The Wimmera and The Great War
29 August—23 November 2014

It is the way that the events and effects of The Great War were recorded and shared within our community that is at the heart of this exhibition. Through letters and cards that crossed oceans, objects of daily life from the battlefield, and recordings of life at home we pause to reflect on the events that changed our region and nation.

These stories, mementos, and signifiers of commemoration have been drawn from the Horsham, Natimuk and Dimboola Historical Societies, and Warracknabeal and District Historical Society; Horsham, Natimuk and Warracknabeal Returned Servicemen Leagues; Barengi Gadjin Land Council; and responses to our public call out that unearthed numerous family collections.

The Wimmera and The Great War records, memorialises and celebrates over 150 servicemen and women and their communities. This sample is a starting point for us all to reflect on family, community, and service over the coming four years as we mark the centenary of The Great War.

An HRAG exhibition supported by the Australian Government under the Anzac Centenary Local Grants Program

Education Program

- Implement this education resource for the AusVELS domains of The Arts, Humanities, English, Design Creativity and Technology, Health and Physical Education, and Communication. All activities can be done in your classroom or where indicated, at the gallery. This resource is also available on the gallery website under Teacher Resources.

- Local historians are also available to speak to school groups on request. Please make arrangements with the gallery in advance.

- Bookings are essential for gallery education activities and historian talks.

EDUCATION SERVICES
Education Officer: Debbie Moar
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Enlistment

At the start of World War I, Australia was a nation of around four million people. This meant that there was a potential pool of around 820,000 men of ‘fighting age’ (between 19 and 38).

Official recruitment for the Australian Expeditionary Force commenced in August 1914. With an initial commitment of 20,000 troops, the army was able to set a minimum height requirement of 5 feet 6 inches (168cm) and preference was given to those who had military experience. Australia would be sending its ‘best’ examples of Australian males. By the end of the year over 50,000 had enlisted and thousands more had been rejected on medical grounds.

There was a powerful mythology of war being the event that turned boys into men. Many recruits worried that the fighting might be over before they arrived or that the German army would be a pushover. Posters and leaflets promised an opportunity to see England and Europe. Troops were paid a minimum of six shillings a day (more than three times the wage of English forces) leading to the phrase ‘six bob a day tourists’. Although slightly below the basic wage, it was still attractive to many because of the tough financial conditions and high unemployment in 1914.

Before heading overseas, men spent time in training camps in Australia and Egypt. Conditions in Australia were harsh and not always sanitary. As a consequence some men died before they even left to fight. During their time at camp soldiers had sports meetings. A 1917 program of events mentions the three legged race, tug of war, bending competition, signal competition, potato race, hundred yards race, sack race and blindfold section competition.

Activities

- Run a sports day/afternoon at school featuring the events from a 1917 AIF Sports Meeting.

Gallery activity:

- Read the book Meet the ANZACs (suitable for Grade 3—4)
The vote for conscription - ‘a call to arms’

At the outbreak of war, Australia had a Military Force designed to defend our coast, under the Defence Act of 1903. The British had withdrawn its military defence of Australia only a few years before. Whilst basic military training in the cadet system for 14-26 year olds and the Citizens Military Force for men aged 18 – 60 had been compulsory across the country since 1911, there was no official Australian Military Force for overseas service. It was realised that a totally separate, all volunteer force needed to be raised. They were known as the Australian Imperial Forces (A.I.F.).

By the autumn of 1916, the news of the enormity of A.I.F. casualties on the Western front and in Gallipoli had reached Australia. There was no end to the war in sight. Despite continued encouragement to enlist through the ‘call to arms’ poster and newspaper campaigns, the number of men volunteering had fallen steadily. Australia Government needed to provide reinforcements of 5500 men per month to maintain its forces overseas.

The Referendum

Prime Minister Hughes decided to ask Australian voters in a referendum first in October 1916 and again in December 1917, to vote on the issue of conscription. The referendum if accepted by the Australian people would have extended this requirement to compulsory service overseas on the battle fronts of The Great War.

German families of the Wimmera were put under scrutiny, needing to prove their loyalty to Australia. They were not allowed to vote in the referendum. Throughout the war years, this remained a major issue amongst the community, leading to continued suspicion and animosity towards residents labelled German.

