

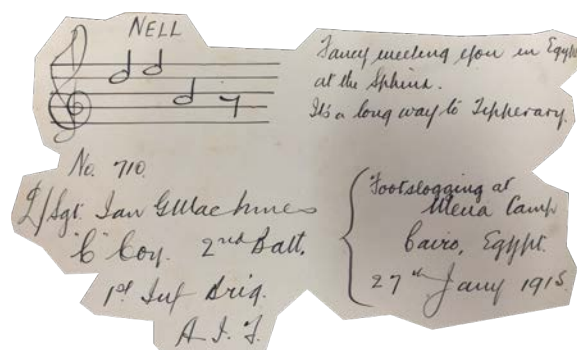
## Impressions of Empire: Autograph books as a historical source, 1899–1919

Alexandra McKinnon

“Fancy meeting you in Egypt at the Sphinx. It’s a long way to Tipperary,” wrote Lance Sergeant Ian Gordon MacInnes of the 2nd Battalion on 27 January 1915.<sup>1</sup> This message was left in an autograph book belonging to Sister Nellie Constance Morrice, who served with the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS) during the First World War. While the relationship between the two is otherwise unknown, they perhaps knew one another from Sydney. MacInnes would die shortly thereafter, last seen on the far side of Lone Pine on 25 April 1915.<sup>2</sup> Aside from a portrait, taken in civilian clothes before he left Australia for the last time, this is the only record of MacInnes in the Australian War Memorial’s collection; he was not at the front long enough to write home.

In the archives of the Memorial, autograph books hold dozens of inscriptions left by men and women during their service, extending across the breadth of Australian wartime experience. The signatures, messages, poems, and drawings left in their pages are a previously unconsidered historical source, and form the basis of this research. Taken as a collective, these autograph books suggest the complexities of the British Empire in the early twentieth century, moving beyond the relationship between Australia and Britain. These records are drawn from the autograph books of ten Australian women, who served as nurses across the battlefields of the South African (Boer) War and the First World War. These women were both witness and participant in these conflicts; their role as non-combatants brought them into contact with a range of those who served.

Autograph books are both personal and national history, neither private diary nor intended for public consumption. Instead, they occupy a space in between. This is reflected in an inscription by George Lambert, the Australian landscape artist whose painting *Anzac, the*



Fancy meeting you in Egypt at the Sphinx.  
It's a long way to Tipperary.  
Footslogging at Mena Camp  
Cairo, Egypt  
27th Jan 1915.

Autograph book of Nellie Morrice.

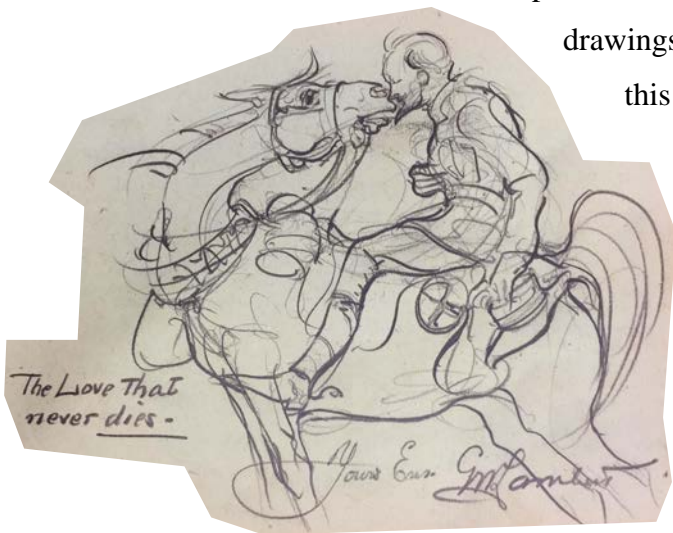
<sup>1</sup> Autograph book of Sister Nellie Constance Morrice, Australian War Memorial (AWM) PR06103.

<sup>2</sup> 710 Lance Sergeant Ian Gordon MacInnes, 2nd Battalion, Australian Red Cross Society Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau file, AWM 1DRL/0428: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1403954>.

*landing 1915* is one of the iconic images of the First World War, featuring Australian troops ascending the steep hillside of Gallipoli. Lambert corresponded with Staff Nurse Charlotte Elizabeth Evans during the war, and he left a sketch in her autograph book towards the end of the war.<sup>3</sup> The illustration was a self-portrait of Lambert and his horse, captioned, “The love that never dies”. This was not the imagery of Lambert’s public art, nor is it a reflection of his innermost thoughts.

Autograph books are a record of interaction and engagement, situating individual remembrance within the sweeping national narratives of conflict and loss. Rather than a definitive study, these autograph books provide a means of exploring portrayals of life at the front, attitudes towards Britain, and perceptions of the broader British Empire. This research is structured around several major themes: exploring representations of the self and the “other”, the experience of conflict, and portrayals of the dead. In the pages of these autograph books, these themes are inseparable, interwoven in scrawled inscriptions and scattered drawings. Given that autograph books are a visual medium,

this research also incorporates illustrations and texts from the original documents. While the focus of this research is the images and illustrations within the pages of these books, it is also drawn from the broader collection of records held by the Memorial. This is an opportunity to bring this material culture into the historical record.



The love that never dies  
Autograph book of Charlotte Evans.

### **Autograph books as a historical source**

In the autograph books considered in this research, inscriptions reflect a process of interaction and engagement across the boundaries of the British Empire and throughout this time period, each inscription serving as an individual marker of remembrance. Autograph books were once a ubiquitous presence in the Australian cultural landscape, exchanged between classmates, colleagues, and friends. (In 1976, *The Australian Women’s Weekly*

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<sup>3</sup> Autograph book of Staff Nurse Charlotte Elizabeth Evans, AWM PR05097.

bemoaned “Whatever happened to autograph books?”<sup>4</sup>) This practice continued as Australian troops embarked for service overseas, recording their interactions with those with whom they came into contact. In the archives of the Memorial, private records reveal autograph books kept by Australian personnel through to the end of the Second World War and other autograph books filled with inscriptions left by Australians. This interaction reflected the breadth of the British Empire, with engagement between British and colonial forces, medical staff, and civilian populations. Inscriptions were not only a reflection of their authors, but of the owners of these autograph books. Each signature is an acknowledgement of remembrance and shared experience, *from* its author, *to* the owner of the autograph book.

This research uses the autograph books of ten Australian army nurses as a means of exploring Australian attitudes towards Britain and the British Empire between 1899 and 1919. Through their work, these women’s interactions spanned the breadth of these conflicts, engaging with an audience beyond individual units, while their own histories reflect the complexities of Australian identity. Sister Agnes Cocks<sup>5</sup> of Adelaide and Sister Mary Anne (Bessie) Pocock<sup>6</sup> of Grafton, New South Wales, served in the Boer War. Pocock served with the New South Wales Army Nursing Service Reserve (NSWANSR), attached to the New South Wales Army Medical Service, the first official organisation for female army nurses in the Australian colonies. She subsequently served in the First World War, having been promoted to matron, and was awarded the Royal Red Cross, Second Class. Cocks volunteered with the South Australian contingent during the Boer War, and remained in Johannesburg for an extended period. She also served in the First World War, but records held at the Memorial only cover her service in South Africa.

Another eight women included in this sample served in the First World War, either with the AANS or Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Military Nursing Service (QAIMNS). Australian nurses during the First World War saw service across different fronts, representing the breadth of Australian service. Charlotte Evans<sup>7</sup>, of Lindfield, New South Wales, served in Egypt, while Staff Nurse Elizabeth Sophy Kemp<sup>8</sup>, of Wynnum South, Queensland, served in

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<sup>4</sup> “Whatever happened to autograph books?”, *The Australian Women’s Weekly*, 28 July 1976, p. 75.

<sup>5</sup> Autograph book of Sister Agnes Cocks, AWM PR85/067.

<sup>6</sup> Autograph books of Matron Mary Anne (Bessie) Pocock, AWM PR05050.

<sup>7</sup> Autograph book of Charlotte Evans.

<sup>8</sup> Autograph book of Staff Nurse Elizabeth Sophy Kemp, AWM Autographs and Autograph Books Collection, Souvenirs 10.

Egypt and Salonika. Staff Nurse Gertrude May Skyring<sup>9</sup>, of Enoggera, Queensland, nursed at the 1st Australian General Hospital in Rouen. Skyring and Nellie Morrice<sup>10</sup> had brothers serving in the First World War with the Australian Imperial Force. Morrice, originally from Sutton Forrest, New South Wales, had nursed at the Royal Hospital for Women in Sydney before the war, and saw service in Egypt, England, and France.

For these women, the experience of war differed beyond geography. Staff Nurse Isoline Jeanette Cowley<sup>11</sup>, of Caulfield, Victoria, served with QAIMNS before reenlisting with the AANS in 1917. At 42, Cowley was among the older volunteers for service with the AANS. Alongside women like Bessie Pocock and Agnes Cocks, who had experienced a previous generation of Australian service with the Boer War, Cowley's engagement with Australian and other forces was presumably different to that of women such as Staff Nurse Amy Glenthora Bembrick.<sup>12</sup> Bembrick, of Epping, New South Wales, was 23 on enlistment in 1917, and met her future husband while serving in Salonika. Staff Nurse Alice Fullerton (Lindsay) Gray<sup>13</sup> and Matron Margaret Anne Gray<sup>14</sup> were sisters, originally from Sydney. They were living in London during the outbreak of the First World War and volunteered for service with QAIMNS. The war service of Lindsay and Margaret Gray was intertwined, and both autograph books were originally attributed to Margaret Gray. Messages addressed to Lindsay Gray were noted in one autograph book during this research, and the attribution for that autograph book was subsequently revised.

These autograph books reflected fragments of experience, and form a small section of the Memorial's collection. Some of these autograph books are included in broader collections of records associated with one person's service, while others are part of the Autographs and Autograph Books Collection, which includes both autograph books and autographed items. This research is a reconsideration of their value as a historical source, removing them from the periphery of collections. Taken as a collective, these autograph books provide a new understanding of imperial identity as manifested in their pages.

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<sup>9</sup> Autograph book of Staff Nurse Gertrude May Skyring, AWM Autographs and Autograph Books Collection, Souvenirs 10.

<sup>10</sup> Autograph book of Nellie Morrice.

<sup>11</sup> Autograph book of Staff Nurse Isoline Jeannette Cowley, AWM PR00134.

<sup>12</sup> Autograph book of Staff Nurse Amy Glenthora Bembrick, AWM Autographs and Autograph Books Collection, Souvenirs 10.

<sup>13</sup> Autograph book of Staff Nurse Alice Fullerton (Lindsay) Gray, AWM PR84/265.

<sup>14</sup> Autograph book of Matron Margaret Anne Gray, AWM PR84/265.

