Galleries an example or illustration of the sacrifice he made or the work he did, and in the archives some record of it. The museum was not conceived as a monument of military glory, but rather as a record of toil and sacrifice; as a place of study to the technician in studying the course of development of armaments; to the historian as an assembly of material and archives to instruct his work; and to the people of Empire, as a record of their toil and sacrifice through these fateful years.103

The range of people whose efforts are to be represented was thus broad, and all of those people were – hopefully – to be able to find physical or archival traces of themselves and their experiences in the museum. This breadth of intended subjects and viewers was in contrast to the much narrower – and more exclusively masculine and martial – vision of the Australian Museum.

The Australian War Museum was intended to represent the experiences and stir the memories of soldiers; in such an institution, civilians and women are simply audiences for, not subjects of, the museum. The focus in Australia on the faraway battlefront to the (almost) exclusion of home was partially a matter of logistical fact: sheer distance meant that the Australian ‘home front’ was less connected to the front than Britain’s. Wounded soldiers, for example, did not come all the way back to Australia to recuperate unless they were definitely not being returned to the front, and compared to Britain there was in Australia not much manufacturing to speak of. The manufacture of war munitions in Britain on the other hand was both integral to the prosecution of the war, and a field of endeavour heavily peopled by women. Charles ffoulkes described this process, and the IWM’s reaction to it, in a 1918 speech to the (short-lived) Local War Museums Association:

With the inclusion of women munition workers the whole question of the contribution of women, their work both under the Red Cross, in canteens, work on the land and general substituting male labour was brought forcibly to the notice

103 Alfred Mond, speech given at opening of Imperial War Museum, Crystal Palace, 9 June 1920. IWM EN 1/1COM/2/1. Cabinet Committee on National/Imperial War Museum, Agendas and Minutes.
of the Committee, and the natural outcome of their deliberations on this head made it evident that the War Museum should preserve not merely the work of the fighting forces but also a permanent and enduring record of the whole nation, and indeed of the Empire in the mighty struggle of free civilization against organised barbarity.¹⁰⁴

The collection of objects demonstrating the contribution of women was thus part of the idea of creating a permanent record of the entire nation and Empire. This reflected the IWM’s more capacious overall brief: the museum’s planners attempted to include the efforts of the entire empire, while the Australian museum focused on the effort of one particular nation within the empire. In words similar to Mond’s later speech at opening of the Museum, ffoulkes argued that ‘each man, woman and child of British birth’ should be able to see in the Museum ‘some tangible and concrete memorial of his or her efforts’. As a result, all of these people should ‘be able to hand on to their descendants in years to come – not merely a tradition but visible evidence of the work they accomplished and the aid they gave to the Motherland in time of danger and need’.¹⁰⁵ Thus, in June 1918, the Women’s Section reported that representatives had toured the Clyde and the Tyne, obtaining ‘valuable exhibits and records from munition factories, shipbuilding yards, etc.’¹⁰⁶ Records of women’s work, such as in anti-gas work, were also compiled, as were press clippings related to women’s work from the outbreak of war. The Women’s Section reported that these were ‘difficult to obtain and have to be bought and borrowed from many sources’.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, as described in Chapter 2, in March 1919 a further tour was taken with an official photographer, ‘by means of which a series of 200 photographs of women’s organisations, taken from an woman’s point of view, were

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.
¹⁰⁶ Agnes Ethel Conway, Report on Women’s Section for 1918–1919. IWM EN1/1/REPD/1/1-6 Reports, Departmental 1918–19.
¹⁰⁷ The Women’s Section compiled records:

During the year great progress has been made with the task of collecting records. Relations have been formed with all the Government Departments concerned, and many large and important reports, such as the one on the work of women under the Anti-Gas Department have been written on the request of the Section. Several thousand reports have been received from funds registered as War Charities. Great progress has also been made with the collection of retrospective press cuttings on women’s work from the outbreak of war; these are difficult to obtain and have to be bought and borrowed from many sources.

Agnes Ethel Conway, Report on Women’s Section for 1918–1919. IWM EN1/1/REPD/1/1.
The idea of the necessity of a woman’s point of view is one which is completely absent from the Australian museum, whose organisers did not countenance the formation of a Women’s Section as necessary to the official collection. Much of this representational difference also arose due to the emphasis of the Australian collectors and Charles Bean on the mythology of the Australian enlisted man – a mythology that drew heavily on the already extant bush legend of the remote, masculine outback. It was the returned soldiers who were expected to see reflections of themselves in exhibitions, not the general populace. Moreover, the emerging national identity of the Australian Dominion was to rest on the martial accomplishments of these men – not the actions of the population as a whole.

