

Family Legacies in the Centenary

Motives for First World War Commemoration among British and German Descendants

MICHAEL ROPER AND RACHEL DUFFETT

This article investigates the affective motives for remembrance among British and German descendants of men and women who served in the First World War. Based on observations of a First World War centenary project funded by the Heritage Lottery and hosted in Bavaria in early 2016 by the London-based reminiscence organization Age Exchange, it asks why people are drawn to research the First World War pasts of their ancestors and how their historical pursuits connect personal experience to public commemoration in the two countries. It develops an understanding of legacy as operating across time in two directions: backwards from contemporary preoccupations to the First World War, and forwards across generations, from the survivors and their descendants to the present.


Keywords: First World War; legacy; remembrance; family transmission; generations; affective motives; trauma; silence

In April 2016, twenty-three German and British descendants of men and women who had served in the First World War were brought together by the London reminiscence organization Age Exchange to tell their family stories of the conflict. Funded by the Heritage Lottery, “Meeting in No Man’s Land” took place over four days in Bavaria; and entailed a series of filmed one-on-one and paired interviews, creative workshops and other events aimed at facilitating and sharing accounts of the family legacies of the war. The following article, written by two British historians who were part of the organizing team, investigates why, a hundred years on, people are drawn to research the First World War pasts of their ancestors

and how their historical pursuits connect personal experience to public commemoration of the war. Meeting in No Man's Land, we believe, offers a unique opportunity to explore the relation between "top-down" and "bottom-up" accounts of the conflict in Britain and Germany, bringing together perspectives—and national histories—that have often been viewed separately.

Research on the public engagement with history consistently finds that people are more likely to feel a sense of connection to the past through their family rather than through public anniversaries or history taught at school and that families are felt to be an important and trusted source of historical knowledge.¹ British surveys also show that almost half the population has a personal connection to people who fought or were involved in the war effort during the First World War, while Australian research notes that family involvement in war often provides the impetus for historical activity, the rise of family history being closely linked to the resurgence of public interest in the First World War.² Memory scholars, meanwhile, find that families are a crucial source of collective memory, the relationships between generations creating powerful emotion-laden versions of the past from an early age, transmitted through forms of "lived" rather than "learned" history.³

Taking the opportunity of the Age Exchange Meeting, we set out to investigate how the descendants' personal relationships with women and men of the First World War generation had shaped their outlooks on the conflict.⁴ We wanted to know what had led them to participate in a commemorative event in which they introduced their family's war past to a broader audience, and we asked each participant to reflect on this during their interview.⁵ Our roles during the meeting oscillated between participation and observation. We took part in the planning process, conducted some of the individual interviews with the German participants (assisted by translators) and watched the Age Exchange team conduct the remaining individual and paired interviews with the descendants. We joined the group activities and social events across the four days and then undertook an analysis of the records produced by the event, including over fifty-two hours of filmed and subtitled interviews and seven hundred digitized artefacts and photographs. Concurrent with our research, Age Exchange began work on a documentary film, *Meeting in No Man's Land*, which was produced and shown in the two countries in fall 2016.⁶

We undertook the research partly in response to military and cultural historians who, as the centenary approached, were seeking to account for the “strikingly stable beliefs” that underpin popular understandings of the First World War in Britain.⁷ These beliefs—embodied in the figure of the soldier hunkered down in the mud of the Western Front—are that the First World War was a bloody and futile conflict whose human toll was exacerbated by military blunders and that the defeat of the axis powers in 1918 was a pyrrhic victory. Historians note the resistance of this so-called “pity of war” perspective to recent academic research, which has sought to broaden understandings of the conflict in terms of geography, nation, ethnicity and race  gender. The stability of the narrative is attributed in part to the strength of remembrance among families, who are influenced by contemporary political and social concerns as well as the direct personal experience of the survivors and the pain of their losses.⁸


The Age Exchange project provided us with a means of investigating the affective investments to the history of the First World War that Dan Todman, Helen McCartney and others have noted, and to see them as forms of historical understanding in their own right. Our aim has been to understand their range and affective power and the role played by families in transmitting and renewing them. Such an approach leads us to conceive of legacies as working across time in two directions; backwards, through the projection of contemporary preoccupations and cultural repertoires onto the war past, an approach that is common within memory studies, but also forwards, through the passage of memory from the war generation to their descendants.⁹

Recent work in Australia, based on an analysis of self-published memoirs of the First World War, suggests the complexity of these personal investments among descendants. It finds that their historical consciousness is not just impelled by contemporary narratives and forms of remembrance but may entail self-examination and emotional introspection, and a desire to understand the broader effects of war on families across time, based on the personal experience of living with the aftermath. These kinds of histories still tend to see the fathers and grandfathers as the principal conveyers of the war brought back home, but at the same time they counter the soldier-centered focus through their personal experience of the longer-term consequences of the conflict within families.¹⁰

Compared with Britain, approaches that focus on the role of the families in the formation and transmission of historical consciousness are more widely adopted among German cultural and social historians of war. In part the more psychological bent of German scholarship reflects the legacies of National Socialism and the need to understand what has been called the “Great Silence” among families implicated directly or indirectly in the Nazi past. In such studies, however, it is usually the Second rather than the First World War that constitutes the primary frame of memory. The study of German generations, for example, pivots around the Nazi past, encompassing the “Front Generation” who fought in the First World War (the parents of our interviewees); those born between 1900 and 1915 who were too young to fight but who put National Socialist ideals into practice during the Third Reich; those who were part of the Hitler Youth generation, many of whom served in the Second World War; and the “Kriegskinder” generation born after the end of the Second World War (our interviewees being drawn from these last two groups).¹¹ These studies are sometimes animated by an autobiographical impulse, the historian responding to forgetting and resistance to acknowledgement of guilt in his or her own family.¹² Here the First World War tends to appear as a kind of “prehistory,” revealing continuities in war goals between 1914 and 1939, the intention being to explain the destructive extremism of the mid-century. While there have been some parallel studies of First World War veterans and family recollections of the conflict, it is within studies of the Second World War that concepts of generation and intergenerational transmission have been most fully developed.¹³

NATIONAL FRAMES OF MEMORY

Although our focus here ~~are~~ on its more intimate manifestations, the historical consciousness of individuals is never immune from broader historical frameworks, and such frameworks help shape what of the war past is communicated and transmitted over time and generations. Personal stories will always lean on familiar public narrative types and tropes.¹⁴ There are striking differences between Germany and Britain in their approach to the public memory of the First World War, differences that the participants in our meeting reflected. In Britain, commemorations like the two-minute

silence on November 11, the services on Remembrance Sunday when the crown and political leaders lay wreaths at the Cenotaph in central London and local ceremonies are held around the country, and the wearing of the red poppy to honor the armed forces (and to help fund veteran charities) were established soon after the war and continue to frame public remembrance of the conflict. There are ongoing debates about how far these state-sponsored rituals annex remembrance to national ideologies, and countersymbols like the white poppy, which commemorates all victims of war rather than just the armed services, contest the national narrative. The announcement in 2013 by the then Prime Minister David Cameron of £50 million ding for the centenary exposed the tensions between more and less pacifist stances, some taking the opportunity to open debates about the reasons for Britain's entry to war and the value of patriotism, others fearing that Cameron's focus on sacrifice might encourage a drift toward the glorification of war. Despite such conflicts, however, the central place of the First World War in the modern history of Britain is not disputed, confirming Ted Hughes's comment in 1965 that "The First World War keeps on getting stronger—our number one national ghost."¹⁵


The British participants in our meeting largely exemplified Hughes's comment. Although they had varying views about the way in which the First World War is commemorated in Britain, all regarded it as a pivotal event in their family's and the nation's history. Many adopted a version of the "pity of war" narrative. Their reference points were often literary: the war poets Edmund Blunden, Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves, or Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth*, with its tragic account of losing her fiancé, brother and friends. These narratives took hold in the 1960s amidst the anti-Vietnam War and student movements, circulating through Alan Clark's 1961 critique of military command, *The Donkeys*, A. J. P Taylor's 1963 book *The First World War: An Illustrated History*, the 1964 BBC TV series *The Great War*, with its novel use of oral testimony, and Joan Littlewood's 1963 production of *Oh What a Lovely War!* It reached new generations in the 1980s through the teaching of the war poets in secondary school English curricula and the TV comedy *Blackadder*. The "pity of war" tendency may not possess the hegemonic power of public memory claimed by some, but its influence could be seen among the largely middle-class and urban British participants who joined the meeting.¹⁶