## Reflecting nurses

The owners of these autograph books are a permanent presence in these pages, imperfectly reflected in the inscriptions written for them. Nurses negotiated the space between the home front and the battlefield, occupying a space “of but not in” the armed forces. The professional capacity of these nurses is consistently eclipsed by their presence as a reminder of home. The same quote from Scottish historical novelist and poet Walter Scott is used to describe various nurses at least five times between 1901 and 1919:

*O, Woman! in our hours of ease,  
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please,  
When pain and anguish wring the brow,  
A ministering angel thou!*<sup>15</sup>

In these autograph books, nurses are presented as archetypes: the “ministering angel” described by Scott, the romantic ideal, or the maternal figure. In one sketch, “the nurse supreme” controls the space of the hospital, withholding food from a patient on bedrest.<sup>16</sup> This nurse is an older maternal figure, in control of her domain and at the centre of the drawing. Her severe attitude assists in recovery, and is ultimately for the benefit of the pictured soldier. A different relationship is presented in a sketch labelled “spare time”.<sup>17</sup> A nurse and a soldier lean on the railing of a ship, their shoulders brushing against one another. The relationship between the two is left unsaid, but the power dynamic has shifted; this younger woman is not the “nurse supreme” of the other sketch, but an equal partner, and potential romantic foil. In another drawing, the nurse in the image is further diminished. Less than half the size of her patient, the woman reaches up to offer hot cocoa.<sup>18</sup> The caption suggested that this interaction was drawn from experience:

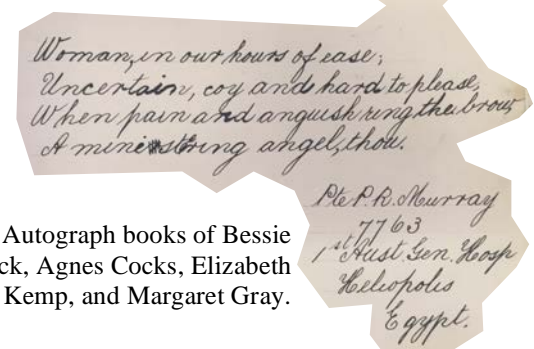
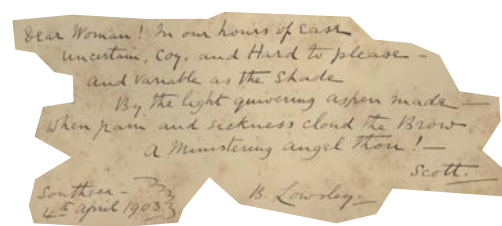
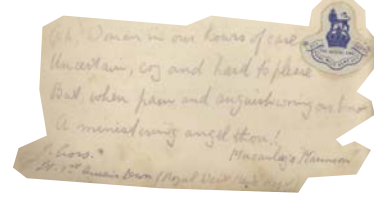
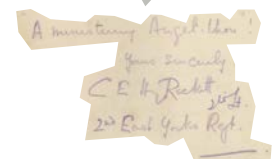
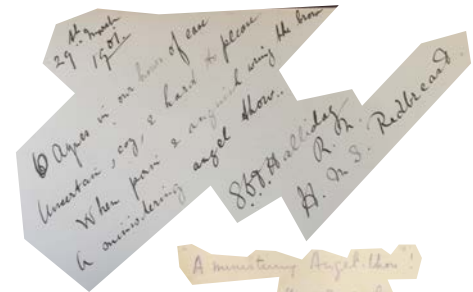
*This is the wish I wish for thee,  
That may your fortunes always be,  
As good as the Cocoa you made for me.*

<sup>15</sup> Autograph books of Bessie Pocock, Agnes Cocks, Elizabeth Kemp, and Margaret Gray, among others.

<sup>16</sup> Autograph books of Bessie Pocock.

<sup>17</sup> Autograph book of Isoline Cowley.

<sup>18</sup> Autograph book of Margaret Gray.



Autograph books of Bessie Pocock, Agnes Cocks, Elizabeth Kemp, and Margaret Gray.



The nurse supreme  
Autograph book of Bessie Pocock.



Spare time  
Autograph book of Isoline Cowley.



This is the wish I wish for thee  
That may your fortunes always be  
As good as the cocoa you made for me  
Autograph book of Margaret Gray.

These images reflected the owners of these autograph books, who were also the intended audience for the drawings, but reinterpreted the role of nurses. “Spare time” and the hot cocoa illustration were created during the First World War. “Spare time” was drawn for Isoline Cowley, as she nursed in Egypt, while the latter was created for Margaret Gray in France. “The nurse supreme” was an inscription from the Boer War, created for Bessie Pocock. As with most inscriptions, the relationships between these women and the creators of these images is unknown; the inscriptions in these autograph books are momentary glimpses into broader relationships.

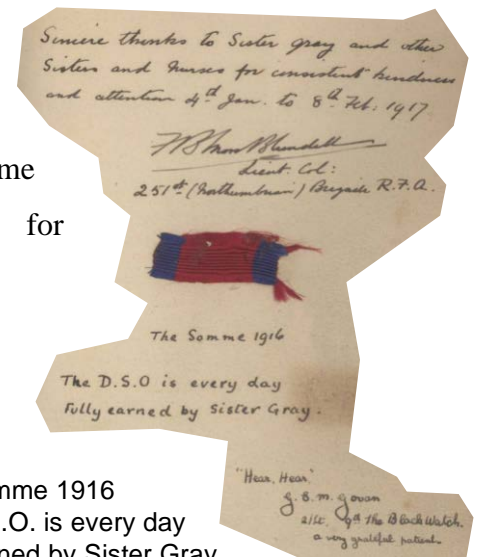
Other inscriptions in these autograph books are more personal, and serve as testament to individual service and devotion. Recovering from wounds sustained in the fighting along the Somme in 1916, Lieutenant-Colonel Frederick Moss-Blundell wrote for Margaret Gray:

*The D.S.O. is every day  
fully earned by Sister Gray.<sup>19</sup>*

Moss-Blundell supplemented this inscription with a piece of ribbon from his own D.S.O., and the message was seconded by “a very grateful patient” from the Black Watch. Beyond direct references to service, the owners of these autograph books are a constant presence in the inscriptions in these pages.

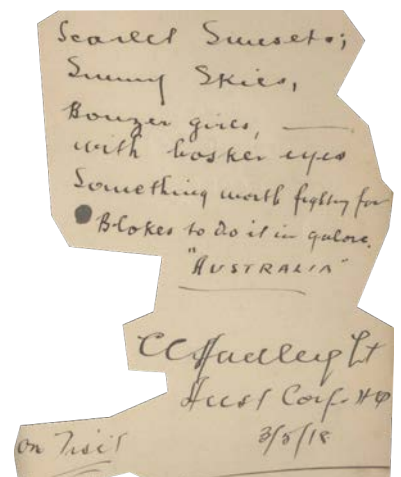
### Representing Australia

During the First World War, many Australian soldiers drew a distinction between being nursed by British nurses and Voluntary Aid Detachment members (known as VADs), and being nursed by Australians. Australian nurses were understood as a reflection of the “bonzer girls with bosker eyes” left in Australia.<sup>20</sup> While the owners of these autograph books were not explicitly mentioned in these messages, they were the primary audience for these inscriptions, firmly linking Australian nurses on service abroad with the “bonzer



The Somme 1916  
The D.S.O. is every day  
fully earned by Sister Gray.  
“Hear, Hear.”

Autograph book of Margaret Gray.



Scarlet sunsets;  
Sunny skies;  
Bonzer girls  
with bosker eyes  
Something worth fighting for  
Blokes to do it in galore  
“AUSTRALIA”

Autograph book of Margaret Gray.

<sup>19</sup> Autograph book of Margaret Gray.

<sup>20</sup> Autograph book of Margaret Gray.

girls” at home. In 1919, on the return to Australia, Tom Steepill, of the 12th Australian Light Horse Regiment, wrote:

*What makes us proud to be Australians?*

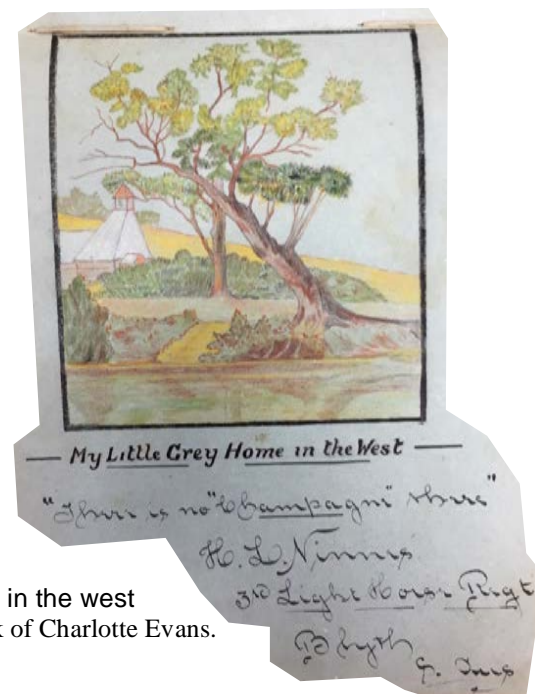
*Our girls, our army, and our country’s freedom.*<sup>21</sup>



Road in England, December / Road in Australia, December

Autograph book of Bessie Pocock.

In inscriptions by Australian forces during the First World War, Australian identity is distinguished from the broader British Empire. While acknowledging a shared military heritage, many inscriptions suggest an inherent difference between colonial and British forces, and between Australia and Britain. An image drawn by an Australian officer shortly before Christmas 1917 acts as a comparison.<sup>22</sup> While recovering at a convalescent home for Australian officers established at Cobham Hall, Kent, two illustrations were created on successive pages. The first image shows an English village in December, covered in snow and depicting a typical English winter scene. The second image shifts the scene to Australia. The illustrations are an acknowledgement of difference and of longing, with the sunny Australian landscape far removed from Christmas in England. This anonymous Australian officer was far from home. A distant home also appeared in a 1918 illustration by Private Horace Leslie Ninnis, of the 3rd Australian Light Horse Regiment.<sup>23</sup> The song *My little grey*



My little grey home in the west  
Autograph book of Charlotte Evans.

<sup>21</sup> Autograph book of Charlotte Evans.

<sup>22</sup> Autograph books of Bessie Pocock.

<sup>23</sup> Autograph book of Charlotte Evans.



*home in the West*, popularised by Australian Peter Dawson in 1911, captioned his drawing. Gum trees occupy the foreground of the image, firmly linking Ninnes' "little grey home" with his South Australian origins.

These representations of Australia mark a shift between 1899 and 1919. There is no acknowledgement of difference in the autograph books from the Boer War, and British soldiers make no mention of any inherent difference in Australian service. Unlike Steephill's specific reference to "our girls, our army, and our country's freedom", Australia is presented in relation to the broader British Empire. For the British soldiers with whom these nurses came into contact, any difference is subsumed by the multitude of similarities, and the ancestral ties between many Australian servicemen and the United Kingdom.

### Imagining the British Empire



A chip off the old block

Autograph book of Elizabeth Kemp.