In the spirit of collecting ‘not merely the work of the fighting forces’ but that of the ‘whole nation’, the IWM also collected images of changed environments at home. One example of this was its 1918 purchase of ‘The Under World’, the ‘much-discussed picture by Mr. Walter Bayes in this year’s Royal Academy exhibition, depicting the scene at a Tube station during an air raid’. The idea of the war presented in the IWM collection was simultaneously exotic and horrible (large, menacing German guns and images of frontline destruction), and yet also present and domestic, something that had interrupted the flow of things in British homes. It was not only something distant and glorious, happening in a faraway and exotic place, exclusively to men. The experience of war manifested likewise in the air raid (which also interested other museums – the London Museum exerted itself to collect objects related to the Zeppelin raids), employment in war-related industry, and children’s toys depicting war activities or personalities. It was this wider scope, including activities beyond the front lines, that made possible Mond’s claims that the Museum was conceived ‘as a record of their toil and

108 Agnes Ethel Conway, Report on Women’s Section for 1918–19. IWM EN1/1/REPD/1/1–6 Reports, Departmental 1918–19.
109 This is the way of thinking behind the advertising strategy used by the AWM in advertising their 1922 Sydney photograph exhibition. See discussion in Chapter 2 of this exhibition, and the exhortation ‘Diggers! see yourselves in action!’.
110 Museums Journal 18 1 (June 1918): 11.
112 See for example IWM EN1/1/REPD/1/4: Children’s Section 18–19 Reports. Sort of thing collected: ‘Report: The Childrens’ Section, December 1918’. ‘[T]he Section is not anxious to over-load itself with a quantity of toys which are of the purely military nature, and of which the shops are full, but desires to obtain clever and representative specimens of the War-Toy proper, which will form an interesting record in time to come’.

EN1/1/REPD/1/4: Children’s Section 18–19 Reports.
sacrifice’ rather than ‘a monument of military glory’ to the ‘people of the Empire’.  

King George V officially opened the IWM in a formal ceremony on 9 June 1920 (Figure 5.9). In his opening address, he said:

We cannot say with what eyes posterity will regard this museum nor what ideas it will arouse in their minds. We hope and pray that as the result of what we have done and suffered they may be able to look back upon war, its instruments, and its organisation, as belonging to a dead past.

This royal statement at a solemn, official moment reflected a widely held belief that the human and material cost of the war were worthwhile as they had in some part contributed to the end of war, and thus to securing a peaceful future. Approximately 2.5 million people visited the IWM in its first year, of which organisers understood ‘a considerable proportion of the visitors were men and women who had served in the fighting and ancillary forces during the war’. Of these, museum staff observed, ‘in many cases they expressed surprise at finding what they considered common objects of everyday life deemed worthy of preservation’. In the second year the Museum was open to the public, 907,743 visitors viewed the collection. These people would have viewed, however, not a harmoniously organised narrative of how their sacrifices had contributed to the instruments of war being those of a ‘dead past’, but a somewhat disorganised collection of objects, loosely arranged into sections such as ‘Army’ and ‘Navy’. Beckles Willson, who had collected so many of the objects in the Museum’s collection, complained to Alfred Mond:
I may say nothing of the treatment afforded by Mr ffoulkes to the relics contributed officially by myself to the museum (only a tenth of these appear to be exhibited at all and those that are shown are undocumented): but the whole plan or want of plan of the show and its undignified and irrelevant surroundings and accessories, are truly deplorable.118

By ‘undignified and irrelevant surroundings’, Willson meant the potted palm trees and fountains, which were part of the Crystal Palace décor. The presence of the machinery of violence scattered amongst greenery and water features could only be described as discordant, and the message they were supposed to convey confused (Figure 5.10).

The limitations of the space at the Crystal Palace also meant that large technology objects were most prominent, arranged in the centre of the space, with smaller items that could be displayed in the cases available arranged in the various bays and alcoves leading off the central space (Figure 5.11). As IWM curator Paul Cornish observes, these ‘physical conditions accentuated what can be discerned as a move away from the original ethos of the museum, as a place of record of the individual’s contribution to the war’. This effect was further accentuated by ffoulkes’ fascination with weaponry and with collecting specimens of the minutiae of their technological development throughout the war (he was, after all, a scholar specialising in historical armaments). In early exhibitions of the museum’s collection, various materiel was arranged for display in scientific categories. The limited audience for such technical kinds of display was recognised as early as 1921, when the Munitions Court at the Crystal Palace was rearranged, and ‘exhibits of an ultra technical nature’ were put into storage.120 When the museum moved into space at the Imperial Institute in South Kensington in 1924, after the lease on the Crystal Palace expired in 1923, the limited space there resulted in further culling of this extensive technical collection.