Germany does not mark the First World War with the kinds of nationally sponsored rituals that are characteristic in Britain, but while the Second World War continues to dominate public memory, the past decade has seen signs of renewed interest in the earlier conflict. The ninetieth anniversary in 2004 coincided with the publication by Gerhard Hirschfeld, Gerd Krumeich and Irina Renz of a thousand-page *Encyclopaedia of the First World War*, aimed at a general audience and presenting a pan-European and transnational perspective on the conflict.¹⁷ The extent of public interest in the centenary, however, surprised many commentators, overshadowing the seventy-fifth anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War. It has spawned a number of new publications and documentary films as well as regional and local museum exhibitions, the impetus for commemoration seeming to come from the bottom up rather than being initiated by the state as in Britain, and prompting a sense that the First World War is “about to assert itself, to emerge from the shadows cast by the Holocaust and the Second World War.”¹⁸ Christopher Clark’s 2013 book *The Sleepwalkers* has been a runaway success and at last count was in its twentieth edition.¹⁹ Yet the debates within the media about the book illustrate the different tendencies that animate this rediscovery, some seeking to locate the First World War within a longer history of conflict in the twentieth century that includes the rise of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust—a so-called “Second 30 Years’ War”—others seeking to absolve Germany of questions about guilt and responsibility and seeing in Clark’s focus on the pan-European roots of the conflict an end to accusations of German aggression and exceptionalism within Europe.²⁰

The Bavarian participants in the meeting reflected this enthusiasm to know more about the history of the First World War. Two had recently read *The Sleepwalkers* and many were curious to know more about remembrance in Britain. Our questions about how the First World War was commemorated locally inspired them to do some research, and on the second day of the meeting we were taken to the war memorial in Rosenheim. Some seemed unsure where it was and were surprised to find that it commemorated soldiers from the Second as well as the First World War. When we asked if there was an equivalent in Germany to Britain’s Armistice Day, the participants replied that of course the principal commemorative day was Holocaust Remembrance on January 27. The Bavarian organizers then did further research and discovered that “Volkstrauertag Day,” which

was introduced in Bavaria in 1919 to express solidarity with survivors of the fallen, had been transformed by the National Socialists in 1934 into “Heroes Remembrance Day.” Here then was an explanation for the lack of awareness of the commemoration, which was bound up with the myth of the First World War that underpinned Hitler’s political vision. For some the relative absence of the First World War in family memory was compounded by the experience of the Second—of houses bombed, families separated and difficult returns—but it also stemmed from the continuing social pressure to acknowledge collective guilt and responsibility for the Second World War.²¹ German interviewee Theodora conveyed the way in which the later conflict had eclipsed the first in her family’s memory. She had recently learned that the Dachau concentration camp had been a munitions plant in the First World War and that her own grandmother had worked there. Growing up in Dachau in the 1950s, her memory was fixed on the site’s later, fateful role.

THE PARTICIPANTS AND THE MEETING

The German and British participants were all descendants of women and men who had experienced the First World War. Six were born between the conflict’s end and the Second World War and were the children of survivors. Sixteen were grandchildren (eight German and eight British), most of them born in the 1940s and ’50s, and one was a great-granddaughter. Most were, or had been, employed in professional occupations, many of them in public sector roles like teaching and social work. The British volunteers were recruited by Age Exchange and many were seasoned “memory workers.”²² German participants came to the project from the Christian welfare organization Caritas in Rosenheim and the Münchner Bildungswerk, a center that develops learning programs, training  and thematic workshops for citizens in Munich.

The group’s members were conscious of being the last “living link” to the survivors and of belonging to a shrinking population that has direct personal memories of women and men who went through the war.²³ Their knowledge was derived as much from their relationships with the survivors as from their education or exposure to the national commemorative culture, and in speaking on their behalf, the descendants hoped to

achieve a “prolongation of memory.”²⁴ Linde remarked on how pleased her father would be that “he can once more have a voice through me.” The war’s legacies were not just stories but could be visceral: a war waged with high explosives had frequently marked the father’s or grandfather’s body.²⁵ The participants also brought with them objects associated with the war: letters, postcards, trench art, and weapons. These had often been part of the “given environment” or “house-worlds” of the war since they were children, and now acted as a focal point for remembering and sharing memories.²⁶

The participants thus shared a sense of standing between an impermanent “communicative memory” based on their relationships with the eyewitnesses, and a “cultural memory” of war that would endure in archives, museums and history books. The “affective ties that bind together families, groups, and generations,” Jan Assmann notes, are the stuff of communicative memory, and the process of introducing a family member to the group—recalling his or her appearance, voice, gesture and moods or showing objects associated with them—created a powerful emotional atmosphere in the meeting.²⁷ Yet the participants did not have the same feelings about their ancestors or work with history in the same ways or use it for the same ends. Each had his or her own reasons for joining the project and connected their family’s past to the history of the First World War through different memory practices.

At the same time, common motivations for taking part in the project were apparent despite the different national backgrounds of the participants. Some of the reasons people gave for joining were prosaic—yielding to the urgings of the organizers, the prospect of a free trip to Germany or the opportunity to revive Anglophone connections. Others were related to the kinds of imaginative investments that participants were making in their ancestor’s First World War past, investments that were simultaneously emotional and historical. Reflecting on the whole context of the meeting, the participants’ testimonies and their experiences as well as ours, we identified five types of motivation for commemoration: didactic ones which draw on moral convictions and anger; responses to silence and the traumatic impact of silence across the generations; responses that, by contrast, emphasized the recovery of survivors and their “lifeworlds” after the war; feelings of responsibility toward ancestors which impel the wish to preserve their memory; and responses to loss which seek to revivify

emotional ties with the dead. These motives do not exhaust the range of possible impulses for commemoration, nor do they constitute distinct “types” of commemorator. At the same time, they show the variety and vitality of the ties that developed within the “emotional community” of our meeting, and which may well be present in other historical communities formed around commemoration and the memory of war.²⁸ In the spirit of our event, which sought to bring together participants from opposing sides, this discussion foregrounds the common impulses, while national differences emerge from within each theme.

LESSONS FROM HISTORY: “NEVER AGAIN”

Some participants approached the meeting with moral considerations in mind: they wished to convey a message about the damage of war. This impulse could be relatively muted, a reflection that came toward the end of an interview that had focused on personal memories of a father or grandfather, while for others the very point of taking part in the project was political, a feeling probably intensified by foreknowledge that the interview would become part of a film and reach a larger audience.

Les had three First World War veterans in his family, but personal reminiscence was less important to him than the urge to sway minds. He had been a Greenpeace activist and described himself as a “combative pacifist.” Les recognized the contradiction in his taking a bellicose stance, seeing it as a function of coming from a family where the men had served in the military. Pacifist though he was, he was also a keen shot.

Les began his interview with an account of journeying from France to his interview in London and of seeing the terrible conditions suffered by refugees in the “prison” Sangat on the Northern coast, where asylum seekers were then being held. Four of his relatives had fought in the First World War, but he spoke mostly about his maternal grandpa who was wounded and gassed. Les had done some secondary reading about the war but relied largely on the information compiled by his uncle Doug, who had taken down in hand his grandfather’s reminiscences of the Somme. Les had visited the spot where his grandfather had fought and he reconstructed the scene in shocking detail. What little he knew about his grandfather—that he had been blown back into the trench after the order to attack and,

after having made an advance, was forced to retreat—he related through a “pity of war” narrative. His grandfather had crawled back to his own lines through a “field” thick with the blood and entrails of sixty thousand men. Time and geography were condensed, his grandfather seeming to witness in one scene the aftermath of 141 days of fighting across fourteen miles of front. His Somme, of mud, blood and madness explained why war must be stopped. Les wanted the meeting to act as a springboard for a peace movement; his paired interview with Maria concluded with the pledge “never again.” For him, the memory of First World War and the centenary commemoration provided an opportunity to put forward a political agenda.²⁹

The anti-war message was more subdued among others, but when asked during the interviews what had brought them to the event, many responded in terms of hopes for peace. The fact that the meeting had been organized by voluntary sector groups with a therapeutic and pan-European interest probably facilitated these sentiments. Current events were also on everyone’s mind, notably Britain’s pending referendum on leaving the European Union, a proposal that none of the organizers or the twenty-five participants voiced support for. The discussions between the British and German governments on the eve of the centenary commemorations may also have helped set the political context, the German ambassador Andreas Meitzner having met with his British counterpart Andrew Murrison in mid-2013 to advise that his government would welcome a “less declamatory tone” about who was responsible for the conflict, and greater acknowledgment of their shared losses and the EU’s achievements in securing peace.³⁰ Age Exchange’s meeting eschewed triumphalism for the sake of cooperation and reconciliation: the symbolic centerpiece of the event was on day one, when the participants from each side, British and German, each holding a family heirloom from the war, stepped forward into the center of the room to share a personal memory with their opposite number. The subsequent events were designed to deepen the bonds between the two groups, culminating in paired interviews. Dialogue and the reconciliation of different war pasts were built into the meeting, and Ruth seemed to speak for all when she proclaimed that “I’m a great European.”

The knowledge that they were in some cases the last living link to the war generation sharpened the sense of responsibility to take a stance.