These autograph books reflect interactions that span the breadth of the British Empire. Although conscious of a distinction between Australia and Britain, inscriptions acknowledge a shared white heritage. A drawing by Gunner Frederick Baxter of the 2nd Australian Field Artillery Brigade illustrated this point.<sup>24</sup> In an illustration captioned "A chip off the old block", a young lion labelled "Australia" has caught a fox labelled "Emden", a reference to the destruction of the SMS *Emden* by the HMAS *Sydney* on 9 November 1914. An older lion watches approvingly, with the reference to Britain requiring no label. This same attitude is

<sup>24</sup> Autograph book of Elizabeth Kemp.

reflected in inscriptions from the Boer War. In the 1900 poem “With French to Kimberley”, Banjo Paterson wrote:

*There met, beneath the world-wide flag, the world-wide Empire’s sons.  
They came to prove to all the earth that kinship conquers space.  
And those who fight the British Isles must fight the British race!*<sup>25</sup>

This imperial continuity was also reflected in other forms. Engagement between members of the British Empire is captured in short inscriptions in these autograph books, such as a thank you note for Margaret Gray. A Canadian captain with the 4th Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force wrote simply:

*From Canada to Australia, with kindest thoughts.*<sup>26</sup>

With few outside subjects in the confines of the hospital, self-portraits were a popular subject for illustrations. Depending on context, soldiers presented themselves in uniform, in the idealised form presented in recruiting posters and patriotic literature, or as patients in hospital, struggling with the physical reality of the war. Some depicted themselves in caricature, such as a drawing by a Scottish soldier with the Queen’s Own Royal Glasgow

Yeomanry.<sup>27</sup> In this illustration, a figure in a kilt encourages the viewer to “Keep up your ‘spirits’”, while clutching a bottle. Drawing from national stereotypes made illustrations immediately recognisable.

Beyond individual representation, the corners of the British Empire were portrayed as a cohesive fighting force, such as through a British sergeant’s toast to British and colonial regiments:

*Here’s luck to NZs and Ausies  
And the Royal Welsh Fusiliers*

*The Cameronian Regiment that fought at  
Armentieres,*

*Side by side they fought and died, while  
shrapnel fell like H--L,*

*Here’s luck to the Scottish rifles and their  
stunt at Neuve-Chapelle*<sup>28</sup>



No matter where you are  
keep up your “Spirits”.

Autograph book of Bessie Pocock.

<sup>25</sup> “With French to Kimberley”, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 September 1900, p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Autograph book of Margaret Gray.

<sup>27</sup> Autograph books of Bessie Pocock.

<sup>28</sup> Autograph book of Gertrude Skyring.

A. TOAST  
Here's luck to NZs and Ausies  
and the Royal Welsh Fusiliers  
The Cameronian Regiment that fought  
at Armentieres, side by side they  
fought and died, while shrapnel  
fell like H--L, Here's luck  
to the Scottish rifles and  
their stunt at Neuve Chapelle  
Sgt J.H. Doan  
1st London Welsh

A toast  
Here's luck to the NZs and Ausies  
And the Royal Welsh Fusiliers  
The Cameronian Regiment that fought  
at Armentieres, side by side they  
fought and died, while shrapnel  
fell like H--L, Here's luck  
to the Scottish rifles and  
their stunt at Neuve Chapelle

Autograph book of Gertrude Skyring.

From every corner of the British Empire, representatives of the “British race” were serving and dying on the battlefields of the Western Front. This shared service acted as a marker of collective identity, reshaping imperial identity through lived experiences.

This same imperial continuity is reflected in references to the Royal Family, in which writers contemplate the position of Australia within the broader British Empire. In her diary, Bessie Pocock recorded, in detail, attending the coronation of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra in 1902, making no distinction between Australian and British patriotism or identity.<sup>29</sup> In 1919, Isoline Cowley recorded the signature of the Prince of Wales in her autograph book.<sup>30</sup> The context was changed, with the signature presented alongside two

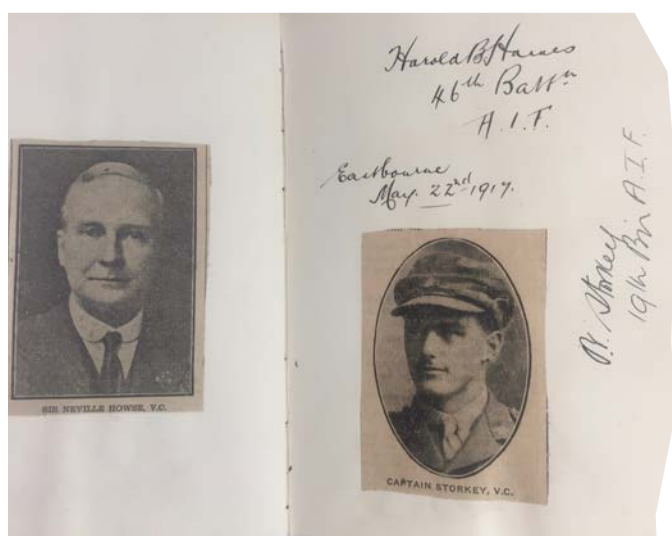
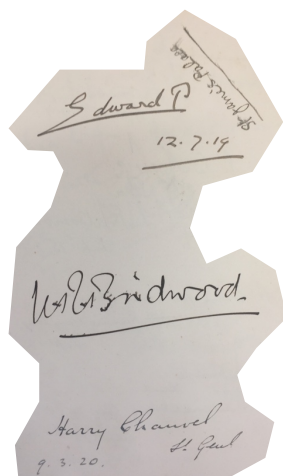
names with Australian associations: General William Birdwood, the British commander of Anzac Corps, and Sir Harry Chauvel, the Australian-born

commander of the Desert Mounted Corps. The placement of these signatures established these men as members of the same imperial elite. Isoline Cowley interspersed inscriptions in her autograph book with pasted images from newspapers that acknowledged Australian winners of the Victoria Cross, including Major General Sir Neville Howse and Captain Percy Valentine Storkey, whose signature was collected next to his image. This contact simultaneously affirmed and transmuted imperial identity, suggesting a distinctly Australian form of imperial patriotism.

Artefacts from the broader collection illustrate these complexities and connections, as reflected through coins held by the Memorial. Coins were a popular talisman throughout this time period, and appear in relation to service during both the Boer War and the First World War. An 1840 Indian rupee coin was modified into a sweetheart brooch by



Autograph book of Isoline Cowley.



<sup>29</sup> Mary Anne (Bessie) Pocock, diary entry, 9 August 1902, AWM PR05050.

<sup>30</sup> Autograph book of Isoline Cowley.

Private John Wildman Emmons, a British soldier who served with the Royal Fusiliers during the Boer War and who had previously served in India.<sup>31</sup> Evans migrated to Australia in 1912, hence its inclusion in the Memorial's collection. Private Arthur Marshall Nicholson of the 5th Battalion carried an 1840 Indian rupee coin during his service in the First World War, as part of a small collection of coins with holes drilled in the top to create pendants.<sup>32</sup> This small collection suggests a continuity between 1899 and 1919, incorporating elements of service from the previous conflict and coins from across the British Empire. Nicholson's collection included an 1898 farthing and 1874 six pence coin, in addition to an 1897 Queen Victoria Jubilee medalet, celebrating 60 years of the reign of Queen Victoria. His collection also included a 1900 peace medalet from the Boer War with a bust of Lord Roberts, the British military commander during the war. Nicholson also included American, Chilean, Dutch, German, and French coins in his collection, but without the hole to connect them as pendants. These artefacts were returned to his family after Nicholson died of wounds sustained in an attack at Menin Road on 21 September 1917.

Evans and Nicholson were not alone. Company Sergeant Major William Oswald of the 13th Battalion connected his identity disc to an 1887 Indian rupee coin,<sup>33</sup> while Private Wilfred James Borthwick of the 5th Australian Machine Gun Battalion did the same with an 1875 Indian rupee coin.<sup>34</sup> Originally from Australia, Private Septimus Ernest Athol Greentree served with the 1st Battalion, Brabant's Horse during the Boer War and with South African forces during the First World War.<sup>35</sup> His improvised identity disc was made from an Indian rupee coin, etched by hand with his name and unit. All of these artefacts have been preserved as markers of Australian service, but reflect the complexities of imperial identity. Across this time period, Australian experience was embedded within the broader British Empire.

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<sup>31</sup> Queen Victoria Sweetheart Brooch (Private J. W. Emmons, Royal Fusiliers), AWM REL29627: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C980328>.

<sup>32</sup> Pendant made from 1840 1/4 Rupee coin, East India Company (Private A. M. Nicholson, 5 Battalion AIF), AWM REL38754.003: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1227012>.

<sup>33</sup> Metal and compressed fibre identity discs (Warrant Officer Class 2 W. Oswald, 13 Battalion, AIF), AWM REL43993: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C253828>.

<sup>34</sup> Identity bracelet (Private W. J. Borthwick, 5 Australian Machine Gun Battalion, AIF), AWM REL34757: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1148028>.

<sup>35</sup> Improvised identity disc (Private S. E. A. Greentree, 11th South African Infantry), AWM REL41725: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1254066>.

## The “other”

Beyond the British Empire, inscriptions reflected the experience of being abroad, serving alongside other foreign forces. Non-white troops and civilian populations are mostly excluded from these autograph books, and absent from references to a British identity. In May 1916, Cecil Fraser of the Royal Flying Corps detailed the experience of being in Egypt, which he referred to as the “Land of the Pharaohs (who died of it)”.<sup>36</sup> For Fraser, the principal import of Egypt was “Australian troops”, while “natives” seemed to appreciate Egypt “no better than anyone else”. Principal products included “Flies, sand, Generals & Beggars”, and principal exports were listed simply as “Ladies”. Egyptian civilians appear infrequently, included as caricatures or as details in landscapes rather than as actors with their own agency. This is a common feature of references to non-white populations. One Australian soldier left a racist poem which suggested God had forgotten to paint the “little Egyptians” white,<sup>37</sup> while another used the purported ignorance of local civilians for a belaboured cricket joke:

*‘Are these Australians good fighters?’*

*‘By Allah, I should say so. Some years ago eleven of them beat all  
England.’<sup>38</sup>*

In a poem referencing the “stunt at Neuve-Chapelle”, Indian soldiers are notably absent, although the Indian Army was a substantial part of the 1915 battle and constituted a third of Allied casualties. References to the breadth of the British Empire referred only to its white inhabitants. In many cases, white nurses were barred from nursing Indian soldiers<sup>39</sup>, which might account for part of this disparity, but interaction clearly still occurred. Margaret Gray’s war service began at Brighton Hospital, working with Indian Army casualties at one of the hospitals which later attempted to remove white nurses.

