

*How We Remember: New Zealanders and the First World War*

Edited by Charles Ferrall and Harry Ricketts

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Over the last few decades, the study of memory and the First World War has emerged as a noteworthy subset within examination of 1914-1918. With questions of how we might make sense of those years gaining ever increasing public space, there has never been a better time for an audit of New Zealand's memory of the conflict. *How We Remember* approaches this complex, occasionally contested, yet largely uncharted territory by recruiting the efforts of twenty of the country's historians, writers, dramatists and commentators.

One defining feature of this book, worth mentioning at the outset, is that its' essays tend towards taking the three words of the title as a statement rather than a question. That is they are less of an endeavour to provide an answer to how we remember -though some contributors raise some ideas on that front - and more a series of individual reflections on what we have 'cherished and valued, forgotten and ignored, constructed and reframed' (blurb). Further augmenting the eclectic quality of the enterprise is how the contributors ponder in a plethora of directions.

This approach certainly impresses the personal nature of this very human topic and validates the premise that we remember in varying ways. However, it grants little in the way of a cohesive feel to the project. Unarranged contents, fluctuating engagement with the titular issue of how we remember (which seems to be an afterthought at best for several essays) and some eyebrow raising remarks add to this fragmented impression. Indeed some authors' premises and rhetoric might make them more of the subject of how we remember than they intended. Examples include a claim that all 'Occidentals' have been shaped by the war 'since no event had done more to create the social order that we all still live in' (169) - so much for the invention of mouldboard ploughs, the reformation, 1492, James Watt's steam engine and effective birth control. Competing with this is the astounding assertion that the Second World War had 'none of the mindless horror of the Western Front trench' (240), which suggests we should be asking some very hard questions about how that war has been remembered!

While the essays take up a wide range of subjects/tasks and mix varying ratios of historical information and personal reflection, some distinct approaches are apparent. Several pieces, for instance, focus on consideration of how the contours of memory were shaped. The introductory chapter launches the project on this note and offers an insightful consideration of the complicated relationship between contemporary experiences and subsequent interpretations of the war. Likewise John Priestley's essay begins with his family's war stories and ponders how the march of time and geopolitical currents will influence posterity's sense of these and similar memories.

Two further essays in this approach advance some curiously clashing premises. Firstly, Jock Phillips offers an account of the evolution of public sense of the war across the twentieth century. Phillips argues that New Zealand's memory of the war was dominated by remembrance diction which effectively suppressed a definitive soldiers' memory of the conflict. Phillips has advanced this interpretation several times since the late 1980s and sadly forgoes the opportunity to respond to the various works which have challenged this manner of interpretation since then (Scott Worthy offered a robust critique of this reading of New Zealand memory a decade ago). The account concludes that 'It was not until the 1980s, when Maurice Shadbolt published his *Voices of Gallipoli* and Chris Pugsley started to document the experience with some serious research, that New Zealanders wrestled once more with the awful realities of that war (240).' Curiously contrasting with Phillips' sense that Shadbolt's work represents an uncovering of realities, is Charles Ferrall's analysis of Shadbolt's fictionalised play *Once on Chunuk Bair* and

his collection of veteran interviews, *Voices of Gallipoli* as mythologizing the events of the Gallipoli campaign. Ferrall documents various instances where Shadbolt's historical narratives deviated from or distorted historical realities to serve contemporary concerns, notably those around nationalism. As Ferrall concludes '*Voices of Gallipoli* and *Once on Chunuk Bair* have a significant place in the history of how Gallipoli has been remembered but should not otherwise influence how we remember the campaign' (108).

Another recurring approach is the examination of specific lives and historical episodes, often seeking to recover what has gone down the memory hole. Examples include David Grant's examination of Mark Briggs and conscientious objection which welcomingly shines more light on what is becoming a recurring point of interest in memory of the war. Minor quibbles include some minor lapses in memory; the Seventh Day Adventists were also recognised as 'legitimate objectors' (127) and the claim that Briggs and Archibald Baxter 'were New Zealand's first successful military dissenters', aside from needing a definition of success, seems to forget the pre-war 'prisoners of Ripa Island' (126). Other historic individuals considered include Anna Rogers' examination of Fanny Speedy who served with the New Zealand Army Nursing Service and Paul Diamond's examination of the context and fallout of Wanganui Mayor Charles Mackay's shooting of D'Arcy Cresswell in a homosexual blackmail attempt gone wrong. There are also several essays which focus on wider historical circumstances. Redmer Yska, for example, outlines the editorial strategy the muckraking *Truth's* adopted to navigate wartime restrictions on the press. The result saw the publication skirting censorship by mixing criticism of wartime circumstances with the sense of itself as a champion of the ordinary soldier. Monty Soutar outlines the events and forces surrounding the dismissal of four officers from the Maori Contingent and tracks the racial and political circumstances within the decision. Lastly, Jane Hurley examines the treatment and experiences of New Zealand POWs imprisoned by the Turks.

A subset of those essays grounded in historical contexts is the consideration of the relationship between memories and particular artefacts. Jenny Haworth examines the history behind New Zealand's war art and what it did, and did not, express. Sandy Callister considers Jan Nigro's art as a site of post-war memories. John Horrocks' semi-polemic essay critiques the forms New Zealand's memorials have taken, though is unsatisfyingly inarticulate in linking adjectives ('glorification', 'living purpose', 'poignant', 'necropolis') with the memorials being reviewed and his larger ideas of appropriate commemoration. John Broughton intersperses the Maori action song *Te Ope Tuatahi* with memories of the role and experiences of the Maori Contingent in the war.

Another distinct approach is seen in those essays exploring personal vantage points and commentary which, complementing the personal nature of these reflections, pursue a wealth of directions. John Campbell, selecting a name off an Awakino memorial, questions the circumstances that led to 'Cecil Bernard Carrington' being inscribed on the stone as well as his own family history and sense of the World Wars. Jane Tolerton juxtaposes the emotion around the 2004 interning of the Unknown Warrior with the silence around the veterans she studied and interviewed in the course of her work. Christopher Pugsley reflects on his personal memories of the Gallipoli landscape, citing his knowledge of the battles waged there, his emotional responses to visiting the site and the physical changes the landscape has undergone over the course the last three decades. Simon During begins his piece with the sense of the war he developed from his family's European background and A.J. Taylor, though rapidly refocuses on the fall of the Weimar Republic and his adolescent discovery of Kafka and Céline. Dave Armstrong reminisces on the formation of his sense of 1914-1918 and its investment in his play *King and Country*. Key points on this journey include his coming of age during the Vietnam War protests, his later interest in his Grandfather's service and his conclusions on the continuing difficulties of making sense of the war. The navel gazing reaches its height in Hamish Clayton's contemplation of some of the difficulties of the contemporary novelist to imagine and write of New Zealander's war experiences.

Finally, C.K. Stead gives a select review of war literature and poetry, shot through with their impact on his development and sense of the conflict.

In final, many of the bits, in this book of bits, are impressive, interesting and original; Hurley, Ferrall and Soutar in particular offer some cutting edge contributions to the historiography. In a wider sense, given the dearth of studies of New Zealand memories of the war this volume is perhaps not a bad way to, hopefully, kick start some conversations on the subject of how we remember.