Hilary's grandmother had been brought up in a workhouse, her great-grandmother having suffered a breakdown after the death of her husband in the war. She wanted to keep the war's consequences on the record—as someone who understood that it had turned lives “upside down” and who was concerned that this knowledge was diminishing with each generation. Theodora commented on the sorrow caused by the First World War, and her concern that the current generation has no connection to its upheavals. The lessons from that war “need to be kept,” as the world now faced another “dangerous” moment of failing dialogue and countries pursuing increasingly sectional and national interests. Wolfgang was troubled by conflicts brewing up all over the world and believed that Germany “had learned” from its violent past. He broke into English at the end of his interview to pledge “Peace in Europe and the World.”

While the wish for peace was mentioned by most participants, this view bore a complex relation to the war past among Germans whose families had been supporters of war and National Socialism. Members of the *Kriegskinder* generation had often formed their views on war in reaction to their parents and grandparents, as we will see below. Angelika believed that, having seen the consequences of conformism, her generation had a more questioning attitude toward authority than the generation who were young adults in the Second World War. The two “catastrophes” of world war had led them to reject “black and white” views. Christel, also born after the Second World War, believed that the political lesson was one of remaining skeptical. “Don't simply believe,” she counseled, but engage in debate and discussion: “You can only appeal to all people to try and live peacefully.”

These motivations then, were about how knowledge of the First World War's consequences could be held by societies undergoing the transition from personal memory to cultural memory and could act as a check on the readiness to enter future conflicts. They were mentioned by most of the German participants, whose social milieu from childhood had confronted them with German guilt and a sense of collective responsibility for the atrocities of the Second World War. Being interviewed by people from Britain and meeting the descendants of people who had been their adversaries in both wars probably tended to intensify the wish to show that Germany had learned from its mistakes.³¹ But there could also be political motives that worked in the opposite direction, where the participants

wished to present hidden injustices, linked to the aftermath of war in their family. Here the point was not to deliver a “lesson from history” to the present but to air a private grievance from the past.

Marga’s account was framed around the death of her father in a psychiatric hospital when she was twelve. He had served in the First World War and in the 1930s had been a member of the SA and Stahlhelm. He volunteered in 1943 and served in Italy where he was taken prisoner, returning home in fall 1945 underweight and “completely depressed.” She felt that her father had been “enamored” of the First World War. He had a book on the proud exploits of his Bavarian regiment, the King’s Regiment, which, when she was a child, he had insisted that she read. She recalled his slogans about the First World War: “war guilt, lies,” his claim that the King’s Regiment had been “undefeated in the field” and that the cause of defeat in the First World War was the “stab in the back.”³² His death after the Second World War left a complicated legacy. She explained how the British Control Commission for Germany had stopped her father from running his electrical shop, believing that an ex-Nazi was “not worthy” to run the business. It was this, as much as his fragile state on return, that had contributed to his attempted suicide in 1947 and death in a psychiatric hospital two weeks later. Marga recapitulates here the feeling among some of the West German population, of being “completely at the mercy of the occupying forces” during the denazification process.³³ His death and her fears surrounding the occupying forces had traveled down two generations: Marga suffers from anxiety, and so does her daughter, now aged fifty-one. Speaking about this to her British interviewer, Marga intimated something of the grievance she bore at the way her father had been treated. But she also felt uncomfortable about his Nazi past. For her, finding a context for her father’s death in a more distant past perhaps helped to defuse the emotional charge of personal experience. Her anxiety, and that of her daughter, she believed, “has its cause in this primal catastrophe of the First World War.” The interview aroused raw feelings of injustice about her father’s death, but Marga did not find it easy to express them: there remains a moral gap between the victimhood of those who fought for the Nazis and those whom they killed and brutalized, and she did not wish to appear to sympathize with her father’s Nazi past.³⁴ The First World War served as a comparatively “safe” location for anger and anxiety, the original cause of the family’s troubles.

British participant Ruth's feelings about injustice were also connected to the early death of a father. He had died when she was four from TB which "we [her family] think" was related to the effects of being gassed in the war, though the Ministry of Pensions refused to acknowledge this. As a result, her mother had had to manage on a widow's pension of ten shillings a week. The family were short of money and forced to be resourceful, keeping chickens and growing their own vegetables. Her sister had passed the 11-plus exam, which enabled entry to grammar school, but was unable to go. Ruth described the hardships her mother had undergone, and there was a moral subtext to her interview, a wish to lay the cause of some of ~~that hardships~~ at the door of the Ministry of Pensions.

Both the peace campaigners and those wanting to air private grievances were in part using the meeting to address a larger imagined audience: a public still swayed through national commemorations by the idea of war as glory, by the image of miserly Ministry of Pensions officials or by British righteousness about German guilt. They wished to challenge public opinion and prevailing understandings of the First World War and were at times guided by political motives, whereas those described below—while also expressing a politics of a kind—were more "inwardly" directed.

BREAKING SILENCE

And when I say: "Show it! Show the wound that we have inflicted upon ourselves during the course of our development," it is because the only way to progress and become aware of it is to show it.



Joseph Beuys³⁵

The comment we heard most often during the four days of the meeting was that parents and grandparents had not talked about the war. Shared histories of family silence drew the British and Germany participants together, and in locating their ancestor's war past in archival records, photographs, mementoes and histories of the war, they broke that silence. In hearing others' stories about the war, they came to view their experience in a broader light, as part of a national or generational history. But the participants came to the meeting with different kinds of family silences,

some felt to be relatively benign, others to have been harmful not just to them personally but across generations of their family.

Some described incidents or objects from childhood whose relationship to the war they did not comprehend at the time. Wounds disturbed the child's sense of how the human body should be, and the marks of violence were recounted with an acute eye.³⁶ Even Les, whose interview was least focused on the "private" legacies, entered a different register when he described a childhood memory of seeing the wounds on his grandfather's calf, buttock and shoulder as he emerged from the shower. The evidence of a violent impact on the body of a father or grandfather created a vivid impression. Diana's "grampie" never spoke about the war, but she could recount the precise details of the wound on his scalp. Marga's father's never talked about the war either, but the thin skin on his neck, caused by a wound from which he had almost bled to death, had encouraged her as a child to imagine what he must have gone through. Domestic ornaments could also arouse curiosity about the war. Delia brought along a Princess Mary Christmas gift box, one of over two and a half million given to those serving at home and abroad in 1914. She recalled running her fingers across the lid as a small child, fascinated by the feel of the princess's bust on its engraved lid, not knowing then the historical significance of the box. Sense impressions like these generated a demand for explanation. Thus, for some the meeting functioned to create a narrative about the dumb heritage of the war; in the case of wounds, knitting together a meaningful account of that which, to the child's eye, was rent.

Sometimes silence was explained as a fact with no deeper connotations: there was simply little to tell. Wolfgang's paternal grandfather had died in 1945 when he was five and he recalled little about him. The only evidence of his grandfather's war was a dozen postcards that he had sent home, a French bayonet and a letter-opener. Wolfgang had filed off the sharp edges of the letter opener's handle when he was younger, not realizing that it was made from a grenade casing and was a valuable example of trench art. The bayonet had lain in his grandmother's attic until she died and was then passed to his father. Wolfgang had placed it on his wall but knew nothing of its provenance. The artefacts of war had become domesticated, their violent back-stories lost.

For others, the lack of family discussion about the First World War was felt to be normal, reflecting the emotional temperaments of genera-

tions who did not talk about the past. It was not a silence that implied a deeper meaning. Peter's grandfather and great uncle had been killed during the First World War, his grandfather dying in a failed attempt to avenge the death of his brother. Yet Peter did not see his father's silence as a traumatic reaction. Rather, it reflected the character of the man. He had learned about the deaths of his grandfather and uncle almost by chance, reading a book on the 10th Essex Regiment that was on the bookshelves at home. He recited its account of the two officers' deaths in an ironic tone, chuckling at words like "heroism" that seemed out of kilter with his own understanding of the war. Here was a man whose "pity of war" narrative was constructed around a family silence felt to be benign, whereas for many others, this stance had emerged from more apparent damage.

Other participants saw silence as a response to a trauma. Fathers and grandfathers appeared taciturn or uncommunicative because of a difficult war past which, reflecting the cultural chasm between the war and home fronts during the conflict, families did not discuss. They recalled men whose temperaments and habits they had taken for granted as children, but whose behavior they now understood as an effect of the war. Diana did not state directly that her grampie had suffered a trauma, but her account was animated by this understanding. He was an uncommunicative man with a "short temper," whose moods had to be managed by her grandmother and who felt rather inaccessible to her as a child. On coming home from work he would head for his favorite armchair, where he would listen to music or the radio and read novels. The family had pieced together his military record in recent years and realized that he had gone through some of the bloodiest battles of the war: the Marne, First Ypres in late 1914 and Second Ypres in spring 1915. Knowing more about the historical context, Diana now saw his rigid routines and need for solitude as a means of managing difficult memories. Diana was interviewed by her son David Savill, Age Exchange's artistic director and the initiator of the meeting, in a fascinating mix whereby the "private" story of unspoken war legacies, passed from the veteran to his granddaughter, entered a public arena through the coaxing of the great-grandson. Their story sheds light on transmission across four generations, David's motivation for setting up the meeting being in part a response to the silence in his family.