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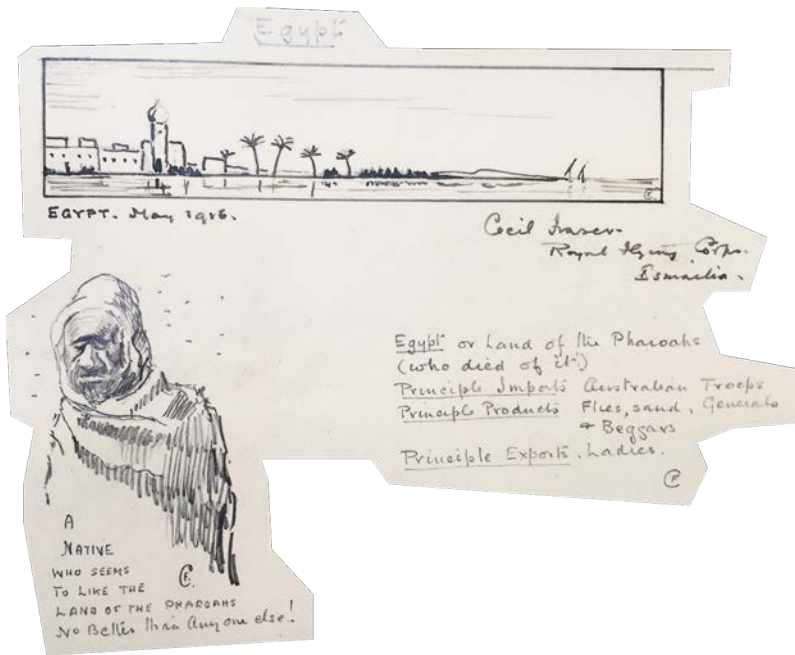
<sup>36</sup> Autograph book of Nellie Morrice.

<sup>37</sup> Autograph book of Elizabeth Kemp.

<sup>38</sup> Autograph book of Margaret Gray.

<sup>39</sup> for further information, see: Alison S. Feil, “Nursing the Other: the representation of colonial troops in French and British nursing memoirs”, in Santanu Das (ed.), *Race, empire, and First World War writing*, Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 158–74.

and Jeffrey Greenhut, “Race, sex, and war: the impact of race and sex on morale and health services for the Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914”, *Military affairs* 45, 1981, pp. 71–4.



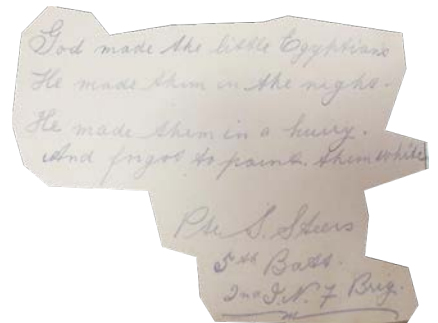
Egypt, or Land of the Pharoahs  
(who died of it)

Principle imports: Australian Troops

Principal Products: Flies, sand, Generals & Beggars

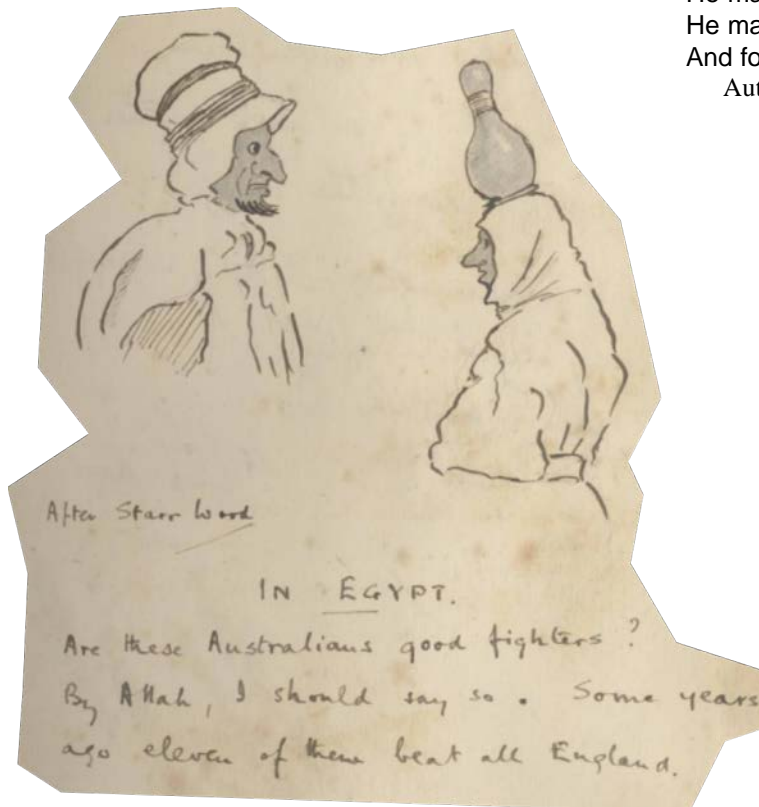
Principle Exports: Ladies

Autograph book of Nellie Morrice.



God made the little Egyptians  
He made them in the night  
He made them in a hurry  
And forgot to paint them white

Autograph book of Elizabeth Kemp.



In Egypt.

Are these Australians good fighters?

By Allah, I should say so. Some years ago eleven of them beat all England.

Autograph book of Margaret Gray.

While noting in February 1915, “We do not get Indians – they may only be looked after by certain of their own people”<sup>40</sup>, Bessie Pocock wrote approvingly in her diary of an Indian lecturer at the YMCA behind the lines in France,<sup>41</sup> and visited a hospital for Indian soldiers in Egypt, bringing violets for the patients.<sup>42</sup> This diary was preserved alongside these autograph books, but Indian soldiers are omitted from inscriptions. While this separation was purportedly a cultural concession for Indian forces, it appears to have originated from a fear of white women engaging with non-white men. Bessie Pocock noted while visiting wounded

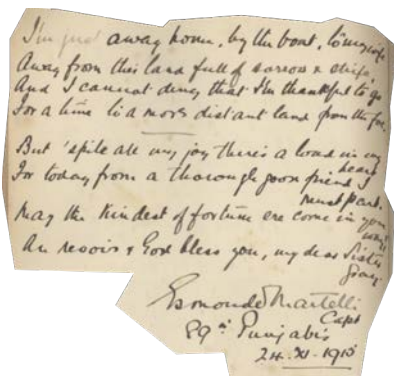
Indian soldiers that “it was most interesting to watch them all – just felt as safe as if they had been our men soldiers. Though how different it was for the poor white women in India in the Crimean War”.<sup>43</sup>

The image of “ministering angels” presented in these autograph books represented the ideal of the “British race” described by Banjo Paterson. While there was no space in this narrative for non-white forces, white officers in the Indian Army were subject to no such restrictions. Captain Esmond Martelli, an Irish solicitor serving with the 89th Punjabis, left a poem in Margaret Gray’s autograph book expressing gratitude for her care and anticipation for leaving “this land full of sorrow and strife”.<sup>44</sup> Each inscription in these autograph

books served to realise an imagined imperial identity, reaffirming a “British race” in the lived experiences of the men and women included in these autograph books.

### Inscriptions as remembrance

Each inscription in an autograph book serves as a record of interaction and engagement. Across the time period in question, inscriptions appeared in Welsh and Gaelic,<sup>45</sup> but also in French, from French and French-Canadian soldiers;<sup>46</sup> in Swahili, from white South African



I'm just away home, by the boat, to my wife  
 Away from this land full of sorrow & strife,  
 And I cannot deny that I'm thankful to go  
 For a time to a more distant land from the foe  
 -  
 But 'spite all my joy there's a load in my heart  
 For today from a thorough good friend I must part  
 May the kindest of fortune ere come in your way  
 Au revoir & God bless you, my dear Sister Gray.

Autograph book of Margaret Gray.

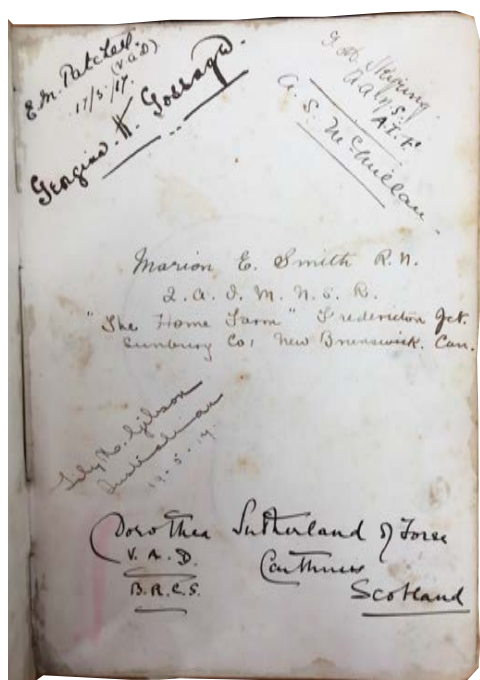
<sup>40</sup> Mary Anne (Bessie) Pocock, diary entry, 2 February 1915, AWM PR05050.  
<sup>41</sup> Mary Anne (Bessie) Pocock, diary entry, 19 April 1916, AWM PR05050.  
<sup>42</sup> Mary Anne (Bessie) Pocock, diary entry, 6 February 1915, AWM PR05050.  
<sup>43</sup> Mary Anne (Bessie) Pocock, diary entry, 2 February 1915, AWM PR05050.  
<sup>44</sup> Autograph book of Margaret Gray.  
<sup>45</sup> Autograph book of Margaret Gray.  
<sup>46</sup> Autograph book of Isoline Cowley.



soldiers;<sup>47</sup> and there are attempts at Arabic from soldiers situated in Egypt.<sup>48</sup> A Rhodesian soldier contributed a map of the African continent to Margaret Gray's autograph book, marking his home and major cities under British colonial rule.<sup>49</sup> *Kia ora*, the Maori-language greeting, appeared at least once in each autograph book.<sup>50</sup> Used equally by Australian and New Zealand soldiers, the inscription suggested an Australasian solidarity. The use of the Maori name for New Zealand, Aotearoa, reflects the complex identities present within the British Empire, and the intercultural contact imperial subjects experienced as a result of wartime service.

Signatures account for approximately half of the inscriptions in these autograph books. These signatures were a record of particular events, such as the men of the New Zealand Mounted Rifle Guard at No. 1 Auxiliary Hospital on 28 February 1916,<sup>51</sup> with the added note, "In appreciation of the kindness shown by the sisters", or attendees for Christmas dinner 1917 at a convalescent home for Australian officers at Cobham Hall, Kent.<sup>52</sup> The first

page of Gertrude Skyring's autograph book reflects this engagement,<sup>53</sup> situating the service of an Australian nurse alongside Australian, British, and Canadian nurses and VADs, serving in the hospitals in Rouen or aboard the hospital trains which brought the wounded in from the battlefields. In the centre of this page, the signature of a Marion E. Smith is visible, giving her address as "The Home Farm", Fredericton Junction, Sunbury County, New Brunswick". The background and service of Staff Nurse Marion Elizabeth Leane Smith reflects the complexities of imperial identity. While Smith enlisted from Canada, she is the only known Australian Aboriginal woman to have served in the First World War.<sup>54</sup> Smith was a Darug woman, and had been born in Liverpool, New South Wales before migrating to Canada as a child.



Autograph book of Gertrude Skyring.

<sup>47</sup> Autograph book of Margaret Gray.

<sup>48</sup> Autograph books of Bessie Pocock.

<sup>49</sup> Autograph book of Margaret Gray.

<sup>50</sup> Autograph books of Bessie Pocock and Margaret Gray, among others.

<sup>51</sup> Autograph book of Margaret Gray.

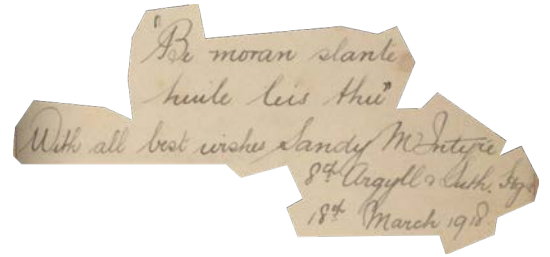
<sup>52</sup> Autograph books of Bessie Pocock.