The 1916 Referendum was defeated with 1,087,557 in favour and 1,160,033 against. By the 1917 Referendum, there was pressure from the British to increase the required enlistments to 7,000 men per month. The Horsham Times, reported Prime Minister Hughes proposal to the Australian people; that voluntary enlistments should continue, but any shortfall would be met by compulsory reinforcements of single men, widowers, and divorcees without dependents between 20 and 44 years, who could be called up by ballot. Exemptions included food producers. The referendum was defeated 1,015,159 in favour, and 1,181,747 against. This decisive defeat closed down the potential for compulsory military service for the remainder of the war.

Newspaper articles in the Horsham Times illustrate the concerns, arguments and the passion of residents across the Wimmera to debate this issue. These sentiments were demonstrated in similar articles in Australian newspapers around the country.
TO THE VICTORIAN MOTHERS OF SOLDIERS

You who have already done so much for Australia by giving your sons, brothers, or husbands to fight for Liberty, have now a great opportunity to help those whose glorious valour has won for themselves, and for the Commonwealth, a name that will live for ever.

Do you wish reinforcements to be sent to your dear ones at the front? They only need 7000 men from Australia every month, one man every working day of the week from each electorate in Victoria.

At present they are only getting 1000 men a month, which means double work for our boys in the trenches, and out of every hundred of those men there are 27 under twenty-one-boys whose patriotic spirit makes them go, but whose half-matured bodies cannot bear the strain of war; and in every hundred men there are 21 married men, many of them with big families of tiny children; and amongst the other men who go are returned men going forth again for the second and third time to help their comrades.

And all this time there are, in Victoria 100,000 single men who are now leaving the defence of our country to married men, old men, and boys.

Do not fail your own flesh and blood. Do not be false to Australia; do not be duped not by the enemies in our midst. Send the 100,000 single men who are now leaving the trenches, and out of every hundred of those men there are 27 under twenty-one-boys whose patriotic spirit makes them go, but whose half-matured bodies cannot bear the strain of war; and in every hundred men there are 21 married men, many of them with big families of tiny children; and amongst the other men who go are returned men going forth again for the second and third time to help their comrades.

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Do not fail your own flesh and blood. Do not be false to Australia; do not be duped by the enemies in our midst. Send the right men to help your own at the Front, by voting YES on December 20th.

Yours sincerely,
W. M. HUGHES, Prime Minister.

The Horsham Times, Tuesday 18 December 1917

THE “NO” CAMPAIGN

SENATOR BARNES AT HORSHAM

There was a large attendance at the Horsham Town Hall on Friday night, when Senator Barnes, delivered an anti-conscription address. The chair was occupied by Mr. F. Williamson.

Prior to Senator Barnes’ speech ex Private Jack O’Brien, formerly of Horsham, had a few words to say. He paid a tribute to the late Sergeant Gerald Ryan, who had died on active service, and brought forth cheering when he announced that had Sergeant Ryan lived he would have gained a commission. The speaker said that the majority of returned soldiers had been left to starve. Thousands were walking about trying to sell pencils and envelopes.Personally, he could not get his back pay, and his pension was only 10/ per fortnight. He had also been refused a passport to go to South Africa. He had a service of 830 days, with 606 days outside Australia, and his discharge, which he read, was endorsed good. There had been a good deal of talk about a sixth division. He would go further, and say that when he left England there were seven divisions. He solemnly declared that he had not met two soldiers who had voted “Yes” at the referendum of last year. There might have been more, but he had only met two who admitted it………..

…..Senator Barnes said he regretted very much that there was any necessity for himself or any other man to again appear before the public on this question. He was under the impression that when the people of Australia spoke last year it ended any thought or any possibility of conscripting the manhood of this country. …Before going to England Mr. Hughes said, "I will never consent to any man being sent abroad against his will". But when he came back one of the first things he did was to tell the people that the voluntary system had broken down; and that there was necessity for conscription to compel Australians to go abroad…..

…..Military experts told us that no country could afford to put more than 10 per cent of its population in the fighting line, even when fighting on its own soil. Yet Australia, if Mr. Hughes had his way, would have sent over 11 per cent of her population to fight 13,000 miles away……

….When introducing the War Census Bill in 1915 Mr. Hughes said: "We are asked to contemplate the sending to the front of 100,000 of the best and bravest of our men, and to keep our fighting force at that strength. Any man who studies the dreadful casualty lists can calculate without difficulty what that proposal means. The country is to be depleted week after week, and month after month, of its best men. To keep 100,000 at the front means, if the war lasts another year, not far short of 200,000 men all told. It is perfectly obvious that we cannot meet such a demand upon our manhood without completely, disorganising the whole economic fabric of our existence. Allowing that there were 370,000 men between the ages of 20 and 44; he asked them if they could get out of that number 168,000 physically fit after medical examination…..