The ways in which the IWM used models and dioramas further illustrate this emphasis on technical illustration over the production of a coherent narrative of British (or imperial) achievements. While some models of the fronts and scenes of destruction were produced, many were donated to the Museum, rather than commissioned (Figure 5.12). The kinds of models that the various collecting committees commissioned or specifically requested to be donated were generally models of technology items, or in the case of those commissioned by the Women’s Work section, scenes depicting the industrial, agricultural, and medical work of women. These were, moreover, to be made by women artists.121

The Museum asked shipyards and other manufacturers to donate models of their products. ffoulkes wrote to Sir Herbert Austin of the Austin

Motor Company, for example, asking him to supply a model of the armoured car ‘which was one of the notable productions’ of the firm during the war. Military units offered technical models. These tended to display a specific object or piece of technology. For example, in 1919, the London Rifle Brigade donated a model of a gas-proof dugout made by one of the officers in the unit.

122 Letter from ffoulkes to Sir Herbert Austin (Austin Motor Company), 11 June 1919. EN1/1/MODE/1/2: Models General 1917–19.
123 See letter of thanks from ffoulkes to the OC, London Rifle Brigade, 10 June 1919. EN1/1/MODE/1/2: Models General 1917–19.
Figure 5.11  Photograph of the army section display, Imperial War Museum, Crystal Palace, 1920
Source: Imperial War Museum, IWM negative no. Q 31438

Figure 5.12  Photograph of visitors to the Imperial War Museum examining a model at the Imperial War Museum shortly after the Museum first opened to the public at the Crystal Palace, London in 1920
Source: Imperial War Museum, IWM negative no. Q31412
work, like the women’s work models, followed this pattern. One featured women ploughing – a scene pared down to the bullocks, the plough, and the women. Another featured women operating a mobile X-ray machine in Italy. It presented the women and the machine inside the cutaway building they were working in. The focus was on the technology being operated, not a broader context. The effect was one of the museum presenting specimens, and explaining their function, rather than a desire to create a narrative of the progress of the war on the battlefield, as the Australian models and dioramas were specifically planned to do.

Again, there was a great deal less central control exerted over what was represented in British as opposed to the Australian models. Many models were donated, and custom-made models were commissioned by sub-committees rather than by the curator; as such, the degree of central supervision over the composition of the models and dioramas was lower than in Australia. (In Australia, Bean wrote the lists of subjects to be represented, and communicated with the artists about their work.) Australia did have two series of technical dioramas, illustrating the medical and supply systems, so Australia did not only illustrate the drama of battle, just as Britain did not only illustrate the creation and use of battlefield technologies isolated from any broader idea of what the battlefield was like. Rather, it was a question of emphasis: the Australian museum conceived of the war as a succession of overseas Australian military engagements and their consequences; the British project took a broader view. Additionally, when noting this system of control, it should also be observed that the IWM always had a higher degree of organisational autonomy than the AWM, and this was visible in the process of collecting exhibits. Australia collected items and commissioned early artwork and films through the Australian War Records Section, which was part of the army. After the war, many of the same personnel continued to work for the Museum. The IWM’s collecting activities were more administratively complex, and might be described as collecting in tandem with the armed forces, rather than as part of them. After the war, the Museum was a statutory body under the Ministry of Works, in contrast to Australia, where the Memorial Museum was under the Department of Defence. These issues of centralisation of artistic direction and control over collecting, as well as the sorts of assumptions about what a museum should look like that museum staff were operating under, were central to the process of mythmaking about the war.

The lack in the IWM and in Britain more generally of a highly organised, central, and dominant narrative at this time allowed room for the development of alternative narratives. In short, there was in Britain room
for the futility narrative to take root. As well as being diffuse in its own practices and in the vision of war those aims and structures created, the IWM lacked the strong central status of the Australian museum in creating and disseminating a unified national narrative of war. It was, moreover, one of multiple cultural voices speaking about the war. As one of many metropolitan attractions, and constrained by the exhibition spaces it was able to occupy, it also lacked the status as a pre-eminent leisure attraction that the Australian museum was able to achieve in the 1920s. While the museum proved popular in its Crystal Palace location, the oddities of those buildings resulted in the uneven layout described above, and numerous artworks had to be withdrawn from display due to the prevalence of weather damage at the Crystal Palace.124

The museum’s move to the Imperial Institute in South Kensington upon the expiry of the lease at the Crystal Palace in 1924 coincided with a sharp drop in visitor numbers, possibly due to its waning novelty, but possibly also a result of its now cramped quarters. The space provided in South Kensington was less than a quarter of the area available at the Crystal Palace, resulting in curators significantly culling the collections. Indeed, the move to South Kensington was not effected without protest – Sir James Allen of the New Zealand Government, for instance, claimed that New Zealand would cease to contribute artefacts to the museum in the event of moving to an Institute it considered to be a white elephant.125 In its new location, the museum was rearranged and shifted focus, and its curators and worked to establish its place as the central repository of artefacts and documentation related to Britain’s war experience.