<sup>53</sup> Autograph book of Gertrude Skyring.

<sup>54</sup> for further information, see: Philippa Scarlett, "An Indigenous nurse in World War One: Marion Leane Smith", *Indigenous Histories*: <https://indigenoushistories.com/2013/10/30/an-indigenous-nurse-in-world-war-one-marion-leane-smith-smith/>.

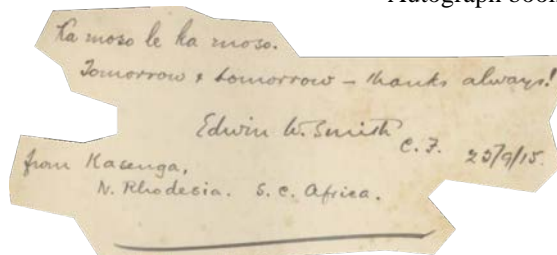


Autograph book of Margaret Gray.



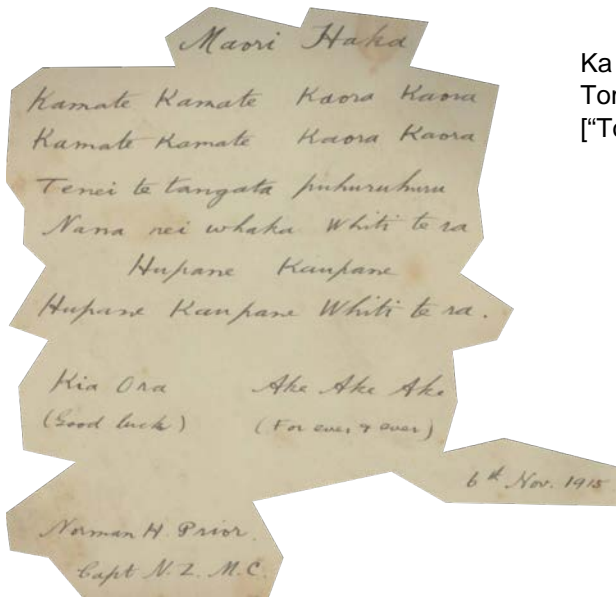
"Be moran slante huile leis thee"  
With all best wishes.  
["Be still looking forward to you", Scottish Gaelic]

Autograph book of Margaret Gray.



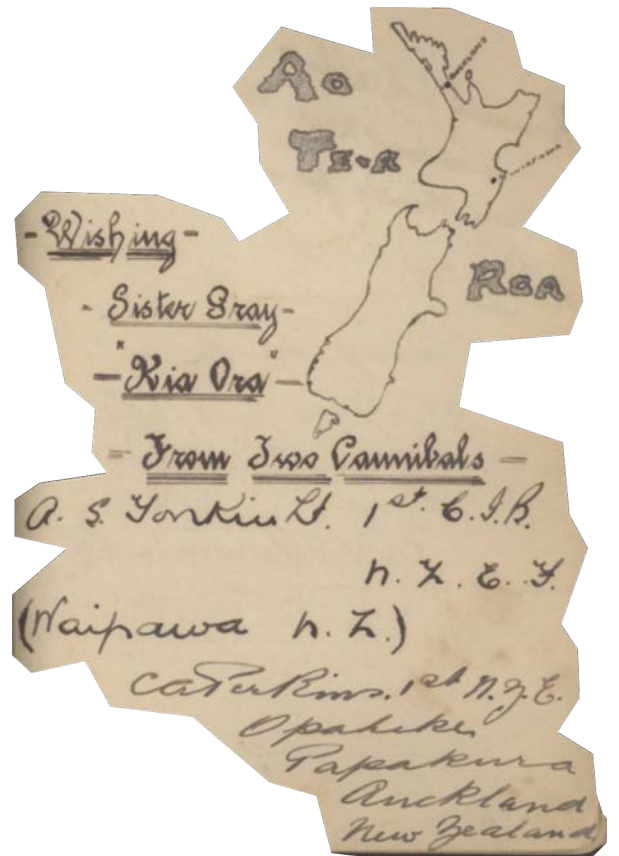
Ka moso le ka moso.  
Tomorrow & tomorrow – thanks always!  
["Tomorrow and tomorrow", Swahili]

Autograph book of Margaret Gray.



Maori Haka  
Kamate Kamate Kaora Kaora  
Kamate Kamate Kaora Kaora  
Tenei te tangata puhuruhuru  
Nana nei whaka whiti te ra  
Hupane Kaupane  
Hupane Kaupane Whiti te ra.  
Kia Ora Ake Ake Ake  
(Good luck) (For ever & ever)

Autograph book of Bessie Pocock.



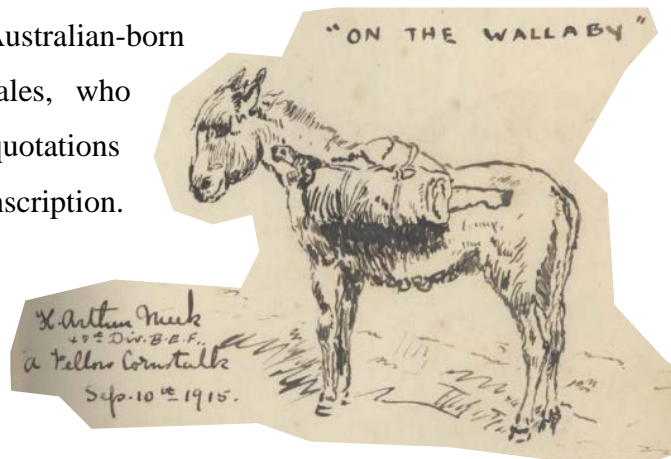
Ao Te-a Roa  
Wishing  
Sister Gray  
"Kia Ora"  
From two cannibals

As with many of the others included in the pages of these autograph books, Smith has no other written record in the archives of the Memorial, and this is the first record in her own words. These signatures serve as an attestation of experience and service.

### Common ground

These autograph books are written in a common language that is now unfamiliar, using popular images and phrases as substitutes for their own. When a soldier with the 48th Division, British Expeditionary Force, described Margaret Gray as a “fellow cornstalk”<sup>55</sup>, the term would have been immediately understood: Australian-born children, particularly those from New South Wales, who purportedly grew like colonial wheat. Beyond slang, quotations were repeated, imbuing layers of meaning into an inscription.

*The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* and an assortment of Shakespearean references appeared across this time period.<sup>56</sup> While the First World War is now associated with the poetry of Wilfred Owen and



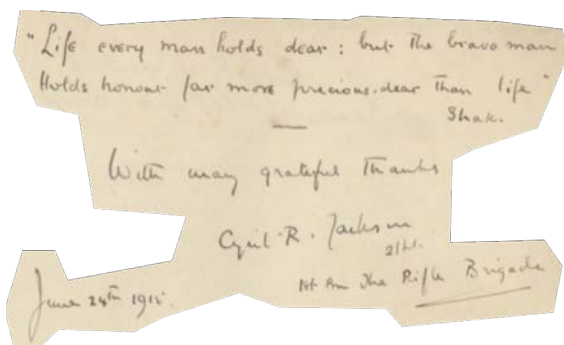
Siegfried Sassoon, writers during this conflict used much of the same patriotic literatures that their forebears did in 1899. This work is often

“On the wallaby”  
Autograph book of Margaret Gray.

dismissed as “popular poetry”, but provides a means of understanding the vernacular of these autograph books, and the experience of this time period. Among the popular poets of the era,

American Ella Wheeler Wilcox<sup>57</sup>, British-Canadian Robert Service,<sup>58</sup> and Australian Adam Lindsay Gordon<sup>59</sup> were popular choices. Robert Service was popularly known as the “Bard of the Yukon”, but his work embodied imperial themes, and, based on its inclusion in these autograph books, resonated with those with whom the owners of these autograph books came into contact.

Perhaps the best-known representative of imperial ideals, Rudyard Kipling is a constant presence. During the



“Life every man holds dear; but the brave man holds honour far more precious-dear than life.” [Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, Act V, scene iii]

Autograph book of Margaret Gray.

<sup>55</sup> Autograph book of Margaret Gray.

<sup>56</sup> Autograph books of Agnes Cocks and Bessie Pocock.

<sup>57</sup> Autograph book of Nellie Morrice.

<sup>58</sup> Autograph book of Charlotte Evans.

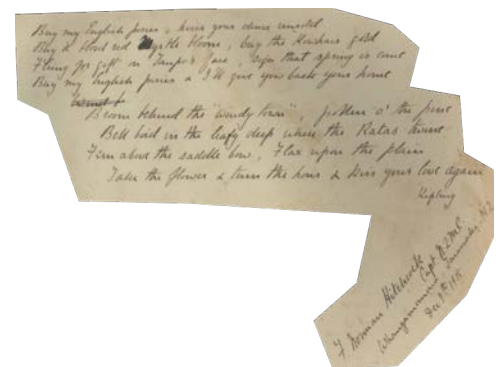
<sup>59</sup> Autograph book of Isoline Cowley.

Boer War, *The absent-minded beggar* served as a call for support for men serving in South Africa, and for their families at home. The poem drew together the experiences of those serving overseas and the families waiting at home:

*He's an absent-minded beggar, but he heard his country call,  
And his reg'ment didn't need to send to find him!  
He chucked his job and joined it – so the job before us all  
Is to help the home that Tommy's left behind him!*<sup>60</sup>

An excerpt from another Kipling poem, *The flowers*, was left for Bessie Pocock in 1915.<sup>61</sup> The excerpt was written by Captain Frank Norman Hitchcock who served with the New Zealand Medical Corps. This verse was in specific reference to New Zealand, with “the kowhai’s gold / Flung for gift on Taupo’s face”, but the verses of the poem extended across the British Empire, suggesting an imperial continuity. Hitchcock’s own background reflected the transnational experience of the time period. Having been born in London, he served at Gallipoli with the Anzac No. 1 Field Ambulance Brigade. When he was killed in action in 1916, his wife was living in New South Wales, and Hitchcock’s name was subsequently included on the Commemorative Roll at the Memorial.<sup>62</sup> The devastation of the First World War also affected the poem’s original author: Kipling’s son, John Kipling, was lost during the Battle of Loos in 1915. His 1916 poem *My boy Jack* was written for Jack Cornwall, the youngest recipient of the Victoria Cross during the First World War, but reflected the grief of a generation of parents. This later work does not appear in these autograph books; in these pages, Kipling remained an imperial presence.

This repeated language was edited and paraphrased as necessary, particularly as the First World War progressed. The trench song *Sing me to sleep where bullets fall* was a parody of a popular 1902 song that began “Sing me to sleep, the shadows fall”. Sergeant



Buy my English posies, here's your choice unsold  
Buy a blood red Myrtle bloom, buy the Kowhai's gold  
Flung for gift on Taupo's face, sign that spring is come  
Buy my English posies & I'll give you back your home  
Broom beneath the “windy town”, pollen o' the pine  
Bell bird in the leafy deep where the Ratas twine  
Firm above the saddle bow, Flax upon the plain  
Take the flower & turn the hour & kiss your love again  
[Kipling, *The flowers*]

Autograph book of Bessie Pocock.

