WINDOWS INTO WARTIME

Large Print Exhibition Text
Windows into Wartime has been produced by NSW State Archives for the Centenary of Anzac. The exhibition engages with the photographic collection of the NSW Government Printing Office to provide insights into the home front during the First World War, 1914-1918. It presents a selection of historical images taken by government
photographers during the time of Australia’s involvement in the War to the cusp of its transition into post war society that was forever changed. From advancements in public health to volunteer movements, the organising of recruitment campaigns and patriotic fundraising events, to the formation of the Red Cross in Australia and the establishment of soldier support schemes, photographers were on the ground shooting the image. One hundred years later, this unique historical record enables us to reflect upon the upheaval that the War had upon Australian society. The Government Printing Office photographic collection is a legacy left to us in the form of fragile glass plate negatives that, under the
custodianship and care of NSW State Archives can be uncovered and brought to light for generations to come.
Bouncing babies – A strong Australia

As Australian war casualties mounted, public officials considered the possibility that a significant proportion of men of working age would be lost to war or unable to return to work, and that this would have a significant impact on the nation’s economic future. To ensure that a strong and healthy generation of young people would be ready to enter the workforce once the War was over, public health responses to infant mortality and childhood diseases intensified. In the years prior to the War, the efforts of public health advocates and charities to systematically reduce the high rate of infant mortality in NSW had gained momentum. The infant mortality rate—which had risen sharply
during the mid-1800s due to the impact of poor sanitation, pollution, spread of infectious diseases and poverty caused by the increasing urbanisation of society—had decreased significantly. In Sydney, welfare organisations such as the Benevolent Society and Alice Rawson School for Mothers pioneered the first clinics to provide new mothers with education on the health and care of their babies. The NSW Department of Public Health opened the Lady Edeline Hospital for Babies in 1913 and expanded the infant welfare movement. The NSW Government opened its first baby clinic at 22 Henderson Road, Alexandria. Clinics at Surry Hills, Woolloomooloo, Balmain, Glebe and Newcastle soon followed. By 1919
there were thirty clinics throughout NSW, with fourteen in the Sydney metropolitan area.

*Waiting to see Doctor*, Baby Health Centre, Alexandria, 1914. NRS4481 ST5640
Will the ‘real’ men please stand up?

Throughout the War the NSW Government worked with the Commonwealth and military authorities in recruiting men for the Australian Imperial Force in the 2nd Military District, which encompassed much of the state. Between 1914 and 1916 a range of recruitment activities, functions and initiatives were employed. These included establishing a State War Council of NSW, forming a Recruiting Committee and a network of regional associations, providing police officers to act as recruiting agents, conducting a census of males deemed eligible for enlistment—followed by a mail-out of 60,000 copies of a letter of appeal from Premier Holman—distributing war posters and literature, arranging
the use of show grounds and racecourses as military camps, enabling the grounds of Government House to be used for drill purposes, granting leave to public officials to conduct and/or attend rifle club drills, and carrying out ‘platform campaigns’ in rural and metropolitan areas. Recruitment movements mobilised as ‘snowball’ marches in a number of country towns.
Chief Sec., Mr Black addressing recruiting meeting, Martin Place, Martin Place, Sydney, 1915. NRS4481 MS3405
Splendid work by our ladies

Shortly after the outbreak of war, the Australian Branch of the British Red Cross Society was established. Inaugurated by Lady Helen Munro Ferguson, wife of the Governor-General of Australia, it was founded as a voluntary organisation promoted to, staffed and managed by women. The Red Cross in Australia quickly became a movement that mobilised women and the public generally. Tens of thousands joined as volunteers. Local branches were established in cities and country towns across Australia. Some of the first branches in NSW were in Westmead, Tamworth, Goulburn, Parramatta, Redfern, Wollongong and Wagga Wagga. By the end of
January 1915, £55,000 worth of goods, including motor lorries, clothing, blankets and food had been donated and shipped out by NSW branches. Red Cross volunteers sewed, knitted, fundraised and collected donations through stalls and events to support wounded soldiers overseas and in Australia. These were held at locations all over the state including outside the NSW Government Printing Office, Bent Street, Sydney. The Red Cross expanded and adapted its activities to meet wartime demands, for example, establishing the Junior Red Cross, the Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau, the Prisoner of War Department and Voluntary Aid Detachments. By the end of the war there were 2200 Red Cross branches in
Australia—including 623 in NSW—and 82,000 female and 20,000 male volunteers. NSW Red Cross fundraising activities contributed nearly £5 million to the war effort.
Red Cross stall at Government Printing Office,
Bent and Phillip Streets, Sydney, 1918.