124 ‘Subsequently, on account of the destructive influence of the great heat in the Medical Gallery, they had to be again removed from the walls and placed in store, those belonging to the Army Medical War Museum in the Pompeian Court, and those belonging to the Imperial War Museum in the Sandow Building . . . The Sargent Water Colours taken down and stored in the early part of the year have been shown by me to several visitors, mostly American, who had come specially to the Palace to see them . . . Heavy showers following on the that necessitated the removal and re-hanging of the Women’s Work Section, where the rain streamed down one of the walls’. Art Section. Report from 31 March to 30 September 1921. IWM EN1/1/REPD/3/1: Reports, Departments 1921–2.

125 Steven Cooke and Lloyd Jenkins, ‘Discourses of Regeneration in Early Twentieth-Century Britain. From Bedlam to the Imperial War Museum’ Area 33 (4) 2001: 382–90, 386. For Sir James Allen’s threats, he cites IWM A3/2. Here Cooke and Jenkins observe that the Imperial Institute was ‘a display cabinet to make the Empire “knowable”’, which had emerged from ‘calls for a Colonial Museum in the 1870s and the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in 1886’, and further that its ‘role as an appropriate signifier of the relationship between imperial power and Empire was already by that time being brought into question’.
As well as being just one of numerous museums and galleries in the metropolis, the IWM was also one of many organisations seeking to exhibit and memorialise the war. The Royal United Services Institution’s collection of militaria, for example, predated it, and the shaping of the Tate Museum’s collections during the war was entangled with the activities of the IWM.\textsuperscript{126} Local museums sought to illustrate their communities’ war experiences, and regimental museums – although closed to the public – maintained their own war collections. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the IWM worked in this varied context to solidify its status as the primary location for the records, relics, and representations of the Great War. One of the ways it did this was by frequently lending out its collections to other museums, in the process raising the profile of the IWM collection as the lender and permanent home of the exhibits. For example, as a result of the museum’s move to South Kensington and its simultaneous reduction in size, its aeroplane collection was loaned to the Science Museum. In 1921, forty-eight pictures were lent to the National Gallery, Millbank (the Tate Gallery), and the war museum’s staff reported with satisfaction that ‘[r]emarkably favourable press criticism was devoted to their exhibition, special mention being made of the pictures lent by the Museum’.\textsuperscript{127} Similarly, paintings, photographs, and collection items were lent at various times to events and institutions as diverse as the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924–5, the Wilton Park Museum in Batley, Yorkshire, in 1925, and a Jubilee event at the Holborn showrooms in 1935.\textsuperscript{128}

The IWM’s attitude to loans was indicative of their awareness of operating within a patchwork of cultural institutions in Britain, and also of a significantly lower concern with controlling and shaping the narrative of war than was the case in Australia. Noting that in February 1935 ‘a


\textsuperscript{127} Art Section. Report from 31 March to 30 September 1921. IWM EN1/1/REPD/3/1–2: Reports, Departmental 1921–2.

\textsuperscript{128} Art Section. Report for the month of March, 1924. IWM EN1/1/REPD/5/1: Reports, Departmental 1923–4. Art, Cinematograph, Exhibits, Library, Maps; Art Section. Report for the month of April, 1924. EN1/1/REPD/6/1: Reports, departmental 1925–5. Art, Exhibits, Library, Maps; Report of Photographic Record Section for the Period 1 September–31 October 1924. IWM EN1/1/REPD/6/2: Reports, departmental 1925–5. Photographs, Photographic Dark Rooms, Publicity, Stores; Photographic Records Section. 30 November 1934–25 February 1935. EN1/1/REPD/13/5–7: Reports, Departmental, 1933, 34, 35. Photographic Records, Stores. In this last case, ‘Messrs Ilford, the photographic specialists, borrowed a number of the Museum’s negatives illustrating King George’s visits to the front, from which they are preparing enlargements for a Jubilee exhibition to be held in their Holborn Showrooms’. 
set of enlargements of battlefield scenes was made to the order of a Mr. Skulnick, who, it is understood, is exhibiting them in various provincial towns at the present moment’ is a far cry from the Australian War Museum’s insistence that both its own captions and its own staff must accompany loaned photographs.129 An acceptance that there was not only one narrative of the war was also evident in the IWM’s Art Section’s decision to exhibit ‘[e]nlargements to illustrate the War from the French, Belgian, Serbian and Roumanian point of view’ in ‘spaces . . . allotted to these countries’ in 1921, and ‘a selection of French prints by Fourain and Sarrut, illustrating the French attitude towards the war’ in 1929.130

Of course, this attention to a plurality of points of view did have its limits. The alternative points of view offered here were not enemy points of view, but rather the differing experiences of allies. Similarly, the museum’s attempts to represent itself as inclusive, particularly regarding gender, were limited by space and by the Museum leadership’s priorities. At the Crystal Palace, the Women’s Work section collected and arranged by the Women’s Work sub-committee was exhibited in its own area. This area also featured a Women’s War Shrine, in which were displayed numerous photographs hanging over an altar-like table framed by sculptures of Nurse Edith Cavell and Dr Elsie Inglis.131 (Dr Inglis, after being rebuffed by British authorities, secured support from France for setting up women’s medical units in France during the war, and subsequently arranged for more on other fronts – serving in Serbia herself.) This approach fit with the Observer’s 1920 view that the war ‘was won by the great Empire family with the Museum as the guardian of “the family mantelpiece or cabinet of precious relics”’.132 When the museum moved to South Kensington, however, the women’s section was no longer shown separately, and the Women’s War Shrine was