<sup>60</sup> “The absent-minded beggar”, *Daily Mail*, 31 October 1899.

<sup>61</sup> Autograph books of Bessie Pocock.

<sup>62</sup> 3/1242 Captain Frank Norman Spurrell Hitchcock, New Zealand Medical Corps, Commemorative Roll: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/R1431399>.

Charles Woods and Sergeant Les Hanna, who identified themselves as “the twins”, left a version of this song for Elizabeth Kemp.<sup>63</sup> In this version, references to Ypres have been replaced by Lone Pine:

*Far from Lone Pine I'd like to be  
Where Turkish snipers cannot pot me  
Think of me crouching where “greybacks” creep  
Waiting for something to put me to sleep*

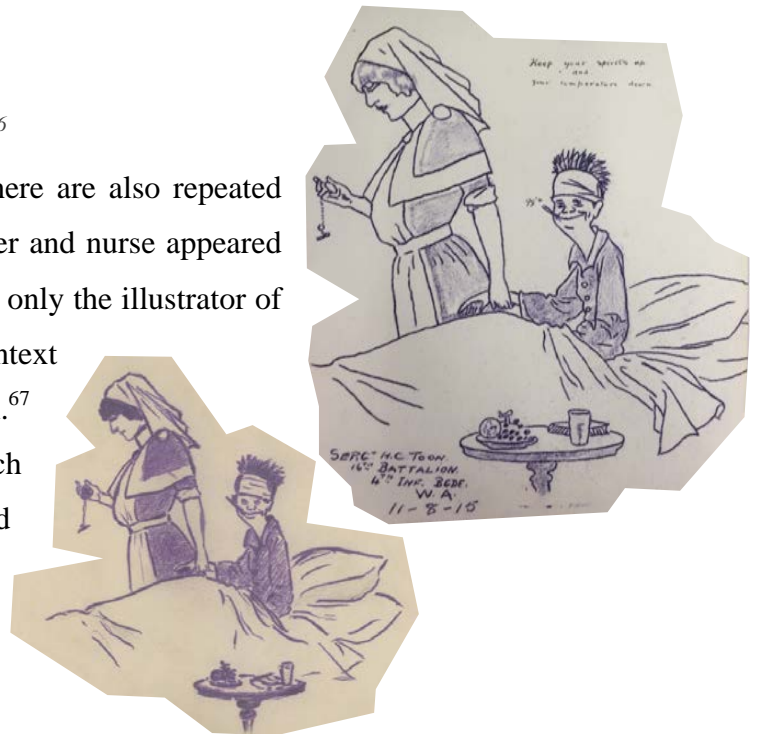
The lyrics to *My little grey home in the west* were parodied for Gertrude Skyring as *My little wet home in the trench*.<sup>64</sup> In his version, Private Robert Pinken Hemphill of the 1st Anzac Light Railway noted:

*I've a little wet home in the trench  
That the rain storms continually drench*

The lyrics were varied slightly for Margaret Gray by a British soldier with the Suffolk Regiment, suggesting that the lyrics were repeatedly shared and reshaped.<sup>65</sup> As the language evolved, vocabulary from the trenches appeared, such as reference to “Jack Johnsons”, a term for heavy German artillery shells derived from the American boxer Jack Johnson. In the same autograph book, a member of the Lancashire Fusiliers altered the lyrics further, presenting homage to the base hospitals in Rouen:

*There's a hospital down in Rouen  
Get there if you can it's “Tres Bon”*<sup>66</sup>

Beyond a shared literary language, there are also repeated visual references. The same image of a soldier and nurse appeared across several autograph books, reflecting not only the illustrator of the immediate image, but the unknown context from which the image was originally drawn.<sup>67</sup> There are layers of meaning reflected in each page of these autograph books, which would have been evident to the writers of these inscriptions, and to their intended audience.



Keep your spirits up and your temperature down  
Autograph books of Nellie Morrice and Bessie Pocock.

<sup>63</sup> Autograph book of Elizabeth Kemp.

<sup>64</sup> Autograph book of Gertrude Skyring.

<sup>65</sup> Autograph book of Margaret Gray.

<sup>66</sup> Autograph book of Margaret Gray.

<sup>67</sup> Autograph books of Nellie Morrice and Bessie Pocock.

Sing me to sleep

Sing me to sleep where bullets fall  
 Let me forget the war and all  
 Damp is my dug out and cold my feet  
 Nothing but biscuits and Bully to eat

Sing me to sleep where bombs explode  
 And shrapnel shells are à la mode  
 Over the sand bags helmets you'll find  
 Corpses in front and corpses behind

Far far from "Lone Pine" I'd like to be  
 Where Turkish snipers cannot pot me  
 Think of me crouching where "greybacks" creep  
 Waiting for something to put me to sleep

Sing me to sleep in some old shed  
 A dozen rat holes round my head  
 Stretched out upon my waterproof  
 Dodging the raindrops through the roof

Far far from starlight I'd long to be  
 Public house bar lights I'd rather see  
 Think of me sleeping where the worm creeps  
 Waiting for Sergeant to kiss me to sleep.

Charles Wood & Lee Hanna  
 1916  
 "The Hussar"

May you live long to enjoy life's happiness and joy  
 in good color.

E.M.H.

Sing me to sleep where bullets fall  
 Let me forget the war and all  
 Damp is my dug out and cold my feet  
 Nothing but biscuits and Bully to eat

-

Sing me to sleep where bombs explode  
 And shrapnel shells are à la mode  
 Over the sand bags helmets you'll find  
 Corpses in front and corpses behind

-

Far from "Lone Pine" I'd like to be  
 Where Turkish snipers cannot pot me  
 Think of me crouching where "greybacks" creep  
 Waiting for something to put me to sleep

-

Sing me to sleep in some old shed  
 A dozen rat holes round my head  
 Stretched out upon my waterproof  
 Dodging the raindrops through the roof

-

Far from starlight I'd long to be  
 Public house bar lights I'd rather see  
 Think of me sleeping where the worm creeps  
 Waiting for Sergeant to kiss me to sleep.

Autograph book of Elizabeth Kemp.

A DOGGEREL

WITH APOLOGIES TO THE METRE  
 OF A LITTLE GREY HOME IN THE WEST.

THERE'S A HOSPITAL DOWN IN ROUEN,  
 GET THERE IF YOU CAN IT'S "TRES BON".  
 IF YOU'RE WOUNDED OR SICK,  
 NURSE G DOES THE TRICK.  
 YOU'RE SOON RIGHT-GOING HOME - NOTHING  
 WRONG.

I'M NOT WOUNDED OR SICK ONLY BENT,  
 BUT TO BLIGHTY I'M GOING TO BE SENT,  
 WITH THOUGHTS ALL THE WAY OF MY NURSE  
 SISTER GRAY,  
 AND RED CROSS NUMBER TWO WHERE I  
 WENT

With very many thanks.

John Graham Pearson from home  
 4<sup>th</sup> att 2<sup>nd</sup> Lau Fus.

6.11.15.

A Doggerel  
 With apologies to the metre of "A Little Grey Home in the West".  
 There's a hospital down in Rouen  
 Get there if you can it's "Tres Bon"  
 If you're wounded or sick,  
 Nurse G does the trick  
 You're soon right going home – nothing wrong.

-

I'm not wounded or sick only bent,  
 But to Blighty I'm going to be sent,  
 With thoughts all the way of my nurse Sister Gray,  
 And Red Cross Number Two where I went

Autograph book of Margaret Gray.

Little Wet Home in a Trench  
 I've a little wet home in a trench  
 Where the rainstorms continually drench  
 There's a dead cow close by  
 With her hoofs t'wards the sky,  
 And she gives off a beautiful stench  
 Underneath, in the place of a floor,  
 There's a mass of wet mud and some straw,  
 And the Jack Johnsons tear,  
 Through the rain sodden air  
 O'er my little wet home in the trench  
 There are snipers who keep on the go,  
 So you must keep your napper down low,  
 And their star shells at night  
 Make a deuce of a light,  
 Which causes the language to flow,  
 Then bully and biscuits we chew,  
 For its days since we tasted a stew,  
 But with shells dropping there  
 There's no place to compare  
 With my little wet home in the trench

*With my grateful thanks  
 to the French  
 P. B. 2011/15*

I've a little wet home in a trench  
 Where the rainstorms continually drench  
 There's a dead cow close by  
 With her hoofs t'wards the sky,  
 And she gives off a beautiful stench  
 Underneath, in the place of a floor,  
 There's a mass of wet mud and some straw,  
 And the Jack Johnsons tear,  
 Through the rain sodden air  
 O'er my little wet home in the trench  
 -  
 There are snipers who keep on the go  
 So you must keep your napper down low,  
 And their star shells at night  
 Make a deuce of a light,  
 Which causes the language to flow,  
 Then bully and biscuits we chew,  
 For its days since we tasted a stew,  
 But with shells dropping there  
 There's no place to compare,  
 With my little wet home in the trench

Autograph book of Margaret Gray.

My Little Wet Home in the Trench  
 I've a little wet home in the trench  
 That the rain storms continually drench  
 Blue sky overhead  
 Mud and clay for a bed  
 And a stone that we use for a bench  
 Bully beef and hard biscuits we chew  
 Shells crackel and scare  
 But no place can compare  
 With my little wet home in the trench

②  
 Our friends in the trench over the way  
 Seem to know that we come here to stay  
 They rush and they shout  
 But they cant get us out  
 Though theirs no dirty works they dont play  
 They rushed us a few nights ago  
 But we dont like intruders and so  
 Some departed quite sore  
 Others slept evermore  
 Near my little wet home in the trench

*P. B. Hauphill No 4706 Angas Light Railway  
 France Feb 28 1915*

I've a little wet home in the trench  
 That the rain storms continually drench  
 Blue sky overhead  
 Mud and clay for a bed  
 And a stone that we use for a bench  
 Bully beef and hard biscuits we chew  
 Shells crackel and scare  
 But no place can compare  
 With my little wet home in the trench  
 -  
 Our friends in the trench over the way  
 Seem to know that we come here to stay  
 They rush and they shout  
 But they cant get us out  
 Though theirs no dirty works they don't play  
 They rushed us a few nights ago  
 But we dont like intruders and so  
 Some departed quite sore  
 Others slept evermore  
 Near my little wet home in the trench

Autograph book of Gertrude Skyring.

### The experience of conflict

Between the Boer War and the First World War, change is most evident in depictions of life at the front. The battlefield does not appear in autograph books from South Africa, while its presence lingers throughout inscriptions from the First World War, contrasted with safety behind the lines and distant homes. Even when situated in England, medical services are presented as a temporary reprieve from the trenches, with the shelter of the hospital inextricably linked to the horrors that both preceded and succeeded its warmth. Even in ostensibly humorous images and inscriptions, references to shell shock appeared. A sketch of a sleeping soldier in a hospital bed shows imagined shells aiming for his head.<sup>68</sup> In autograph books from the First World War, the war is a constant presence.