For some, then, the meeting was an invitation to share the personal experience of living with war damage and thus convert the unspoken lega-

cies witnessed by children and grandchildren into a historical narrative, in an impulse that is typical of successor generations who live with the “postmemory” of conflict.³⁷ The memories of silence that people shared, however, were not only prompted by personal experience; they were also animated by psychological theories. While for Diana the trauma perspective formed an implicit framework of understanding, the German participants tended to adopt a more explicitly psychological concept of silence and its impact across generations. Some had participated previously in a seminar series in Munich on the intergenerational impact of the Nazi past called the “Long Shadows of War.” The organizer of the series, Jürgen Müller-Hohagen, was a psychologist living in Dachau, whose academic and clinical work was closely connected to his experience of living nearby the camp and growing up with the personal guilt of being born to a family of “Nazi bystanders.”³⁸ He was one of the event organizers and was interviewed for the meeting, and we were led to wonder at points whether some of the participants were or had been his clients. He believed that the impact of extreme violence and guilt had been transmitted down the generations to descendants of the Nazi past, “negated by the perpetrators themselves, but transported to the offspring via poisoned relationships.”³⁹

Many of the German participants talked about the oppressive and emotionally damaging effects of silence. Theodora and Jürgen described how the suppression of memories from the First and Second World Wars had created a “heaviness” in the family. Hanne recalled an underlying “tense mood” throughout her childhood, due in part to the way her family had “covered” both her father’s participation in the SA during the Second World War and her grandfather’s war past. The “huge silence” in the family meant that “nothing can grow out of it.” Theodora remarked that there was no “inner relation” between her generation—born after the war—and the First World War. Swept under the carpet at home, the war was also “shoved aside” at school, remarked Christel. Hanne conveyed the tendency of families to want to forget in a story about her grandfather’s Honor Medal, which, after his death in 1951, lay undisturbed in a cigar box in an outbuilding of the family joinery until January 2016, when she and her cousin, stimulated by the invitation to join the meeting, went looking for war memorabilia (figure 1). Established by von Hindenberg shortly before his death in 1934, the National Socialist government had declared the Honor Medal to be the only valid official recognition of war



Fig. 1. The cigar box which lay undisturbed in an outbuilding of the family joinery works after Hanne's grandfather, an SA officer during the Second World War, died in 1951. Inside was this photo of her grandfather in uniform, his Honor Medal and the 1934 presentation letter.

service. Linked as it was to Hitler's rehabilitation of the First World War veteran as the exemplary citizen, the medal signaled associations that the family had wanted to forget. Yet this forgetting had had psychological consequences down the generations, as "we all carry the legacy whether we want it or not. If we let the war touch us or if we are looking at the terrible things or not, they are there."⁴⁰

The history of the First World War had value for these participants as a means of breaking silence. Aware of the unconscious legacies of the Second World War past in their families, they turned to the First World War in a bid to understand its origins. For Hanne and Jürgen, the realization that parents and grandparents had gone through an earlier trauma helped to place their behavior in a broader context (figure 2). Hanne described a grandfather who "had no emotion for the children. He had emotion for work, for helping others and for doing things properly." The two generations had shared a house after the Second World War, and for



Fig. 2. Jürgen had recently found this photograph of his grandfather in 1892. In the interview he notes his military bearing, “upright, controlled.”

a while she had shared a bed with her grandparents, recalling her fears lest she move about in her sleep and arouse the grandfather’s ire. He used to hit them with a stick if they misbehaved at ~~the meal times~~, and in the interview she picked up a ruler and waved it around the table, just as he had done. She recalled her relief after he died, at being able to snuggle up to her grandmother in bed. All she could remember about him was his strictness: “I had no other feelings.”

To help prepare for the meeting, Hanne had gone to the archives in Ebersbach where her grandfather was born and lived before the war. “It was very exciting,” she explained, to learn that he had been a keen gymnast

and had acquired his own fishing rights—this prompted a memory of him as an old man, filling the bath with fish. She learned that all of his four siblings had died in childhood, a prewar “tragedy” which she thought must have affected him deeply. She also believed that his war had been a traumatic one, that he had seen death and “horrible things.” From her reading of archival sources, and the discovery of the cigar box, she had begun “to get to know him” as a person. Participants like Hanne were using history not to *justify* the political views and conduct of grandfathers, as the myth of the “stab in the back” would have it, or to explain the rise of Nazism or to depict ancestors as victims, but rather to gain a better sense of how the violence of war had affected these men psychologically and physically. Historical research supplied an external perspective on the events that had helped make their fathers and grandfathers who they were. History in this case becomes the handmaid of psychology, furnishing an “external” perspective and explanation of personality and behavior that helps to detoxify memory. Hanne was an artist whose earlier work had addressed her father’s Nazi past, and part of her contribution to the event was a workshop in which the participants drew pictures of the war legacies in their families. At the end of her interview Hanne recited the quotation from Beuys with which this section opens. In this way she proclaimed her identities as a child saddled with silences from the two wars, as an artist and as a member of a generation committed to breaking silence.

The perceived value of breaking silence was understood as simultaneously personal and political, linking together national difficulties in accepting the Nazi past and personal experiences of growing up. For the German participants, it was not possible to seal family histories off from the national past. Where British participants might talk of fathers and grandfathers who were “stern,” the Germans described men who were “authoritarian,” and their attitudes were reserved if not openly disapproving. This was linked of course to the Second World War and the close relationship that some perceived between paternal attitudes and support for National Socialism. Part of the point of sharing their stories was to expose the authoritarian nexus between public and private.

Dieter’s story illustrates this. His grandfather had been commissioned in the war, but by 1917 he had become demoralized by having to send men into battle and see them return as casualties. He became a Democrat in Weimar Germany, and remained an opponent of Hitler even through

the early years of the Second World War when the invasion of France succeeded and his veteran friends were applauding Hitler's ability to finish what they had failed to do in the First World War. Dieter's father's politics were diametrically opposed to his grandfather's. He had joined the Hitler Youth in the 1930s, and even today, to Dieter's embarrassment and anger, would defend Hitler.

For Dieter, there was a cross-generational inheritance of overbearing authority. If his father "commanded something," he explained, "we had to follow this command absolutely." Dieter felt that the origins of this authoritarianism lay in his grandfather's experience during the First World War, and its political and personal aspects were closely bound. The war veteran had opposed Hitler, but at home, as Dieter discovered from his aunts, he was "very aggressive and irascible." Dieter believed that his father, in becoming a Hitler Youth and "making Hitler his father," was rebelling against his own father, who was himself "like a dictator."⁴¹ Dieter still struggled with this personal legacy, feeling that he was sometimes too compliant with his work colleagues in the effort to avoid becoming the dictator his father and grandfather had been.

Far from being buried in silence, in this family the First World War was the pivot around which political differences and generational tensions were expressed. The commemorative objects that Dieter brought with him were "thick books" about the Treaty of Versailles which, from an early age, his father had urged him to read because they made clear that Germany had been wronged. As a young man Dieter had had no response: although he rejected his father's politics, he lacked the historical knowledge to oppose him. But he had read widely about the First World War, arming himself with historical perspectives that did not exonerate Germany. Here, the presentation of a story to a British and German audience was a response not so much to a dumb past as to a domestic First World War drama played out over three generations, in the hope that resolution could be achieved by exposing the emotional and political conflict between grandfather, father and son. Talking of authoritarianism, he said at one point that "I can feel it in my family, I can feel it through my father." He thought its origins went right back to his grandfather's experiences in the trenches. His father, however, felt ambivalent about Dieter's attempts to banish the fifty-year-old family taboo on talking about authoritarianism. From Dieter's research it emerged that the grandfather had barely been

an adult when he had joined up, and had “suffered, he was a victim,” yet Dieter’s father was “scared that too much is going to come to light.” Calls to end silence, notes Jay Winter, may either result in a lifting of the interdiction or occasion its reiteration, and Dieter’s father oscillated between these positions.⁴²

Dieter’s situation was unusual in that the First World War, not the Second, was the conduit through which political and personal differences between the generations were expressed. While in his family the *political* consequences of the war were discussed, its private consequences were not. Dieter shared with others a belief in the value of history in gaining perspective and helping to reconcile opposing views. His had been a life in which “everything [was] separated into two worlds,” and he had gone back to his grandfather’s war in the hope of locating the origins of domestic tyranny. Having revealed the traumas of his grandfather’s war, he hoped that anger might “find its end.” Angelika thought the value of a historical perspective on the two world wars lay in the capacity to see things from different sides, and achieve distance through “thorough and honest analysis,” while Linde was interested in how her own family’s experience related to others. If on the one hand a historical perspective could help understand the collective emotional costs of “militaristic thinking,” on the other it could show that Germany was not the only guilty party.