131 The Cavell bust was by George Frampton (IWM ART 2782, 1920), and the Inglis sculpture by Ivan Mestrovic (IWM ART 2454). For more on Cavell and Frampton, and about his Monument to her at St Martin’s Place, London, see Sue Malvern, “For King and Country”: Frampton’s Edith Cavell 1915–1920 and the Writing of Gender in Memorials to the Great War’, in David Getsy (ed.), Sculpture and the Pursuit of the Modern Ideal in Britain, c.1880–1930 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).
132 Malvern, ‘War, Memory and Museums’, citing the Observer, 8 August 1920.
dismantled. Women’s voices were still present in the museum and the collection, but circumstance again shifted the emphasis of display.

As the central museum, the IWM had to be capacious – its self-assigned brief was to provide something for everyone. The numerous smaller groups and institutions wanting to represent the war, however, were under no such obligation. Notably, in 1917 and 1918, a group of Scottish worthies pushed for a Scottish National War Memorial to be built in Edinburgh Castle. (After the war, the armed forces would no longer require the whole castle for military purposes.) That this National War Memorial should include a national war museum as well as a Memorial Chapel dedicated to the dead of the Great War was explicit from the outset (although an idea of its including a more general Scottish history museum quickly disappeared). John George Stewart-Murray, the Duke of Atholl, and a Conservative and Unionist MP, was instrumental in lobbying for the Memorial to be built. He described himself as ‘really the originator of the show’, and was at other times less flatteringly termed a ‘one-man band’. Atholl and the other organisers of the national war museum for Scotland explicitly did not desire plurality. They wanted to build a museum offering a specifically Scottish point of view not adequately provided by a metropolitan museum for everyone. The same driving impulse, which in 1920 Atholl described as being behind the Memorial scheme, would inform the scope and structure of the putative Museum:

I am afraid that all the rebel spirit that lies dormant in every Scot roused itself within me, and I made a public statement that if the people of Scotland wished to have a National War Memorial to commemorate their own dead it would not be in Hyde Park, London, and put up with Government money, but it would be put up by Scottish hands, with Scottish money, on Scottish soil.

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133 Malvern, ‘War, Memory and Museums’, 187.
135 These other organisers initially included Captain George Swinton, a former officer of the Highland Light Infantry, and Lieutenant-General Sir John Spencer Ewart, General Officer Commanding Scotland.
136 Excerpt from the Duke of Atholl’s speech at Glasgow, 22 February 1920, quoted in printed leaflet, supplement to The Caledonian, December 1922, Federated Caledonian Society of South Africa, Papers of the Duke and Duchess of Atholl concerning the Scottish National War Memorial, Acc. 4714/2, NLS.
In June 1917, Atholl wrote to the Scottish press arguing that Scotland had played important part in the war and ought to be treated as ‘a Nation not as a conglomerate of provincial towns’ and that a National Historical War Museum ought to be built. The Museum, supporters thought, would be ‘for Scotland what the United Services Institution in Whitehall is for the British Army and Navy – and more!’ and would support a vision of Scottishness which included the Scottish diaspora, as ‘naturally the various regiments raised in the Dominions overseas, and claiming a Scottish connection, would be included’. During 1918 and 1919, organisers developed ideas about what might be acquired for a museum and what kind of a Memorial might be appropriate. The Aircraft Exhibition held in Islington, London, in late 1918 inspired organisers with the hope of acquiring aeroplane exhibits. They strategised means of acquiring trophies and relics, ‘the most interesting form of exhibit’, and the one class of exhibit which they were ‘going to have great difficulty procuring, owing to the fact that practically everything worth having is centralised for the benefit of the Imperial War Museum’. With the end of the war, however, the focus turned to designing and building the Scottish National War Memorial, and the museum idea was pushed into the background.

The Memorial Committee, with Atholl as chairman, met for the first time in January 1919. Over the next few years, they oversaw the design (by Sir Robert Lorimer) and construction of a ‘Gothic’ memorial in Edinburgh Castle. The Memorial opened in 1927. It consisted of a Hall of Honour adjoining an octagonal chapel – it was deliberately church-like. Stained glass windows depicted both the horror of war and the restoration of peace and order. A sculpture by Pilkington Jackson, entitled ‘Reveille’, was designed to be the last thing a visitor saw on leaving the shrine, and to symbolise in the words of its creator ‘the ennoblement of Mankind through Sacrifice, the desire that war should end and Right triumph’.