Caricatures of the trenches appeared from the Gallipoli campaign onwards. One drawing depicted the experience of being in water-drenched dugouts, alongside illustrations of portly officers and hard-working stretcher bearers, in an image titled “Gallipoli 1915”.<sup>69</sup> Well-known artists were included alongside anonymous servicemen, suggesting an equality of presentation, if not of skill. A sketch by George Lambert appeared in Charlotte Evans’ autograph book,<sup>70</sup> while Bruce Bairnsfather, whose “Fragments from France” cartoons were published weekly in *The Bystander* during the First World War, contributed a sketch to Margaret Gray’s autograph book.<sup>71</sup> An inscription in Amy Bembrick’s autograph book mapped fighting along the Macedonian Front, situating the broader battlefield in the pages of the autograph book.<sup>72</sup>

In inscriptions, soldiers explain why they are fighting, an unspoken contrast with those who were not serving. A drawing by a captain with the Artists Rifles contrasted a British officer from 1816 with another from 1916, presenting service during the First World War as a natural successor to the heroes of Waterloo.<sup>73</sup> In both conflicts, a quote from Perseus in Charles Kingsley’s *The heroes* attributed a classical element to service:

*Tis better to die like a hero, than live like an ox in his stall.*<sup>74</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Autograph book of Elizabeth Kemp.

<sup>69</sup> Autograph books of Bessie Pocock.

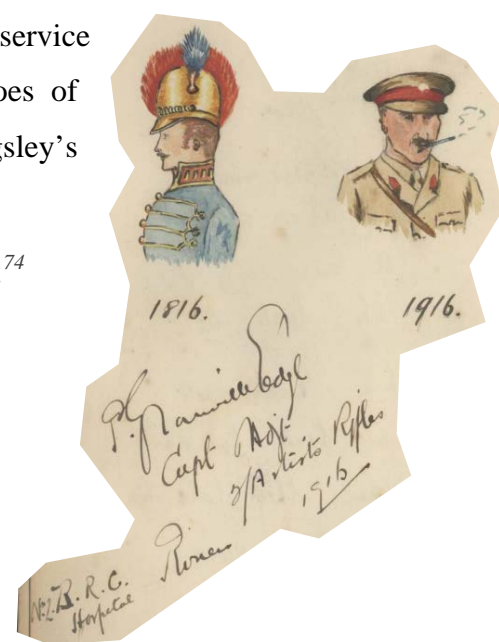
<sup>70</sup> Autograph book of Charlotte Evans.

<sup>71</sup> Autograph book of Margaret Gray.

<sup>72</sup> Autograph book of Amy Bembrick.

<sup>73</sup> Autograph book of Margaret Gray.

<sup>74</sup> Autograph book of Agnes Cocks.



1816. 1916.





Gallipoli 1915.

Autograph book of Bessie Pocock



A Son of the Veld



A Bushman N.Z.

Autograph book of Agnes Cocks.

These modern conflicts are presented as successors to ancient epics, with service as a purportedly heroic duty.

While heroic ideals are repeated, depictions of the “enemy” shift over this time period. In the Boer War, similarities between Boer and colonial soldiers were left unstated, but manifested in the illustrations in these autograph books. In Agnes Cocks’ autograph book, there is a single image of a Boer soldier, captioned “A son of the veld”.<sup>75</sup> In the same book, a sketch of a New Zealand soldier was also included. The captions could be swapped with little distinction: both men are bearded, wearing worn clothing and broad-brimmed hats. In 1899, Banjo Paterson wrote, “We think of the Boer as semi-savages [but] we have plenty of people just as rough as they are”.<sup>76</sup> In described a Boer homestead, Paterson also noted, “everything reminds one of Australia”.<sup>77</sup> This changes in inscriptions from the First World War. An imperial sense of solidarity is emphasised, while portrayals of the “enemy” become far less sympathetic. Germany becomes the subject of ridicule and hatred, with the German

Kaiser and German soldiers both caricatured. In one image, the German Kaiser is drawn as a zeppelin, with an exaggerated moustache and facial features, plaintively crying, “Oh where! Oh where is my great victory”.<sup>78</sup> The title reflected the artist’s opinion on the subject matter: “the gas bag”. These caricatures were less common with representations of the Ottoman Empire. Across these autograph books, there was a single depiction of Turkish soldiers.<sup>79</sup> Created by Sergeant Leslie Charles Hale of the 18th Battalion, this image depicts a Turkish soldier grasping a crescent moon as the moon slowly sinks into the sea. The caption “The setting of the Crescent” suggests that this was a reflection of the general perception of the Ottoman Empire as the “sick man of Europe”, rather than a particular commentary on Turkish service.

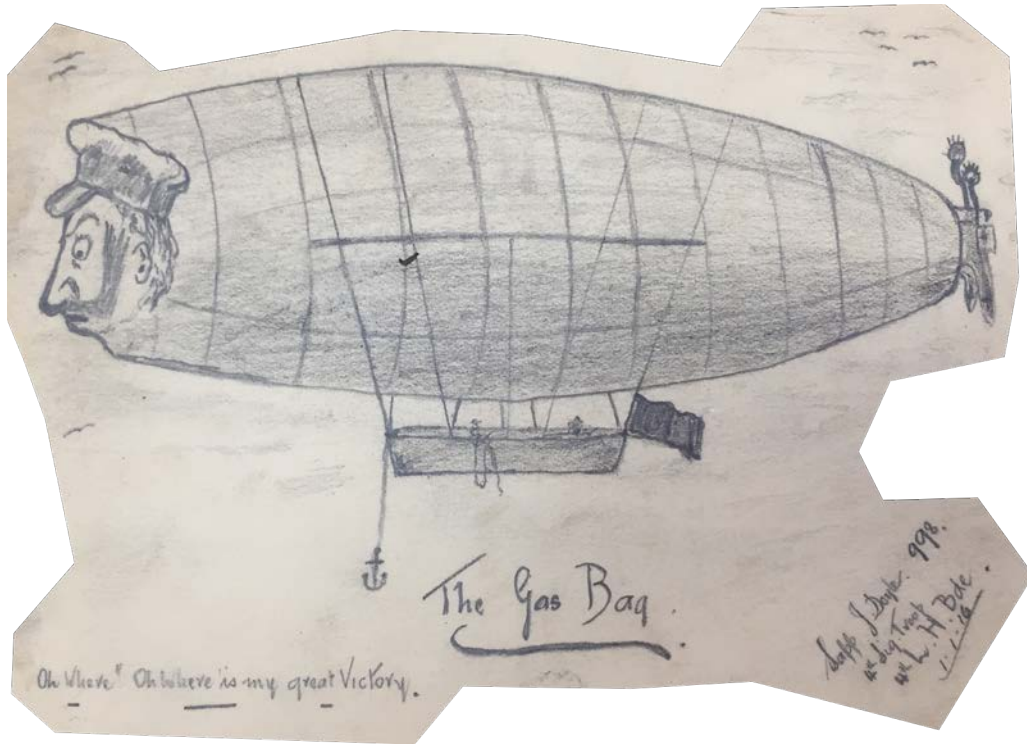
<sup>75</sup> Autograph book of Agnes Cocks.

<sup>76</sup> A.B. (Banjo) Paterson, 4 December 1899, in R.W.F. Droogleever (ed.), *From the front: A.B. (Banjo) Paterson’s dispatches from the Boer War*, Macmillan, Sydney, 2000, p. 32.

<sup>77</sup> A.B. (Banjo) Paterson, 9 December 1899, in R.W.F. Droogleever (ed.), *From the front: A.B. (Banjo) Paterson’s dispatches from the Boer War*, Macmillan, Sydney, 2000, p. 42.

<sup>78</sup> Autograph book of Elizabeth Kemp.

<sup>79</sup> Autograph book of Elizabeth Kemp.



The Gas Bag  
Oh Where! Oh Where is my great Victory.

Autograph book of Elizabeth Kemp.



Astronomical Note:  
"The Setting of the Crescent."

Autograph book of Elizabeth Kemp.

Grand Hind Quarters.

"G.H.Q."

Do not judge the sketch for what it is but rather what it Ham.  
Autograph book of Margaret Gray.



Grand Hind Quarters.

"G.H.Q."

Do not judge the sketch for what it is but rather what it Ham.

Quotations from patriotic literature emphasise continuity across this time period, but there is a shift in the limits of social acceptability. While inscriptions from 1899 and 1919 share a common language, the dialect has changed. During the First World War, open criticism of political leadership is included among

other quotations, such as an image of a pig in uniform labelled "G.H.Q. – Grand Hind Quarters" that questions the capability of military command.<sup>80</sup> In Bessie Pocock's autograph book, an anonymous author left a scathing poem regarding British Prime Minister David Lloyd George:

*Lloyd George no doubt,  
When his life ebbs out  
Will ride in a flaming chariot  
& sit in state, on a red-hot plate,  
Between Satan & Judas Iscariot<sup>81</sup>*

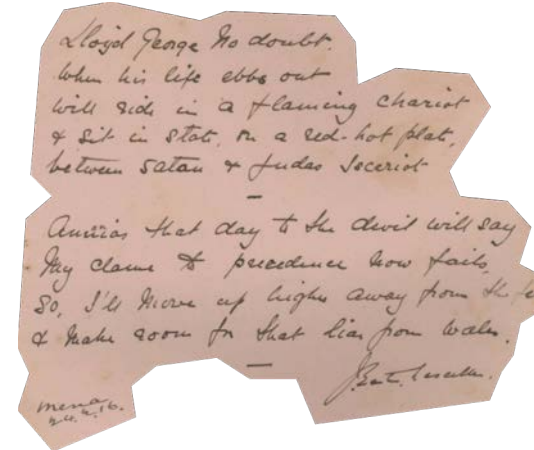
The context for this poem is unclear, but it appears as an outlier, juxtaposed with caricatures and patriotic poetry. While it may not have represented the views of the majority, it was still left within the pages of the autograph book, visible for any future writers.

Within these autograph books, some censorship does occur, such as a page from Isoline Cowley's autograph book where an image entitled "On the day on which peace is declared" has been obscured by a field postcard from a prisoner-of-war in a German work camp, but this is unusual.<sup>82</sup> It is unclear why this image was censored, and it is impossible to remove the covering postcard without destroying the page. These autograph books are a compilation of experience, shaped by those with whom their owners came into contact, and altered accordingly.

<sup>80</sup> Autograph book of Nellie Morrice.

<sup>81</sup> Autograph books of Bessie Pocock.

<sup>82</sup> Autograph book of Isoline Cowley.



Lloyd George no doubt  
When his life ebbs out  
Will ride in a flaming chariot  
& sit in state, on a red-hot plate,  
Between Satan & Judas Iscariot

Ananias that day to the devil will say  
My claim to precedence now fails,  
So, I'll move up higher away from the fire  
& make room for that liar from Wales.

Autograph book of Bessie Pocock.



On the Day on Which Peace is Declared  
Autograph book of Isoline Cowley.

