

**“A memorial of the fine work they did for their country”:
The Victorian Education Department and the Villers
Bretonneux School**

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The Victorian Education Department established a War Relief Organisation in August 1914, so that staff and students could contribute to Australia's efforts in the Great War from the home front. During the course of the war over £422,000 was raised by the Department's War Relief Organisation Fund, largely through the efforts and sacrifices of the children of the Victorian state schools. Three years after the Armistice approximately £100,000 of this money remained unspent, but there were conflicting views amongst Committee members of the Department's War Relief Fund as to how this money should be disposed of—reflecting divisions within the broader community in post-war Australia over how best to compensate and remember those who had “sacrificed” for the war. It was not until 1922 that a decision was reached by the Education Department's War Relief Fund Committee: the bulk of the money was to be used on assistance for limbless soldiers, but £12,500 was set aside to re-build a primary school in the French town of Villers Bretonneux.¹ The school, named Victoria College in honour of its far away benefactors, has been described as a monument aimed at remembering the Australian men who fought around the town during 1918, but the scale of the donation from the Education Department indicates that there was a desire within the Committee of the War Relief Fund to use the College as a memorial to the war efforts of the Victorian Department of Education.

The decision to fund the re-construction of the Villers Bretonneux School was rooted in the relationship Australians had formed with the town during, and as a result of, the war. Villers Bretonneux, which overlooks the city of Amiens, was a town of great strategic importance: site of a vital railway junction, the point at which the British and French forces joined on the Western Front, and as the last defence between the Germans and the Channel Port, Amiens was highly prized by both the Allies and the Germans. Not surprisingly then, when the German army launched their massive spring offensive of 1918 the town of Villers Bretonneux was targeted. An assault

made on the town on 4 April was repulsed by the Allies, but when the Germans made a second attempt in the early hours of 24 April 1918 they were successful. Men from six battalions of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) were hastily dispatched to the area in order to launch a counter attack against the German army, and to regain control of Villers Bretonneux and the surrounding woods. The counter attack was, in the words of CEW Bean, “fraught with danger”, but by dawn on the third anniversary of the landing at Gallipoli, the Australians had successfully flushed the Germans out from the area around Villers Bretonneux. For many, this was the turning point of the war: Villers Bretonneux marked the end of the successes the Germans had been enjoying during the early months of 1918, and a squat stone monument lies on the road outside the town to mark the extent of the German advance.² Villers Bretonneux was an expensive “success” however, with over 1,200 Australians losing their lives overnight, and with the almost complete destruction of the town.

Despite the destruction, many of the residents of Villers Bretonneux who had been forced to flee the town soon returned, and lived alongside the Australian soldiers. Bruce Scates has noted that, especially when the men of the AIF were stationed in the reserve lines, they were at liberty to fraternise with the locals, “seeking solace, companionship and the surer release of sex and alcohol.”³ At Villers Bretonneux friendships developed between the French civilians and the Diggers when the Australians liberated the town, then blossomed when a group of Australian soldiers began to rebuild the local school in 1918. Amidst the Peace Day celebrations the following year, the Mayor presented a group of Australian soldiers stationed at Villers Bretonneux with the Australian Graves Service with a memorial plaque recalling the deeds of the Australians there in 1918.⁴ This plaque, and the small ceremony which accompanied its presentation to the Australians, hints at the interactions and friendships which could not help but be formed between Australian soldiers and French civilians during the war.

When the Mayor of Villers Bretonneux expressed the “grateful thanks” of his townspeople to the Australian soldiers at the Peace Day celebrations, he also reassured them that “the burial places of your dead will always be respected and cared for.”⁵ This was not a hollow promise. When Lieutenant Lee returned home to Australia after working with the Australian Graves Service, he told other Australians

about the people of Villers Bretonneux, who “Sunday after Sunday, placed wreaths on and looked after the graves of Australian soldiers in the cemeteries near Villers Bretonneux.”⁶ This news would have been an enormous relief to the bereaved in Australia, who – being so geographically distant from the graves – were prevented from caring for the graves of their loved ones.⁷ And no doubt this must have made the people of Villers Bretonneux seem less like strangers, and more like almost an extension of family. Jay Winter has used such a comparison in his discussion of the adoptive kinship bonds, as he terms them, formed between people who shared the experiences of wartime trauma and loss; arguing that those who offered help and comfort “joined the families” of the recipients of their kindness.⁸ But the examples of adoptive kinship examined thus far by historians have focussed on the help extended and received, and the bonds formed, within national boundaries—with British and Germans helping their own people for instance. But adoptive kinship ties also operated in wider, trans-national fields.