137 Memorandum on a Scottish National War Memorial, Museum, and Home of Record. Copy filed in Scottish National War Memorial archive (SNWM).
138 Ibid.
139 Letter from Lt. General MacLean, Headquarters, South Eastern Area, Royal Air Force. Covent Garden Hotel, Strand, WC2, London, to Atholl, 11 December 1918. Scottish National War Museum. Correspondence re aeroplanes as exhibits 1918–19. Atholl Papers, Acc. 4714/43. NLS. Note that this exhibition is also described in Chapter 4.
140 Letter from Major Don to Atholl, 3 February 1919. Atholl Papers, Acc. 4714/43. NLS.
were arrayed around the memorial, emphasising Scotland’s particular martial traditions. The memorial also included inscriptions regarding the sacrifices of Scots who died in the service of other forces, including the Dominion armies, and English, Welsh, and Irish regiments. All of these features combined to create a memorial locating the war ‘within a traditional framework so that the losses inflicted could be understood within the familiar theology of sacrifice and redemption’.142 This traditional framework also extended to place the First World War and the Scottish soldiers who fought in it within a continuous Scottish martial tradition.143

This was the approach taken by the Museum when work on it resumed in the late 1920s. The group of conservative men primarily responsible for the vision of the Memorial and the Museum created institutions that saw the war as part of long history of Scottish military achievement and peculiarity. In this sense of continuity and romance, the Scottish project more closely resembled the nation-building narrative constructed in Australia than it did the discontinuity and rupture present in parts of the IWM. As stated in the wartime memorandum on a Scottish National War Memorial, Museum, and Home of Record, the Scottish museum conceived during the war, ‘originating with relics of the present war – such a museum as that contemplated for London – would eventually become a storehouse for the war relics of Scotland, its weapons, its uniforms, and heirlooms. Many treasures would come in on loan and remain for ever’.144 The museum’s organisers, and the curator they appointed, Major Mackay Scobie, solicited the public to donate items of interest, and while numerous artefacts relating to the First World War were donated, so too were many Jacobite objects and items connected with more apparently romantic elements of Scottish military history. The Scottish National Military and Naval Museum was opened in 1933, and in publicity materials submitted to the press, the character of the Museum was spelled out explicitly:

The Duke of Atholl thereafter [i.e. after the memorial opened in 1927] busied himself with the idea of a Military and Naval Museum. He had in mind the erection of something not only historic but that would portray that splendid

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142 Jenny Macleod, ““By Scottish Hands, with Scottish Money, on Scottish Soil”: The Scottish National War Memorial and National Identity”, 73–96, 95.
143 For a further detailed description of the memorial and its contents, see Ian Hay, Their Name Liveth: The Book of the Scottish National War Memorial. With a Foreword by Earl Haig (Edinburgh: Trustees of the Scottish National War Memorial, 1931.)
144 Memorandum on a Scottish National War Memorial, Museum, and Home of Record. Copy filed in Scottish National War Memorial archive (SNWM).
Items advertised as worth seeing thus included relics of Culloden, including the colours of the Stewarts of Appin and of Barrell’s Regiment, as well as the clothes Bonnie Prince Charlie wore that day, a collection of oak statuettes created by Pilkington Jackson, representing the uniforms of the Scottish Regiments from various periods, and a Bible ‘found on the body of a lad in the Seaforths, who had evidently been reading it as he lay dying in No Man’s Land in the Great War, taken as a relic by a German officer and now restored to this country and resting in the Museum’. In the end, the museum presented the romance of ‘Scottishness’ and the similarly romantic idea of the Scottish Regiments, but there was no real attempt to represent the experience of war itself. Rather, the Scottish museum when it opened presented the paraphernalia of war related to Scotland: old pistols, flags, drums, dress.

By contrast, the IWM during the same period was developing a number of exhibits which aimed to represent the experience of war. (This was similar to the use of models at the Australian museum; however, here they were only one way among many of viewing the war. In Australia, they were central.) Models of front and Support Line trenches were produced in early 1925, and a mocked up ‘typical dug-out’ was displayed in South Kensington (Figure 5.13). Eight ‘well-patronised’ Mutascope Machines – or box-like machines into which viewers could look and see films of incidents in the war – were on display through the museum. (One of these, for example, showed footage of General Allenby entering Jerusalem.) The museum was attempting to provide multiple means of looking at war at the same time as its curators and administrators pondered its future (Figure 5.14). As South Kensington was so cramped and very much still a temporary space, a new location was needed. In 1930, museum authorities began to consider moving into the much more spacious premises that had until the 1920s been the site of Bethlem Hospital (or Bedlam), the famous – or infamous – psychiatric hospital. Lord Rothermere had acquired

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146 Ibid.