NRS4481 ST6216
Working, clearing, building

War wounded soldiers began returning to Australia in mid-1915. Repatriation schemes were introduced in 1916, and by 1919 there were 1500 returned soldiers settled on land holdings in NSW. Most were concentrated in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area, with the remainder scattered across the state from Albury to Wagga Wagga, Byron Bay to Casino, and Bankstown to French’s Forest in metropolitan Sydney. Frenchs Forest was the inaugural soldier settlement scheme of the Voluntary Workers’ Association (VWA) of NSW. It was founded in February 1916 by Dr Richard Arthur, a prominent Presbyterian, social reformer, medical practitioner and Member for Middle
Harbour, and his group of high profile supporters ‘to fight for those who have fought for us, in providing homes for wounded men and soldiers’ widows’. Some 200 acres of scrubby ‘suburban holdings’ at French’s Forest was divided into thirty-seven lots to provide ‘disabled soldiers’ with a ‘comfortable cottage … to raise some poultry, a pig or two and cultivate some ground’. Volunteers from suburban, Public Service and other VWA branches cleared land and built weatherboard houses. By December 1916, 26 homes had been built.
Opening ceremony, Mosman Cottage, French’s Forest Soldier Settlement, 1916. NRS4481
MS4863
Concerts, costumes and carnivals

Britain’s declaration of war on Germany mobilised a range of patriotic, comfort and voluntary aid movements in Australia. Serving on the home front, organisations could raise funds and donate goods in support of Australian soldiers overseas and the Allied campaign more widely. School children were encouraged to contribute to the war effort by participating in patriotic fundraising activities. The NSW Government established the Department of Public Instruction Patriotic Fund to coordinate public school fundraising activity and to consolidate monies raised by local schools across the state. With nearly 250,000 public school children throughout NSW, events like Empire Day
on 24 May 1915—which aimed to raise one shilling per head of school population—were ventures that delivered a substantial collective return. Involving school children in the war effort extended to classroom learning and to ‘manual’ work such as knitting socks for Australian soldiers, building deck chairs, crutches and cupboards for the Red Cross, growing fruit and vegetables for charitable organisations and staging school concerts to raise funds. Another way for schools to raise money was to provide entertainment through patriotic displays. Such an event was held on 14 October 1914 at the Sydney Cricket Ground. Over 10,000 children participated in the spectacular and different schools represented the Empire and
Allied nations. The highlight of the display was the creation of a ‘living Union Jack’ by 7000 children. Other similarly patriotic symbols including the Victoria Cross and the Red Cross were created in subsequent events.
England, Sydney Cricket Ground, Sydney,
14/10/1914. NRS4481 ST5600
The purple pandemic - Protecting the populace

During the final months of the War an influenza pandemic took hold in Europe. It spread rapidly across the globe killing between 50 and 100 million people and affecting up to fifty per cent of the world’s population. On 27 January 1919, the Commonwealth declared that pneumonic influenza existed in the state. The NSW Government quickly introduced a raft of measures to contain the spread of disease. Schools, theatres, dance halls, churches, pubs and other public gathering places were closed. Even though an inoculation vaccine had been developed, the health system was pushed to breaking point. Pneumonic influenza struck down young, healthy adults, and more
males than females. In NSW more than half the deaths occurred in people aged between 20 and 39 years. There were reports of people waking up well in the morning but dead by night fall. A purple cyanotic skin colour was a distinctive tell-tale sign that death was near. Following the last notification of pneumonic influenza in NSW on 6 August 1919, all preventative measures were retracted. In less than a year, more than 12,000 Australians lost their lives to pneumonic influenza. This disastrous health event magnified the social and economic trauma facing Australian society as it entered a period of post war readjustment.
Riley St. Depot, Surry Hills, 1919. NRS4481

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