….The speaker went on to deal with the cost of the war. Up to date the bill amounted to £212,000,000, and it would be added to at the rate of £80,000,000 yearly even if the voluntary system continued. That would leave an interest bill equal to the customs revenue of Australia. He did not know that anybody wanted to escape that obligation, but there were some people who were piling up profits while most of the soldiers were fighting for six bob a day. People were making immense fortunes, while soldiers’ wives were struggling against the rising prices……

….No country that had introduced conscription had stopped at the single men. In New Zealand they were sending the married men, and they were sending across to Australia for men to carry on the work of the country. We would be in the same position in Australia if conscription were carried. And where were we going to get the labor? He contended that 50 per cent of the soldiers at the front came from the ranks of trades unions and labor organisations. He did not wish to belittle what others had done, but he was sure that the majority of the soldiers were labor men.

The Horsham Times, Tuesday 18 December 2017

Activity:

- Run a class debate on the issue of conscription. Take the viewpoint of Wimmera interest groups such as families of serving soldiers, a food producer, a returned soldier or nurse, a German speaking citizen etc.
- Write a persuasive essay on why Australia should/should not have supported conscription.
- Evaluate enlistment posters from WW1. How do they communicate their message?
- Design your own poster encouraging enlistment or how to vote in the referendum.
Communication

In 1914 communication was through postal mail and telegram—there were no telephones, texting or emails! For soldiers and their families letters, postcards and parcels were exchanged over the ocean to bring news of their welfare and to bring comfort whilst fighting at the front. Receiving a letter from home became a precious event in a soldiers life. Soldiers could not disclose the exact location and movements of their battalion for fear of the enemy’s interception of information. Parcels were sent to soldiers from the Australian Comfort Fund, an organisation of volunteers formed to distribute free comforts such as food, tobacco, clothing and socks to the Australian fighting men.

To boost morale and give the soldiers a well earned rest, they were granted a short period of leave. Men were granted 10-day leave passes with ration books that they could use to go to England or Paris. Consequently many postcards of major tourist destinations such as the London Bridge and the Eiffle Tower, were sent home. Many soldiers had their studio portraits taken while in London, which could be made into a postcard to send home.

Soldiers also kept diaries recording their daily lives. The diaries were pocket sized and the writing was in pencil.

Activity:
- Take photographs of iconic landmarks around your town and turn the images into postcards
- Learn to embroider!

Gallery Activities:
- Write a postcard to a friend and send it in the mail.
- Design a postcard
Somewhere in France  
Monday Jan 29/17  

My Dear Sister  

Just a few lines and a card to let you know I am all right and only doing a bit of a freeze these times, the place has been white with snow for about 3 weeks it is quite a common thing to see ice six inches thick on the ponds around here the civilians have to chop a hole through it with an axe in the mornings before their cows can get a drink, it amused me the first time I seen one of them lashing in to a water hole with an axe. I suppose you will wonder how I come to be where they were watering cows, well I will tell you, we came out of the trenches for a spell and I was sent to a sniping school for a few days, about 50 miles from the firing line. I had a very decent time there we were shooting most of the time I was not sorry to get away from the trenches and the Big Guns for a while. I am back again now as we are all feeling pretty fresh........  

Excerpt from a letter sent home from Hal to  
“My Dear Sister, Somewhere in France, Monday 29 January 1917” Harold Edwin Marra (Netherby)  
Service no. 345 Private 38th Battalion, A Company  
On loan from a private family collection

Gallery Activities:
- Write a letter to a friend and post it.  
- Write a letter from the point of view of a soldier writing home or of a family member writing to a soldier.  
- Penmanship—practice cursive writing. Practice writing with pen and ink.
Extract from September 19 1915, ‘Shrapnel Gully’ Lemnos, Mudros.


Private Nelson Langley (Rupanyup)
Service no. 8, 4th Light Horse Brigade, headquarters
On loan from a private family collection.

Gallery Activities:

Write a diary entry for a day you have had this week.

Imagine you are a soldier/nurse in WW1. Write a diary entry from their perspective.
Commemoration

When soldiers died on the front from illness or in battle families were sent bereavement cards from the Australian Military. Soldiers efforts and lives were commemorated with the awarding of medals, service badges, and citations. Towns erected commemoration boards and war memorials. Some were very elaborate.