## The dead

The dead were an unspoken presence throughout these autograph books, particularly as the losses of the First World War increased. The pages of these autograph books preserved a final record of engagement. Ian Gordon MacInnes' greeting from the Sphinx for Nellie Morrice in January 1915 held a more contemplative meaning a few months later; within three months of writing that message, MacInnes would be dead.

Writers struggled to interpret these losses, and an increased awareness of loss permeates the pages of later autograph books. Many inscriptions were reflective, contemplating a future life either after the war or after death. Religious inscriptions attributed a spiritual element to service, referencing a life beyond the trenches and the possibility of a rebirth into a more peaceful world. In April 1918, in the middle of the German Spring Offensive, an Australian gunner wrote:

*They say, Could there be such a hideous blot as War, with God above?  
But we who know Him, trust Him through it all!  
Nothing our faith shall move*<sup>83</sup>

This consideration of an afterlife was repeated across these autograph books. In 1919, on the return to Australia, Chaplain Frederick August Spencer, serving with the 7th Light Horse Regiment, wrote for Charlotte Evans:

*Which would you rather be?  
My old war-mate, or me?*<sup>84</sup>

His writing emphasised that the dead will not grow old, while the living must "labour yet, doubt yet, grieve yet, become ill yet, die yet". For the living, their work had not yet ended.

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<sup>83</sup> Autograph books of Bessie Pocock.  
<sup>84</sup> Autograph book of Charlotte Evans.

There are who scoff, and say that  
 God is not!  
 Our mighty God of Love  
 They say, could there be such a  
 hideous blot  
 As War, with God above?  
 But we who know Him, trust Him  
 through it all!  
 Nothing our faith shall move,  
 Though sun be darkened, and  
 tho' stars shall fall,  
 God is! and God is Love.  
 G. W. P. A. Vindin  
 15<sup>th</sup> April, 1918. H. S. T.

There are those who scoff, and say that  
 God is not!  
 Our mighty God of Love  
 They say, Could there be such a  
 hideous blot  
 As War, with God above?  
 But we who know Him, trust him  
 through it all  
 Nothing our faith shall move,  
 Though sun be darkened and  
 tho' stars shall fall  
 God is! And God is Love.  
 Autograph book of Bessie Pocock.

J. A. H. Spence, 7 A. L. H. 27.7.19.  
 Which would you rather be –  
 My old war-mate, or me?  
 He writes that he lives in Summerland,  
 Where the flowers are blue and gold,  
 And water flows over gleaming sand,  
 And the heart does not grow old.  
 But I must labour yet, doubt yet,  
 grieve yet, become ill yet, die yet.  
 Which would you rather be –  
 My old war-mate, or me?

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 My old war-mate, or me?  
 He writes that he lives in Summerland  
 Where the flowers are blue and gold  
 And water flows over gleaming sand  
 And the heart does not grow old.  
 But I must labour yet, doubt yet,  
 grieve yet, become ill yet, die yet.  
 Which would you rather be –  
 My old war-mate, or me?  
 Autograph book of Charlotte Evans.

This interaction between the living and the dead is more overt in other autograph books. Margaret Gray annotated inscriptions in her autograph book with newspaper clippings or a pencilled date of death regarding the fate of those who returned to the front lines.<sup>85</sup> The juxtaposition of the short inscriptions and the ultimate fate of their writers is jarring, but is a key element in the use of autograph books as a form of remembrance. Knowledge of the fate of contributors prompts a reconsideration of their chosen inscriptions. On 25 April 1915, Captain John Jenkinson of the 6th North Staffordshire Regiment left an inscription for Margaret Gray. Another example of the transnational nature of the British Empire, the poem had been originally written by Sir Ranjitsinhji Vibhaji Jadeja, the noted Test cricketer and ruler of the Indian princely state of Nawanagar.<sup>86</sup> Ranjitsinhji was a student at Cambridge University, playing first-class cricket, when he wrote the original verse, and the poem had been adopted for public recitation at British schools. The poem included the line:

*Help me to win, if win I may; but –  
and this, O powers! especially –  
if I may not win, make me a good loser.*

*Amen.*

Jenkinson would be killed in action later that year, on 26 October 1915. It is unclear whether he would have known the origins of the poem, but, given its use in British schools, the meaning of the poem for Jenkinson would have been clear, attesting to the Victorian virtue of fair play.

Other inscriptions in Margaret Gray's autograph book were annotated in the same way. On 19 August 1915, Lieutenant Oliver Emmanuel expressed his gratitude to Margaret Gray as "one who gave me biscuits by mistake". He would be killed in action a month later, on 25 September 1915. Private Charles Arthur Cherrington (killed in action 17 July 1917), Second Lieutenant James McMillan Murray (killed in action 24 June 1917), Second Lieutenant Duncan Craig Morrison (killed in action 10 April 1917), Second Lieutenant Edwin Blow Kertland (killed in action 16 June 1915), and Lieutenant Maurice Thrupp (killed in action 31 July 1917) all merely signed their name. With these annotations, the inscriptions in this autograph book served as a form of remembrance.

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<sup>85</sup> Autograph book of Margaret Gray.

<sup>86</sup> Satadru Sen, *Migrant races: empire, identity, and K.S. Ranjitsinhji*, Manchester University Press, 2004, p. 28.

Second Lieutenant Edwin Blow Kertland, 3rd  
Battalion, Royal Irish Fusiliers, KIA 16 June 1915

E. B. Kertland 2/Lieut.  
3rd Royal Irish Fusiliers  
Rouen  
12:30 AM.  
24: IV: 15

Lieutenant Maurice Thrupp, 1st Battalion,  
Grenadier Guards, KIA 31 July 1917

Maurice Thrupp  
1st Grenadier Guards  
10.4.17

Private Charles Arthur Cherrington, 2nd Battalion,  
Middlesex Regiment, KIA 17 July 1915

Charles C. Cherrington  
41st The Welsh Regt.  
Killed July 1915

Second Lieutenant Duncan Craig Morrison,  
8th Battalion, Argyll and Sutherland  
Highlanders, KIA 10 April 1917

D. C. Morrison 2/Lt.  
8th Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders  
Killed 10.4.17

Second Lieutenant James McMillan Murray,  
8th Battalion, Cameronians (Scottish Rifles),  
KIA 24 June 1917

J. McMillan Murray 2/Lt.  
8th Cameronians  
Killed 24.6.17

A Prayer  
Powers that be, make me sufficient to mine own occasion.  
Teach me to know and observe the rules of the game.  
Give to me to mind my own business at all times and to lose no opportunity of holding my tongue.  
When it is appointed for me to suffer, let me, so far as may humanly be possible, take an example from the dear, well-bred beasts, and go away quietly to bear my suffering by myself.  
Help me to win, if win I may; but — and this, O powers! especially — if I may not win, make me a good loser. Amen.

Killed Oct: 22nd 15  
John Jenkinson Capt.  
6th North Staffs Regt.  
April 25th 1915

With many thanks & the best of good wishes to one who gave me biscuits by mistake.  
Oliver Emanuel  
19.9.15  
1st Wiltshire Regt.

With many thanks & the best of good wishes to one who gave me biscuits by mistake.

Lieutenant Oliver Emanuel, 1st Battalion,  
Wiltshire Regiment, KIA 25 September 1915

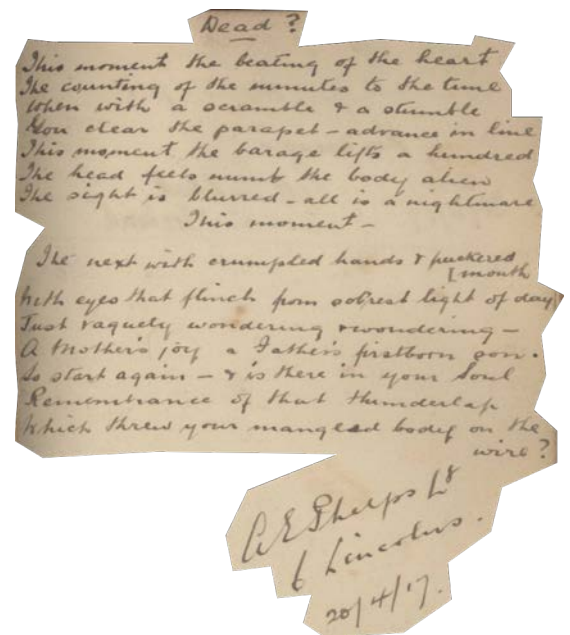
A Prayer  
Powers that be, make me sufficient to mine own occasion.  
Teach me to know and observe the rules of the game.  
Give to me to mind my own business at all times and to lose no opportunity of holding my tongue.  
When it is appointed for me to suffer, let me, so far as may humanly be possible, take an example from the dear, well-bred beasts, and go away quietly to bear my suffering by myself.  
Help me to win, if win I may, but — and this, O powers! Especially — if I may not win, make me a good loser. Amen.

Captain John Jenkinson, 6th Battalion, North Staffordshire  
Regiment, KIA 13 October 1915



The mounting losses of the First World War weighed on many writers. A poem in Margaret Gray's autograph book detailed the moment of impact of an attack, a marked contrast to the absence of the battlefield in inscriptions from the Boer War.<sup>87</sup> As with political commentary and satirical sketches included in these autograph books, this writing may not have reflected the majority opinion, but it was being written, and allowed to remain, in a form not seen during the Boer War:

*Dead?*  
*This moment the beating of the heart*  
*The counting of the minutes to the time*  
*When with a scramble & a stumble*  
*You clear the parapet – advance in line*  
*This moment the barrage lifts a hundred*  
*The head feels numb the body alien*  
*The sight is blurred – all is a nightmare*  
*This moment –*  
*The next with crumpled hands & puckered*  
*mouth*  
*With eyes that flinch from softest light of day*  
*Just vaguely wondering & wondering –*  
*A Mother's joy & Father's firstborn son.*  
*So start again - & is there in your Soul*  
*Remembrance of that thunderclap*  
*Which threw your mangled body on the wire?*



Autograph book of Margaret Gray.

This blunt reference to death draws the battlefield into the pages of this autograph book, emphasising the connection between the living and the dead. The devastation of the First World War was seemingly inescapable, even after death.

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<sup>87</sup> Autograph book of Margaret Gray.

## Impressions of Empire

The material space of these autograph books is important, with the disparate elements and themes explored in this research intertwined. Complaints about conditions, trenches, and the enemy sit alongside platitudes with no apparent contradiction, and earlier inscriptions are annotated or altered by later ones. These inscriptions are not being written for posterity in the general sense of the term; these autograph books were held by individuals, and inscriptions were intended as specific remembrance.

There was no fundamental shift in what the majority of men and women were writing in 1899 and 1919. The British Empire remained in focus across these autograph books, negotiating the complexities of imperial identity through individual interaction. These inscriptions share a common language, drawn from quotations and repeated visual references and extending across this time period. There is, however, a reframing of the boundaries, with inscriptions from the First World War extending the limits of social acceptability in a form unseen during the Boer War.

In the pages of these autograph books, however, the focus is on interaction on a personal level. These autograph books affirm individual remembrance, engaging with men and women from across the breadth of the British Empire. Each signature is a promise of remembrance exchanged between each writer and the owners of these autograph books, affirming their existence as individuals in the middle of conflict.



"Blime, what a life!"