BEING THE BEARER OF FAMILY HISTORY

The sense of being a carrier of family memory, with a responsibility to preserve the heirlooms, records and stories of ancestors, brought some of the participants to the meeting. A kind of selection process often seemed to have gone on in their families, who had designated them archivists and curators. Grandchildren were particularly likely to take on this role. There was often a sense of being the only one in the family to hold memory. “I can’t remember anything at all being said about the First World War,” remarked Theodora of her childhood. Her grandfather was “introverted” and “unapproachable” and there were no family stories about his war, so Theodora had gone to the Munich archive to locate his war record and now wanted to “dig for more.” She was, however, the only “really interested” member of her family. The thought that there might be nobody after

them to hold the family memory could be quite unsettling: Mariana was thinking of donating her father's war letters to the city of Vienna where he had grown up, as her brother did not want them, and Mariana's only son, who would have inherited them, had died young. Being the bearer of a First World War history could feel a responsibility, but could also set descendants off on creative historical paths.

The sense of custodianship associated with objects from the war could stimulate historical pursuits. Martin explained how when he was in his twenties his grandmother had taken him aside and explained that she wanted him to have her scrapbooks and crucifix from the war. He did not know why she had chosen him, but she had. She had been a VAD (voluntary nurse) in a hospital in Buxton, and Martin's story focused on the puzzle of the crucifix and how it had come into her possession. Reading through her scrapbooks, he reconstructed the incipient romance between his grandmother and the sergeant who had given it to her. The value of the crucifix, the soldier had told his grandmother, lay in what it represented rather than its monetary worth. He had taken it from a bombed house in France, where it had hung on one of the few remaining walls, a miraculous survivor like the statue of the Virgin on the church tower in Albert, in the Somme. In Martin's interview, he thinks about what the crucifix might have meant to the family on whose bedroom wall it had hung, to the soldier who took it and to his grandmother. Possession of the crucifix sets in train a host of broader questions about lives lived in cataclysm, the significance of religion, romantic relationships and the emotional bonds between nurses and patients. Martin had gone on to become a history teacher and attributed his career to having been appointed custodian of the crucifix and scrapbooks. His historical pursuits seemed to have traveled full circle: as a young man he had been more interested in political than social history, but he now sought to see the war as his grandmother had seen it, to put himself in her shoes. Similarly, Chris had become interested in the war after the deaths of his aunt and uncle, who had passed on medals and papers to him. The objects seemed to demand a history, and he had done some research on his grandfather's Manchester Pals regiment. This allowed him to connect his grandfather's past to the social history of the army and of Manchester during the First World War. Chris presented a photo of the Pals veterans standing in Albert Square in the 1970s, his

grandfather among them, about to return to France in a battlefield tour sponsored by the newspapers.

Rainer's interest in the First World War was also motivated by the possession of objects, in his case, a diary given to his mother in 1913 by her uncle Adolf. She had begun the diary in mid-1914, recording the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand and the hordes of newly mobilized soldiers in the local railway station in the small town of Bückeberg in Northern Germany. Rainer's own aging had made him more interested in this "inheritance," but in the diary he found a mother whose attitudes were hard to identify with. Rainer read out extracts in which the young girl described "[f]ully equipped soldiers standing there, full of fighting spirit, strong and powerfully." By contrast, his own early experience of war—the Second—was one of fright. As Rainer explained, "my mother bore me into the war and I experienced war on-site from the age of one until seven." Their smallholdings were bombed eleven times. Inspired by the wish to understand the strength of patriotism displayed by his mother in her diary, he had recently visited Bückeberg station and had stood on the platform trying to imagine a time in which it "was a great thing in the view of the society to go to war for the fatherland." Rainer brought with him a book by the early nineteenth-century German poet and soldier Carl Theodor Körner, which he felt had "laid down a direction" for the beliefs his mother had expressed a century later. The diary intimated everything that he loved about her, the passion for writing and painting and her lively interest in society and culture, but it also set him on a path to understand how, at the same time, she was capable of subscribing to warlike ideals he now found "depressing." Her favorite uncle, the one who had given her the diary, had died in the trenches just a year later, yet grief at his death had not shaken the adolescent girl's enthusiasm for war and the fatherland.

The diary, a physical inheritance, had presented Rainer with evidence of war enthusiasms that his generation, growing up after the Second World War, now found "incredible." He had turned to history in an attempt to better understand the warlike mentality, tracing it back from the Second to the First World War, standing not just metaphorically but literally in his mother's place, on the very spot where her patriotic fervor had been stirred. Perhaps, however, such research can function as autobiographical enquiry at one remove. Among Rainer's photos was one of himself dressed in the uniform of the Hitler Youth. When the interviewer pointed this

out, he replied that this was common among children of his generation, but it suggests that the warlike sentiments he was determined to fathom through his historical researches were perhaps not as distant or unfamiliar as they seemed at first. The First World War can stand as a surrogate for the Second: more distant temporally and emotionally, lying beyond the horizon of personal experience, its history can provide insight into feelings and beliefs actually closer to home.

For others, the sense of being a bearer revolved less around objects than relationships. Aly also described himself as the keeper of war memory in his family. As a small boy, he had asked his grandfather all sorts of questions about the war, “silly questions really.” The relationship came to revolve around the war as Aly grew older and they became more like “companions.” Aly had worked with his grandfather in the local Toc H. bookstore in Wales, where his grandfather would socialize with other veterans, and in his twenties Aly would make sure to visit his grandparents for lunch each week. Aly’s curiosity about the war encouraged him to coax stories from his grandfather, but he also wanted to help counter his grandfather’s growing isolation. Aly felt ambivalent about being the one to hold the heritage of war and resented it when other members of his family, having shown no interest, would ask him for information. At the same time, Aly, like Martin, had gone on to have a career in which those private interests found a professional place: he was one of the creators of *Europeana*, a website that invites people across Europe to submit images of First World War heritage in their family and tell the stories associated with them.⁴³ His personal role in the family, eliciting his grandfather’s war stories, had grown into an international social enterprise. There was a direct link between the manner in which his grandfather and great-uncles had gone about recording their war and Aly’s role today: all three brothers had gone to war with Brownie cameras, and Aly ~~now was~~ capturing in digital form the many hundreds of Kodak photos taken by people like them.

COMMEMORATING LIFEWORLDS

The ability to sustain humanity through the destructiveness of war was emphasized by some participants, whose stories commemorated life- rather than deathworlds.⁴⁴ They described energies and enthusiasms during



Fig. 3. Christel's grandfather wrote postcards on the bark of silver birch, and decorated others with lichen, flowers and wheat stalks. He was a baker in civilian life; the design resembles plaited bread. In placing her grandfather's messages home in a dedicated display box, his granddaughter memorialized her grandfather's survival and humanity.

the war and afterwards. Accounts such as these focused on survival and regeneration and could function as “counternarratives” to trauma. Bill, for example broke into tears when explaining that he was named after the officer who had instructed his father to return to the lines after an attack in which the officer and his father were wounded. Bill felt that he owed his life to this officer, and being his namesake intensified the wish to honor his sacrifice. The legacy here was the continuation of life itself.

Implicitly countering a historical narrative of the war's brutalizing effects, some described men who had remained compassionate throughout the conflict. Christel's grandfather had served in Berezina in Russia. His postcards described the lives of the Russian peasants and were observant and sympathetic; the experience had fostered his sympathies toward poor and blameless people caught up in conflict, an attitude that he had showed again during the Second World War when he had harbored Polish laborers to stop them having to go to the front. The physical form of the postcards symbolized her grandfather's peaceable nature. Crafted by hand from bark, they made “something beautiful” from the conflict, by contrast with the more ambiguous message of trench art fashioned from

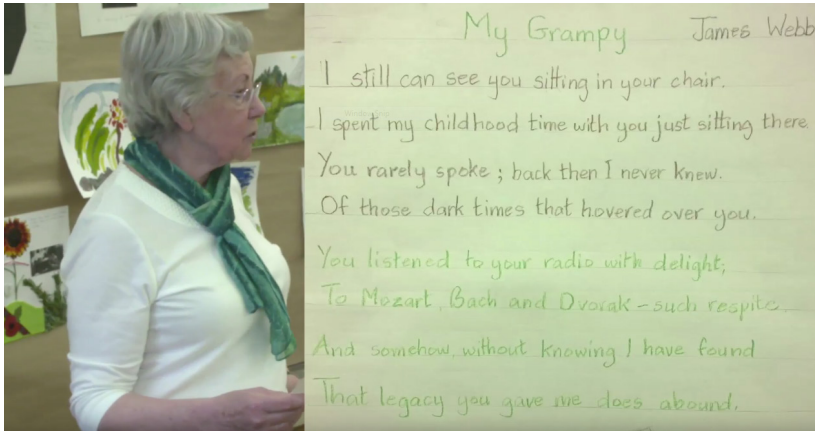


Fig. 4. Diana Savill's poem about her grandfather, with the paintings of other participants in the background. She drew a piano keyboard at the bottom of her poem to symbolize the musical legacy of her grandfather.

shells or bullet cases (~~figure 3~~).⁴⁵ Christel's stories may be an example of what Harald Welzer calls the "heroising" tendency in German families, who "manoeuvre" their ancestors away from the perpetrator group and focus instead on their "moral integrity" and acts of resistance.⁴⁶

The participants also recounted lifeworlds after the war. Delia's grandfather loved amateur theater and cinema and eventually became a cinema manager. He never talked about the war, and, like many of her generation in the 1960s, she had learned of its horrors by reading Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* and watching "every episode" of the 1964 BBC television series *The Great War*. Her abiding memory of her grandfather was not the misery of life in trenches, which she had learned about later, but his love of life.