The Dead Man’s Penny

The Dead Man’s Penny is a commemorative medallion which was presented to the next of kin of the men and women who died during The Great War. The bronze medallion features an image of Lady Britannia surrounded by two dolphins (representing Britain’s sea power) and a lion (representing Britain) standing over a defeated eagle (symbolising Germany). Around the outer edge of the medallion are the words ‘He died for freedom and honour’. Next to Lady Britannia is the deceased soldier’s name, with no rank provided to show equality in their sacrifice. The Dead Man’s Penny was accompanied by a letter from King George V, stating ‘I join with my grateful people in sending you this memorial of a brave life given for others in the Great War’.

Sourced from The National Museum of Australia.

Activity:

- Research a soldier from the exhibition using the Australian War Memorial website http://www.awm.gov.au/
  Find the same type of information as is provided on our exhibition labels. An example is provided above about Lawrence Robert Parks. Information is found searching the Embarkment Rolls, Roll of Honour (soldiers who died at war) and Red Cross (soldiers who were wounded) files in the People tab.

- Research what the Remembrance Medal, 1914—1915 Star, Military Medal, Gallipoli Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal and Mothers and Widows badge were awarded for.

- Find a commemorative object in your town. Is there an honour board or public memorial? Research its history.

- Design your own commemorative object or medal of honour.
**Historians**

Local historians, Graeme Massey and Gillian Francis are available to speak to school groups about themes and items from the exhibition on request.

Graeme Massey is former Secondary College history teacher and a member of the Warracknabeal and District Historical Society. He is the author of Fallen Heroes, Warracknabeal War Memorial, 2002.

Gillian Francis is a member of the Horsham Historical Society and is currently writing a book about WW1 service men and women from the local district with her husband John Francis. Gillian is available in October Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.

Due to the size of the exhibition and the space it takes up in our gallery, school groups larger than 12 will be divided in two. An activity from this education resource will be run by gallery staff for one group whilst the other group will view the exhibition with a historian. The groups will then swap over.

**Duration**—1—1.5hrs BOOKINGS ESSENTIAL (At least ones week notice needs to be given to arrange a floor talk. When booking please indicate how long your visit will be, the age group, and AusVELs domain focus of your students)

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The Great War Time line

4 August 1914 Britain declares war on Germany

10 August 1914 Volunteers recruiting began in Australia
By the end of 1914, 52,561 Australian volunteers had enlisted for overseas service.

9 November 1914 HMAS Sydney destroyed the German raider SMS Emden at the Coco (Keeling) islands

26 November 1914 Australian Troops arrived in Egypt for further training

1915

25 April 1915 Troops land at ANZAC Cove
Australian, New Zealand, British and French troops made a pre-dawn amphibious landing on the Gallipoli Peninsula, Turkey.

2 May 1915 Baby 700
Australian and New Zealand troops attacked the Turkish occupied feature known as the Baby 700. 1,000 Australian lives were lost.

24 May 1915 Burial Truce
A temporary truce was negotiated between Australian and Turkish troops to recover the dead from no-man’s land for burial.

6-9 August 1915 The August Offensive
A series of British attacks were launched along the Gallipoli Peninsula in a renewed attempt to break out from the beach heads at ANZAC and Cape Helles and capture the high ground of the Kildi Bair Plateau and the Sari Bair Range.

6 August 1915 Battle of Lone Pine
Australians assaulted the Turkish position and spent the next three days defending their line. So fierce was the fighting at Lone Pine, the ANZACs suffered 2,277 casualties.

7 August 1915 Charge at Nek
Dismounted Australian Light Horsemen charged the Turkish trenches. From the 8th and 10th regiments 234 were killed and some 140 wounded.

19 December 1915 Evacuation of Gallipoli
Australian, New Zealand, and British troops were withdrawn from ANZAC Cove. By then Australians had sustained 26,000 casualties of which 8,000 were killed in action or died of wounds or illness.

1916

1 July 1916 ANZAC troops arrived in France
Australians arrive as the British Offensive on the Somme, France begins.

19-20 July 1916 Battle of Fromelles
Australian and British troops attacked the German position at Fromelles, France. The Australian 5th Division suffered 5,333 casualties in less than 4 hours

23 July - 3 September 1916 Battle of Pozières
ANZAC troops took the village of Pozières. All Australian divisions suffered heavily under bombardment, incurring 5,285 casualties over five days.