148 Ibid.
Figure 5.13  Typical dug-out. South Kensington. IWM Exhibit
Source: Imperial War Museum, IWM negative no. Q 48352

Figure 5.14  Part of the Art Gallery, Imperial War Museum, South Kensington
Source: Imperial War Museum, IWM negative no. Q 48436A
the site in 1926 and intended to demolish the old hospital for parkland servicing the local community – an economically depressed area which at the time was considered to have some of the worst overcrowding in London.\(^{149}\) In the end an arrangement was made whereby the buildings and some of the land would be used to house the IWM, and the rest of the land would be devoted to a public park. The IWM was, henceforth, to reside in Bedlam. Exhibiting a sensibility very much at odds with the romantic aims of the Scottish Museum, the IWM’s first Director-General, Martin Conway, observed in the House of Lords: ‘I do not think that a lunatic asylum is at all a bad place for a war museum myself.’\(^{150}\)

**Canada: The Dormant Museum, 1920–1935**

In Canada, local and national efforts to establish a national war museum came to nothing in the 1920s. That this happened after the energetic efforts of the Canadians to amass collections of art, photographs, trophies, and artefacts was largely due to the fact that Canada lacked the presence of an individual, like Bean, dedicated to pursuing the idea. In December 1918, at the request of the minister of Militia and Defence, an Order-in-Council had created the Commission on War Records and Trophies. This commission was supposed to prepare a report on accommodating war records and trophies, and on distributing some to the provinces and local bodies. The Commission included the Dominion Archivist Doughty. In May 1919, another Order-in-Council asked the Commission to collect and care for all material appropriate for a National War Memorial.\(^{151}\) In 1921, however, the Union government of Sir Robert Borden that had governed Canada throughout the war was defeated in the election. A new Liberal government was formed under William Lyon Mackenzie King, with a new Progressive party holding the second largest number of seats. Furthermore, as will be explained in the next chapter, public opinion was divided in Canada, as French-Canadians resisted the use of the war to promote a unifying national vision.\(^{152}\) Plans for a national war memorial

\(^{149}\) Steven Cooke and Lloyd Jenkins, ‘Discourses of Regeneration in Early Twentieth-Century Britain. From Bedlam to the Imperial War Museum’.

\(^{150}\) Hansard, House of Lords, 1932–3, 86, 152, cited in ibid., 388.


\(^{152}\) For further information on French Canadians, the war, and national/regional narratives, see Jean-Pierre Gagnon, ‘Les soldats francophones du premier contingent expéditionnaire du Canada en Europe’, *Guéres mondiales et conflits contemporains* 157 (Janvier 1990), 83–101; Mourad Djebabla, ‘Historiographie francophone de la Première Guerre
museum as a government priority faded. Many war trophies were, in an operation overseen by Doughty, distributed across the country. Libraries and Archives Canada now holds metres of files of municipalities writing to request trophies, often citing their superior contribution or sacrifice as compared to their neighbouring towns or cities.

There were a number of proposals for local war displays, and a Provincial war museum was proposed for Regina, Saskatchewan, in 1920.\textsuperscript{153} Architects were engaged for the project, the province’s Premier wrote to Arthur Meighen, the minister of the Interior, and Sir Robert Borden, the Prime Minister, requesting war trophies and other artefacts.\textsuperscript{154} The city of Regina wrote a letter to Doughty on the allocation of their trophies, asking for weapons to display in the putative museum that had a story attached to them. The City Commissioner wrote that

\begin{quote}
[a]s stated in my first reference the history of each gun will enhance its value greatly. This will particularly be true when personal touch with the war has been lost; the trophies and their story will be the basis of the popular history of the war and a memorial to Canada's share in the struggle. Having a definite history they will be a powerful influence in fostering British Ideals in the hearts of new Canadians.\textsuperscript{155}
\end{quote}

However, this plan also petered out, and guns sent from Ottawa to Regina with the intention of forming the nucleus of a war museum collection were kept by the city, which erroneously presumed that the weapons were meant for them to display in local parks.

Fundamentally, Canada lacked the presence of a group of dedicated individuals with the right connections who were committed to and energetic about ensuring the establishment of a national war museum. Many of the people who collected so energetically during the war, or who dreamed up schemes of national galleries or memorials, were busy