For others, the relationship between the war's destructive impact and the creative interests of fathers and grandfathers was more apparent. Diana described her grampie's interests in music and reading as solitary activities, which had made him appear remote and inaccessible to Diana as a child. Yet his recuperative habits became her professional passions: she had become a pianist, the first in her family to go on to higher education. Her grandfather's pastimes reflected the war's toll, but were wholly positive activities for Diana (figure 4).

The love of hiking (or for the Bavarians, mountaineering), cycling, motoring, travel, languages, art, music, theater, film and photography



Fig. 5. Theodora's painting shows her grandfather looking down from the heavens on his family and their shared pastimes.

were mentioned, suggesting an interesting perspective on the history of interwar leisure as a war legacy. Wolfgang's parents had traveled around Europe after the war in a mobile home made by his father, who liked to paint the wilderness. Sometimes the legacy lay in the ancestor's ability to move on from the war emotionally. Linde remembered a father who, when she was a girl, would line up his pencils in neat rows and not let her touch them, but who, as an old man, was happy for his grandchildren to use them however they wished. Theodora's painting for the art workshop depicted her grandfather amidst his family and the paraphernalia of his favorite leisure activities, skiing and cycling (figure 5). Sometimes the legacies were generational and social. Angelika believed that Germany's role in the environmental movements and the unification of Europe was the positive consequence of having to accept guilt for the Nazi past. Lifeworlds fostered after the conflict could be personal and private or collective and political. They asserted the ability of an ancestor not to succumb to the war's destruction and the military roles assigned to them and to retain a sense of agency, humanity and creativity.

MAKING EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS

The wish to compose a picture of a family member, to evoke him or her as a person, was common among the participants. The structure of the meeting facilitated this, beginning with the individual interviews where people described the ancestor they had come to talk about, and continuing with the art workshops, paired interviews, and exchanges at lunch and in the evenings. It sometimes seemed that personal attachments were being transformed into memorials in front of us. Before her interview, Christel had transferred her grandfather's handmade postcards from an anonymous box into a wooden display case, wanting, she said, to "present it more beautifully" and "give it a place of honor."⁴⁷

We had moments during the five days when a vivid image of the person being described would come to mind even though we had no idea what she or he actually looked like. This reflected the participants' wishes to recapture memories and experience anew the relationship with a parent or grandparent.⁴⁸ The war itself might be incidental to this desire, furnishing a source of evidence about the person in the form of records, letters or mementoes, with the bureaucratic record-keeping of the war being used primarily to revivify a relationship rather than reconstruct the war past.

Mariana's father's postcards and letters from the Dolomites served to bring back the memory of a "very loving" father. He and her mother had separated when Mariana was a girl, and she regretted that she had not had the chance to live with him after the age of three. For Mariana, the meeting gave a means to reflect on a relationship whose loss she mourned. Her father loved to paint in his spare time, and in the art workshop Mariana drew a memorial cross sited in his favorite Austrian mountain landscape.

Rosemary thought that the knowledge of her grandfather's war had been buried in the family due to her uncle's death in the Second World War, his loss dominating the earlier war history. Her own interest was not principally in military history or the social history of the home front, but in the wartime romance between her grandparents. She brought with her the letters that her grandmother had written to her grandfather when they were courting in the very first days of the war. The letters helped her to see her grandfather in a new light. He had died when she was twelve. She recalled that he liked pubs but disliked women in pubs. From the grandmothers' letters, however, he appeared passionate and as someone

who liked women. Rosemary had researched his London Scottish Regiment and even knew the design of tartan they wore on their kilts. But what really animated her was reading from the letters, as these gave her a way of being “in touch with people’s emotions”: the young Edwardian woman’s agonies of separation, her longings for her fiancé and fears about his fidelity, her efforts to hold herself together and give him succor. This was a war whose history needed to be felt from within rather than reconstructed through unit histories and service records.

Recalling a childhood relationship with a First World War survivor could also help navigate the tensions between officially sanctioned history and personal memory in families where there was a “difficult past.”⁴⁹ Empathy toward the war generation was problematic for German participants whose family members had supported National Socialism. Describing the personal qualities of a parent or grandparent could be a means of seeking to restore reputation and mitigate the impact of political allegiances condemned by history. Angelika started her interview by talking about her grandfather’s love of travel, language and culture. Before the war he had cycled through France and the Netherlands, the Balkans and Hungary. He was a Francophile who had fought against France in the war. She remembered his curiosity about the world, the way he had explained things to her as a small child, how calm and relaxed he had been. But he also had supported Hitler, joining up again in the Second World War and serving as an intelligence officer. “I have to add,” she explained, “that my grandparents were committed National Socialists.” Hitler had made people feel better, she said, and her grandfather, in joining the party, would have been motivated by a wish to come to the aid of his country. She was sure he had never done “anything bad”; he was “a good man.” She presents herself as a kind of moral guarantor, her childhood memory making her confident that her grandfather, although he was a supporter of Hitler, was not implicated in the evils of Nazism. Christel also drew on personal knowledge of her grandfather to draw conclusions about his part in history: being the peaceable person he was, she felt that he would not have volunteered in the First World War: “the way I knew him,” she said, he must have been a conscript. Among German descendants the implicit trust in the moral integrity of the ancestor can work against the motivation to understand more about their family’s place in the history of extremism.⁵⁰



Fig. 6. Delia's grandfather advertising the film *Roman Scandals* circa 1933. He was a keen amateur actor and became a cinema manager after the war.

Loss could encourage the desire for connection, historical research becoming a means of communing with a loved one and filling in the gaps in family history. The coming to light of a hundred wartime letters from Ruth's father to her mother, which her sister had discovered after their mother's death, gave her a sense of him, not the frail man dressed in hospital pyjamas that she recalled as a four-year-old, but cheerful, funny and a wonderful writer. The letters countered her own memories, allowing her to imagine her father in his prime.

Sometimes the memory of an ancestor served as a means of holding up a mirror. Looking at photographs of their ancestors during the First World War and talking about their personalities and character, the participants

saw aspects of themselves.⁵¹ Theodora recognized in her grandfather an attitude of resistance to authority which she had passed on to her children. Delia had taken part in an earlier Age Exchange theater production on children of the Great War, and her account of her grandfather's postwar career in theater and as a cinema manager was itself rather theatrical. She painted a vivid picture of him walking the streets of South London in costume, advertising his cinema's latest releases, and at the end of her interview showed a photograph of him dressed as a Roman soldier (figure 6). He was energetic and forward looking and had continued working until well into his eighties. Hers was not so much a story as an *enactment* of a family legacy—the love of performance—by a woman now the age of the grandfather she was recalling. The experience of sharing their memories of a loved family member provided a powerful motivation for most of those taking part in the event.

*

The groups that Age Exchange brought together in the meeting were of a political, social and generational type. Broadly middle class, they were also pro-European, as you might expect from an event that invited people to come face-to-face with those who had been their adversaries in two world wars. Their stories tended to converge on pity and loss, much as German Ambassador Meitzner had recommended on the eve of the centenary. Being the descendants of those who had served their country on the home or war fronts, they were motivated by a common wish to connect their family's past to a wider history and were helped by the bureaucratic machinery of record keeping that the First World War set in train. In filming the meeting, and in creating a documentary, the organizers were helping to bridge the “floating gap” between the impermanent experience of descendants and history. The fact that participants were recalling early relationships with their own parents and grandparents added to the emotional intensity of the event, stirring memories and identifications closer to home than those that a state-sponsored commemoration such as Armistice Day might produce. The meeting thus created an emotional community of a singular kind.

The four motivations for commemoration that this article has identified suggest a more variegated picture of the relationship between individuals, families, nation-states and the tropes of the First World War than is sometimes assumed. In the British case, adoption of the “pity of war”

narrative may serve political ends or may simply serve as the backdrop to a fascination with the romantic attachments of ancestors or as a counterpoint to lives lived well afterwards. For some the cataclysm itself may be incidental, the reason for the existence of letters or diaries from a loved one, rather than the point of interest. Although some participants depicted family silences about war within the psychological imperatives of a trauma narrative, others did not.