4-5 August 1916 Battle of Romani
Australian, New Zealand and British mounted troops engaged up to 8,000 Turks.

28 October 1916 First Conscription Referendum
Australians voted on the issue of conscription, which was narrowly rejected.

5-17 November 1916 Battle of Flers
After returning from the Somme, ANZAC troops attempted to take the village of Flers.

18 November 1916 Battle of Somme ended

1917

March 1917 The Germans Withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line

6 April 1917 United States of America declared war on Germany

11 April 1917 First battle of Bullecourt
Australian Troops assaulted the Hindenburg line at Bullecourt. The battle cost the 4th Division 3,000 casualties, of which 1,170 were taken as prisoner – the largest capture of Australian Troops on the Western Front.

3-17 May 1917 Second battle of Bullecourt
Australian and British Troops again attacked the Hindenburg line at Bullecourt. All Australian divisions suffered heavily under bombardment, incurring 7,482 casualties.

7 - 14 June 1917 Battle of Messines
Australian troops formed the southernmost flank of the British attack on Messines Ridge. The ANZAC casualties numbered about 13,900.

20-25 September 1917 Battle of Menin Road
ANZACs attacked Menin Road, Ypres in Belgium as part of the British offensive. Again victory was not without heavy losses, with Australians suffering 5,000 casualties.

26 September 1917 Battle of Polygon Wood
Australian Troops attacked the German stronghold of Polygon Wood as part of the third battle of Ypres and sustained 5,700 casualties.

4 October 1917 Battle of Broodseinde
Australian troops captured the German position at Broodseinde Ridge at the cost of 6,500 casualties.

12 October 1917 Attack on the village Passchendaele

31 October 1917 Battle of Beersheba
Mounted Australian Light Horse charged the fixed Turkish defences at Beersheba in Palestine.

20 December 1917 Second Conscription Referendum
Once again Australians voted on the issue of conscription, and once again it was narrowly rejected.

1918

21 March 1918 Spring Offensive
The German Army launched an attack, aimed at splitting British and French. The British were hard hit on the old Sommes battlefield of 1916.

27 March - 30 April 1918 Attack on Dernancourt
Australian troops were attacked around the Village of Dernancourt to Albert. The Australian 4th division sustained 1,230 casualties.

24-25 April 1918 Villers-Bretonneux
Germans troops had captured the village of Villers- Bretonneux to which Australian troops launched a counter attack. The attack cost 1,469 casualties across two brigades.

4 July 1918 Battle of Hamel
Australia and her allies deployed aircraft, artillery and armour in combination with infantry to take the town of Hamel. It was the first time Americans fought alongside Australians. The Australians suffered 1,204 casualties.

8 August 1918 Battle of Amiens
In response to the Spring Offensive, 20 allied divisions launched a counter-attack against the German Army at Amiens. It was later described as the ‘black day of the German Army in this war’, but it came at a cost of 6,000 Australian casualties.

31 August - 2 September 1918 Battle of Mont St Quentin
Australian troops launched an attack and captured the towns of Mont St Quentin and Péronne.

18 September 1918 Preparing for the Hindenburg Line
Australian troops assisted the British in securing a position from which to launch an attack on the Hindenburg Line.

28 September 1918 Battle at Megiddo
British and Australian troops continued an offensive into Palestine during the battle of Megiddo, in which 70,000 Turkish soldiers were taken prisoners.

29 - 30 September 1918 Breaking the Hindenburg Line
Australian and American troops, involving artillery, aircraft and tanks, spearheaded the British attack on the Hindenburg line.

5 October 1918 Battle of Montbrehain
The Australian troops fought their last action on the Western Front at Montbrehain.

30 October 1918 Turkey signs armistice
The Turkish Government signed an armistice, bringing an end to the fighting in the Middle East.

11 November 1918 Armistice Day
The German Government signed an armistice that brought an end to the First World War. By the war’s end 61,512 Australians had been killed or died of wounds or illness, and 152,000 had been wounded.
## Resources

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<td>Australian War Memorial soldier record research</td>
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<td>Department of Veterans Affairs—Education Resources</td>
<td><a href="http://www.dva.gov.au/commems_oawg/commemorations/education/Pages/education%20resources.aspx">http://www.dva.gov.au/commems_oawg/commemorations/education/Pages/education%20resources.aspx</a></td>
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