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\textsuperscript{153} Letter from Brig-General A. W. Ross, CMG, DSO to General Sir Arthur Currie. 27 April 1920. LAC RG 37 D 377.
\textsuperscript{154} Letter from Percy Nobbs of Nobbs & Hyde architects to Doughty, Director of War Trophies, 6 May 1920. LAC RG 37 D 377; Letter from W. M. Martin, Premier of Saskatchewan, to Arthur Meighen, Minister of the Interior in search of a collection of war trophies for War Memorial Museum proposed for Regina. 13 May 1920. LAC RG 37 D 377; Telegram from W. M. Martin, Premier of Saskatchewan to Sir Robert Borden, 11 June 1920. LAC RG 37 D 377.
\textsuperscript{155} Letter, L. A. Thornton, City Commissioner, Regina, to Doughty, 6 August 1920. LAC RG 37 D 377.
\end{flushright}
Creating National Museums and Narratives of War

with other projects after the war. Beaverbrook stayed in Britain where his business interests primarily lay, became involved with the IWM, and served as a government minister again during the Second World War. Eric Brown, who had assisted in collecting Canada’s war art, was busy steering the National Gallery project – still nation building, but through a different proposed institution. Edmund Walker, before his death in 1924, was also primarily engaged in the National Gallery project. Doughty was also busy running the National Archives, as well as overseeing the distribution of war trophies. (He served in this post until 1935, and died in 1936.) As a result, Canada’s war collection was stored in an Annexe to the National Archives in Ottawa. It was not until 1935, when only one of the original members of the Commission remained, that an Order-in-Council was issued stating that ‘ministers are of the opinion that the time [had] now come when adequate provision should be made for the proper accommodation, cataloguing and care of those trophies which it is considered should be retained for Museum purposes’.156 The Annexe of the National Archives began – slowly – to be prepared for exhibition.

Conclusion: Bedding Down National Narratives

In the 1920s, both Britain and Australia opened national war museums originally conceived during the war. Both had itinerant existences during the 1920s, before moving to their present locations in Lambeth and Canberra after 1935. Although Australia’s population was one tenth of Britain’s and dispersed much more sparsely, the AWM Museum received consistently higher numbers of visitors throughout the 1920s and early 1930s than did the IWM. In 1923, Sir Arthur Leetham of the Royal United Services Institute in London wrote to Treloar that ‘[t]he War Museum in the Crystal Palace is shortly to be removed to one of the buildings in South Kensington. I understand they have got to reduce the collection very considerably’, and commented rather mournfully that ‘[t]he British public have not taken on that Museum at all, I think the real truth is that they want to forget about the war instead of being reminded of it’.157 Likewise, in 1926, Treloar reported that the Australian museum had received 333,887 visitors to the IWM’s 224,683.158 The Australian

157 Letter from Arthur Leetham, RUSI to Treloar, 5 July 1923. AWM 93 7/1/243.
Conclusion: Bedding Down National Narratives

museum was both more popular and more tightly controlled: it was conceived and run by a small, coordinated group of people, and what was displayed was explicitly arranged to form a coherent narrative of the foundation of a new national story.

This small, energetic, and well-connected group at the centre of the Australian museum also ensured that the museum became the national war memorial. The IWM, while proposals were initially made to this effect, did not achieve this status. The IWM was collectively authored, with collecting being run with a reasonable amount of autonomy by different sub-committees. Due to the predilections of its Curator, Charles ffoulkes, the collection was constructed initially along the exhaustive classificatory lines of a nineteenth-century science or natural history museum, although this approach was never the only one, and softened during the 1920s. Many objects or collections in the IWM were the result of donations from departments such as the ministry of Munitions or the War Office historical section, or the extensive collection of war art from the Ministry of Information. The leadership of the Museum absorbed a multiplicity of objects, displaying them as part of the story of the effort of the whole of British metropolitan and imperial society’s contribution to the war effort. In contrast to this capaciousness, a group of Scottish worthies led by the Duke of Atholl spent the 1920s creating a romantic and traditional Scottish National War Memorial and military museum strikingly at odds with this vision.

In Canada, by contrast, there was an absence of leadership in the years following the war. With major players like Beaverbrook in Britain, like Brown and Doughty otherwise or multiply occupied, or like Walker dying during the 1920s, the project went into abeyance for several years. In Canada, numerous other commemorative projects dominated during the 1920s and early 1930s.

Significantly, immediately after the First World War, Australia had no national museum with which a war museum had to compete. Among the numerous cultural attractions of London, the IWM settled into a niche as the national repository for the materiel history and the documentation of the war, but it never achieved the same degree of cultural dominance as the Australian museum. In many ways, this was because the organisers of the London museum did not feel the same urgent need to shape a national story from the war. The organisers of the Australian museum, and especially its inventor, the official Australian historian Charles Bean, felt to the contrary: that Australia, at a bloody cost, had finally entered into the broad sweep of British military history and imperial progress. The AWM became a monument to this idea.
As we will see in the next chapter, many of the British museum organizers hoped that they were illustrating a rupture with the past, a catastrophe so vast that it must surely mean the end of war. Future visitors might come with the aim of viewing the curious apparatus of a barbarous past. In 1936, when the IWM was installed in its Lambeth location, the King’s words from 1920 were placed on a plaque over the museum’s entrance. However, by that time, with war looming, the desire for museum visitors to be able to ‘look back upon war, its instruments, and its organisation, as belonging to a dead past’ had already begun to appear to be a forlorn hope. In short order, the task of constructing narratives about the Second World War became central to the museum’s mission. It has remained so until today.