While it was possible for the British ancestors to relate stories of domestic life that were largely insulated from and untroubled by national events, the impact of defeat and extremism was part of the family history for all the German participants. The meeting thus gave us insights into the psychological fallout of defeat and victory. The German participants were arguably more aware of being members of a generation, since the stories of the *Kriegskinder* generation born after 1945 were frequently dominated by conflict with their parents over National Socialism. In Germany, as Mark Roseman notes, “it was the perceived overlap between family and national experience that gave generational rebellion its symbolic and emotional force.”⁵²

Among the German participants the “discovery” of the First World War could serve a variety of ends, sometimes even within a single individual. For many the point of research was to construct a personal history of the Thirty Years’ conflict in which the authoritarian tendencies revealed in the First were repeated in the Second; and commemoration might lead to sympathetic understanding or underscore resentment toward the war generations. For others, the First World War could furnish a past in which the moral pressures of responsibility and guilt were felt to be less oppressive, since it was a *different* and more remote war than the one they had grown up with, one in which, *pace* Clark, it became possible to exculpate Germany from sole responsibility. For some, Germany’s role in European integration was a positive sign of lessons learned from the two wars; for others, it was still clouded with the responsibility for extremism.

The participants in our meeting formed but one memory group, however, united in their wish for cross-national reconciliation. On the last day we went on a walking tour of Munich, past the city gates where Pegida demonstrations and counterdemonstrations, separated by police barricades, were held each Monday. A month later, the anti-immigration and anti-Islam AfD (Alternative for Germany) Party would hold a meet-

ing outside the Hofbräukeller tavern in Munich where, on October 16, 1919, Hitler had made his first political speech.⁵³ Two months later, as Age Exchange worked on its documentary film of the meeting, Britain would vote to leave the European Union. The affective ties between the participants in our meeting were based on the sharing and reconciling of different pasts, but as recent events in Europe suggest, the memory of the two world wars can equally form the basis for groups drawn together through feelings of division and enmity.

APPENDIX 1:

MEETING IN NO MAN'S LAND INTERVIEWS FOR BRITISH AND GERMAN DESCENDANTS



These are a guide and can be added to or changed slightly depending on the interviewee's background etc.)

Please could you tell us your name and where you were born and grew up.

You've come to share a family history that relates to the First World War. Who is the principal relative/or ancestor you have come to tell us about?

Did you know them personally—or someone who was close to them?

If you knew them personally can you tell us what kind of person they were? Where were they born? What were they doing before the First World War? (Follow up question if possible)

What do you know of their experience of the First World War? (Follow up)

In what way were they or their family members affected by the War, either at the time or afterwards? (Follow up questions if appropriate)

How did you come to learn of their experience of the First World War? How was the story passed down to you?

Do you have any photos or letters or other artefacts that relate to your Father/Mother or Grandfather/Grandmother etc. and their experience of the First World War?

Please show us...and describe what you have brought? (Follow up questions where appropriate)

Do you have anything that your ancestor wrote during the war or after, about any aspect of their experience? If so could you read an extract for us from a letter/postcard.....

Did they pass on a song, or a saying from their wartime experience?

Did they share with you or a relative any specific experience from the First World War that has remained in your memory through the years?

Can you tell us why you wanted to share your family history of The First World War? Why is it important to you?

Do you feel that your ancestor's experience of the First World War has in some way affected subsequent generations within your family? In what way?

If you could only choose one artefact among those you have brought to show us, which would you choose and why?

What is your personal view of the First World War and how in your country do people choose to remember or commemorate it?

How do you imagine that your views of the First World War might compare with those of the British/German descendants you will be meeting?

You have chosen to take your family history from the First World War and share it with the descendants of former enemies. Why did you feel you wanted to do this?

NOTES

We would like to thank the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Heritage Lottery Fund, and the Everyday Lives at War First World War Engagement Centre for supporting this research. We thank Age Exchange and all the participants in the Meeting in No Man's Land project for a very productive and enjoyable collaboration in "co-research." We are grateful to Sarah Lloyd and Julie Moore from the Everyday Lives at War Centre, Bart Ziino, John Tosh, Sean Nixon, Age Exchange's Artistic Director David Savill, and anonymous readers from this journal for their insightful comments.

1. Paul Ashton and Paula Hamilton, "At Home with the Past," in Paula Hamilton and Paul Ashton, eds., *Australians and the Past: A National Survey* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2003), 3, 8, 12; Paul Ashton and Paula Hamilton, *History at the Crossroads: Australians and the Past* (Sydney: Halstead

Press, 2010), 10; Anna Clark, *Private Lives, Public History* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2016); Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 9.

2. British Council, *Remember the World as Well as the War: Why the Global Reach and Enduring Legacy of the First World War Still Matter Today* (2013), available at <https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/remember-the-world-as-well-as-the-war-report.pdf> (accessed December 15, 2017); Carolyn Holbrook and Bart Ziino, "Family History and the Great War in Australia," in Bart Ziino, ed., *Remembering the First World War* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 39.

3. For an excellent commentary on family memory as a type of collective memory, see Astrid Erll, "Locating Family in Cultural Memory Studies," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 42, no. 3 (May–June 2011): 303–18. On the genres and practices of family history, see Wendy Bottero, "Practicing Family History: Identity as a Category of Social Practice," *British Journal of Sociology* 66, no. 3 (Sept. 2015): 534–56. On the psychosocial functions of family stories, see Anna Green, "Intergenerational Family Stories: Private, Parochial, Pathological?," *Journal of Family History* 38, no. 4 (2013): 387–402. The role of cross-generational transfer in underpinning constructions of knowledge about the Second World War is discussed in Louis Oppenheimer and Ilse Hakvoort, "Will the Germans Ever Be Forgotten? Memories of the Second World War Four Generations Later," in Ed Cairns and Mícheál D. Roe, eds., *The Role of Memory in Ethnic Conflict* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 94–105. See also Roger Frie, *Not in My Family: German Memory and Responsibility after the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 11.

4. We wanted to understand how, in Barbara Tint's words, the descendants had "internalised their lived or learned history" of the First World War. Barbara Tint, "History, Memory and Intractable Conflict," *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (Spring 2010): 240.

5. The schedule, which was agreed between the University of Essex and the Age Exchange team, is attached in Appendix 1.

6. The film can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZtOvjVihEFA2> (accessed December 15, 2017). A companion article describes the events of the meeting in more detail, comparing Age Exchange's approach to reminiscence work with the approaches and methods of oral history. Rachel Duffett and Michael Roper, "Making Histories: The Meeting of German and British Descendants of First World War Veterans in 'No Man's Land,' Bavaria, 2016," *Public Historian*, 40, no. 1 (Feb. 2018).

7. Helen McCartney, "The First World War Soldier and His Contemporary Image in Britain," *International Affairs* (London) 90, no. 2 (2014): 299. Dan

Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon and London Press, 2005); Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory: The First World War: Myths and Realities* (London: Headline Review Press, 2002); David Reynolds, *The Long Shadow: The Great War and the Twentieth Century* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2013).

8. McCartney, "First World War Soldier," 304; Todman *Great War*, 69–71; 213–16.

9. Todman identifies the contemporary circumstances that encourage historical interest in the First World War, among them the "generational fracture" that occurs with the passing of the direct experience of the war generation; the rise of family history, heritage culture and battlefield tourism; and greater prosperity, including home ownership, which provides the space and stability for the preservation of war heritage. However, he does not believe that the emotional motivations for remembrance are transmitted across generations as a form of aftermath: "The concern to locate family casualties does not result from a sense of grief inherited, in some way, from previous generations." Todman, *Great War*, 70. Similar preoccupations with the contemporary sources of historical interest can be seen in Reynolds, *The Long Shadow*, and Ross Wilson, "Framing the Great War in Britain: Modern Mediated Memories," in Ziino, ed., *Remembering the First World War*, 59.

10. Holbrook and Ziino, "Family History," 44, 49. See also Michelle Arrow on the "affective power" of First World War TV programs in Australia. "I Just Feel It's Important to Know Exactly What He Went Through": *In Their Footsteps* and the Role of Emotions in Australian Television History," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 33, no. 4 (2013): 596.

11. For Second World War studies of generations, see Mark Roseman, ed., *Generations in Conflict: Youth Revolt and Generation Formation in Germany, 1770–1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Gabriele Rosenthal, *The Holocaust in Three Generations: Families of Victims and Perpetrators of the Nazi Regime* (London: Cassell, 1998); Harald Welzer, *Grandpa Wasn't a Nazi: The Holocaust in German Family Remembrance* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1995); Dan Bar-On, *Fear and Hope: Three Generations of the Holocaust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Heinz Bude, "The German *Kriegskinder*: Origins and Impact of the Generation of 1968," in Roseman, ed., *Generations in Conflict*, 290–305; Thomas Kohut, *A German Generation: An Experiential History of the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013). Kohut focuses on the war "youth generation" born between 1900 and 1915. The definition of generations in these studies is based on social rather than familial characteristics; for the most part in this article, we define generation in more colloquial terms as steps in the line of descent.

12. See, for example, Frie, *Not in My Family*.
13. We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing us toward examples: Ludwig Harig's novel *Ordnung ist das ganze Leben* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1986); and the interviews with First World War veterans undertaken by Peter Knoch in the 1980s.
14. Harald Welzer, "Collateral Damage of History Education," *Social Research* 75, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 296.
15. Ted Hughes, "National Ghost," in William Scammell, ed., *Winter Pollen: Occasional Prose* (London: Faber, 1994), 70.
16. On the cultural influences on family memory of the First World War in Britain, see James Wallis, "'Great-Grandfather, What Did You Do in the Great War?' The Phenomenon of Conducting First World War Family History Research," in Ziino, ed., *Remembering the First World War*, 29.
17. Gerhard Hirschfeld, Gerd Krumeich and Irina Renz, eds., *Encyclopaedia of the First World War* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2003). "The war is back in German history," wrote Tillmann Bedikowski in his review of the book. http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/gerhard-hirschfeld-gerd-krumeich-irina-renz-hrsg.730.de.html?dram:article_id=102196 (accessed December 13, 2017).
18. Arndt Weinrich, "Un siècle—deux trajectoires: Les mémoires françaises et allemandes de la Première Guerre mondiale, 1918–2014," *La Grande Guerre: Politische, Kulturgeschichte der Vorkriegszeit*, March 27, 2017, http://grande-guerre.hypotheses.org/2009#identifler_13_2009 (accessed December 13, 2017). Exhibitions include Berlin's *War of the Empires—World War I 1914–1918*, at the Deutsches Historisches Museum, and the program of exhibitions *1914. At the Heart of Europe: The Rhineland and the First World War*. For other examples see *ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. Andreas Wirsching, "Christopher Clark's Sleepwalkers and the Germans: A Misunderstanding?," August 5, 2014, <http://insidestory.org.au/christopher-clarks-sleepwalkers-and-the-germans-a-misunderstanding> (accessed July 10, 2017).
21. Kevin Wolnik et al., "The Long Shadows of the Difficult Past? How Young People in Denmark, Finland and Germany Remember WWII," *Journal of Youth Studies* 20, no. 2 (2017): 165. Jeffrey Olick notes in his discussion of the so-called "historians' dispute" of the mid-1980s that for people like Jürgen Habermas, recognition of German guilt was "the *sine qua non* of a healthy German political culture, and any implication that it was not obvious and untouchable was unacceptable." Jeffrey Olick, "In the Ashes of Disgrace: Guilt versus Shame Revisited," in Efrat Ben-Ze'ev, Ruth Ginio and Jay Winter, eds., *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 71.

22. Some had participated in a London-wide Age Exchange project during 2014–15 called “Children of the Great War.” See <http://www.age-exchange.org.uk/cotgw/>.

23. The family memory of war is a “powerful prop” of remembrance, remarks Jay Winter, without which commemoration may become “hollow.” It is this hollowing out that the participants sought to resist. Jay Winter, “Sites of Memory and the Shadow of War,” in Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, eds., *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 72.

24. Ziino, “‘A Lasting Gift to His Descendants’: Family Memory and the Great War in Australia,” *History & Memory* 22, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2010): 130; Ziino, “Introduction: Remembering the First World War Today,” in Ziino, ed., *Remembering the First World War*, 7–8. The second and third generations hold out against oblivion; “character and personality, emotion and relationships,” observes Green, soon dissolve, and “move beyond reach.” Green, “Intergenerational Family Stories,” 391. On the transmission of knowledge to grandchildren, see Oppenheimer and Hakvoort, “Will the Germans Ever Be Forgiven?,” 101, 103.

25. Nicholas J. Saunders, “Apprehending Memory: Material Culture and War, 1919–1939,” in John Bourne, Peter Liddle and Ian Whitehead, eds., *The Great World War, 1914–45* vol. 2 (London: HarperCollins, 2001), 476–88; Ziino, “A Lasting Gift to His Descendants,” 134.

26. Nicholas J. Saunders, “Bodies of Metal, Shells of Memory: ‘Trench Art’ and the Great War Re-cycled,” *Journal of Material Culture* 5, no. 1 (2000): 46, 59. On the role of objects in mediating relationships between survivors and descendants, see Carol Kidron, “Breaching the Wall of Traumatic Silence: Holocaust Survivor and Descendant Person–Object Relations and the Material Transmission of the Genocidal Past,” *Journal of Material Culture* 17, no. 1 (2012): 3–21.

27. Jan Assmann, “Communicative and Cultural Memory,” in Erll and Nünning, eds., *Cultural Memory Studies*, 110–11. Family history is an “emotional labour” and we struggle with emotions as we do it, notes the archivist and family historian Martin Bashforth: “Absent Fathers, Present Histories,” in Paul Ashton and Hilda Keen, eds., *People and Their Pasts: Public History Today* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 206.

28. The phrase “emotional community” is from Mabel Berezin, who notes the power of commemoration to engender and express emotional energies. “Secure States: Towards a Sociology of Emotion,” *Sociological Review* 50, no. 52 (2002): 39.

29. Ross Wilson identifies one of the contemporary “uses” of the First World War as being to help mobilize anti-war sentiment. Ross Wilson, *Cultural Heritage of the Great War in Britain* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), 191.


30. Jasper Copping, "Germany Intervenes in WWI Commemoration Debate," *Telegraph*, August 18, 2013.

31. Wolnik et al., "Long Shadows," 170.

32. Marga's father embodies elements of George Mosse's "Myth of the War Experience," which constructed the war as a sacred event and a high point of heroism and sacrifice, thus displacing the reality of war. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 7.

33. Svenja Goltermann, "On Silence, Madness, and Lassitude: Negotiating the Past in Post-War West Germany," in Ben-Ze'ev, Ginio and Winter, eds., *Shadows of War*, 99.

34. "Former soldiers of the *Wehrmacht* did not cross over the boundary between perpetrators and victims," remarks Goltermann, and "[f]or this reason, their mental suffering never became part of the memory culture of the Second World War in Germany." *Ibid.*, 111.

35. ted in "The Memory of Labour—A Dramatized Installation," <http://culture.pl/en/article/the-memory-of-labour-a-dramatized-installation> (accessed January 3, 2018).

36. Memories of wounds, writes Kidron, are a form of "somatic communication" in which the descendant takes in an embodied memory of legacy through the survivor. Kidron, "Breaching the Wall," 11. See also Ziino, "'A Lasting Gift to His Descendants,'" 134.

37. Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory. Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

38. For information on the Dachau Institute of Psychology and Pedagogy, see <http://www.dachau-institut.de/institut.html> (accessed July 17, 2017).

39. Jürgen Müller, "Descendants: Meeting in our Damaged Mirrors," contribution to workshop "Intertwining Heritage: Language, Research and Representation Based on Cultural Traumas," draft sent to authors.

40. These comments chime with Roseman's observation that "to grow up in post-war families was to grow up in strained silences." Mark Roseman, "Introduction: Generation Conflict and German History, 1770–1968," in Roseman, ed., *Generations in Conflict*, 42.

41. Roseman suggests, in contrast to Dieter's family history, that the Nazi regime mobilized youth but "without generational conflict." *Ibid.*, 31.

42. Jay Winter, "Thinking about Silence," in Ben-Ze'ev, Ginio and Winter, eds., *Shadows of War*, 4.

43. See <http://www.europeana1914-1918.eu/en>.

44. On lifeworlds and deathworlds, see Kidron, "Breaking the Wall," 4.

45. On the "deep ambiguous" nature of shell art, see Saunders, "Bodies of Metal," 55.

46. Welzer, "Collateral Damage," 310–13.
47. On the First World War objects preserved by family members, and the creation of personal shrines to ancestors, see Michele Barrett and Peter Stallybrass, "Printing, Writing and a Family Archive: Recording the First World War," *History Workshop Journal* 75, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 1–32.
48. Wallis notes that loss may be a powerful carrier of intergenerational bonds and First World War memory. Wallis, "Great-Grandfather," 29.
49. Wolnik et al., "Long Shadows," 164
50. An example is Frie, *Not in My Family*, introduction.
51. On the search for family resemblance in photographs, see Kidron, "Breaching the Wall," 13.
52. Roseman, "Introduction," 42.
53. *Guardian* online, March 13, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/13/munich-police-rival-protests-afd-anti-refugee-party-meeting> (accessed July 17, 2017).

MICHAEL ROPER is a social and cultural historian of twentieth-century Britain based in the Sociology Department at the University of Essex. He is working on a Leverhulme Trust funded project about childhood and family legacies of the Great War in Britain, and a personal memoir of the war's impact across three generations of his family in Australia. He is a Co-investigator in the University of Hertfordshire's AHRC/HLF Engagement Centre, "Everyday Lives in the First World War." (mrop@essex.ac.uk)

RACHEL DUFFETT is a social and cultural historian of twentieth-century Britain based in the Sociology Department at the University of Essex. She has a particular interest in the material culture of the First World War and its legacies in the interwar years and is a researcher in AHRC/HLF Centre, "Everyday Lives in the First World War." (rduffe@essex.ac.uk)