The Victorian Department of Education had carried out such adoptive kinship functions from the outset of the war, with one of the aims of the Department’s War Relief Organisation being the provision of comforts and assistance for the civilian population of Allied nations. Accordingly, throughout 1914-1918 money was sent from the Education Department’s War Relief Fund to the Poles, the Russian Appeal, the Belgian Christmas Appeal, and the Italian Red Cross, amongst others.⁹ Interestingly, there appears to have been a hierarchy in place in terms of which Allied nations the Victorian Education Department War Relief Organisation (VEDWRO) Fund Committee considered most worthy of relief funds. When the Lord Mayor of Melbourne requested help for the Serbian Fund for example, the Department’s War Relief Fund Committee curtly informed him that they “had already granted £500 to the Servian [sic] Fund,” and asked him “whether his letter had been written not knowing that fact.”¹⁰

While the Serbs were apparently only worthy of a one-off donation from the Lord Mayor of Melbourne, donations were repeatedly granted by the people of Victoria to causes aimed at offering help to the French. Such appeals for the French were made mainly through the efforts of Charlotte Crivelli, a French woman resident in Melbourne.¹¹ Crivelli established the French Red Cross Society of Victoria in 1916,

and organised a number of Appeals in Melbourne for the benefit of the French during the war. She sent numerous requests for help to the Committee responsible for administering the Education Department’s War Relief Fund, and consistently received their support. In June 1916 the VEDWRO Fund donated £1,000 to Crivelli’s French Week Appeal, in August of that year another £250 was sent to the French Red Cross, £500 was awarded to the Société d’Assistance Maternelle et Infantile (which Crivelli was also in charge of) in October, before another £250 made its way to the Alliance Francaise Appeal by the close of 1916. The French National Day Appeal, held in July 1917 and again organized by Crivelli, received £5,000 from the Department of Education. The following year Madame Crivelli asked the Department for assistance for French orphans – two separate payments were made in response to this, one of £500, the other, £100.¹²

The willingness of the Education Department to assist the civilians of Allied nations, and particularly France, did not abate with the end of the war. In November 1919 Charlotte Crivelli sent a letter to the VEDWRO Fund asking for a donation towards the Villers Bretonneux district—£500 was earmarked for the purchase of Christmas presents for the children as a result.¹³ Two years later Crivelli again contacted the VEDWRO Fund Committee, requesting financial assistance for Victoria’s “adoption” of the town of Villers Bretonneux.

Crivelli’s request highlights the fact that Jay Winter was not the first to liken the help afforded to the victims of war to a figurative adoption. In fact, the term “adoption” was used by the British League of Help for the Devastated Areas of France, formed in London in 1920. Under the auspices of this organisation British cities and towns adopted ruined French towns and assisted with their rebuilding. Three weeks after the British League of Help was established in London, newspapers in both Sydney and Melbourne ran reports on the adoption scheme. And Charlotte Crivelli set about enlisting the support of several prominent men who had been leaders in the Australian Imperial Force to help her in bringing about a Melbourne-based adoption of Villers Bretonneux.¹⁴ In October 1920 a public meeting of interested citizens was held at the Melbourne Town Hall, where it was unanimously agreed that the city of Melbourne should adopt the town of Villers Bretonneux. The fundraising target was set at £20,000 – enough money, it was claimed by the members of the newly formed

Victorian Villers Bretonneux Fund committee, to provide the necessaries of life for all the inhabitants of the town.¹⁵

The Committee of the VEDWRO Fund considered Crivelli’s request for help in reaching the target of £20,000 for Villers Bretonneux at a meeting held in August 1921. Frank Tate, Chairman of the Fund, and long-serving Director of the Education Department, was in favour of making a contribution to the adoption scheme from the Department’s War Relief Fund, but opinion amongst his colleagues was divided. There was some confusion at the meeting over whether or not a resolution had been passed which prevented the balance of the VEDWRO monies from being spent outside Victoria. This was much more than a discussion of mere technicalities. The post-war years were marred by disputes over who was most deserving of assistance, a debate which brought into question the issue of who had made sacrifices for, and who had shirked from, the war effort of the Empire.¹⁶ A decision on Villers Bretonneux was postponed until the VEDWRO Fund Committee met again in September 1921.¹⁷

By the time Tate and his colleagues met to further discuss the proposal to grant money to the Villers Bretonneux Fund, the resolution regarding where the excess War Relief Fund money could be spent was discovered to have only ever been a recommendation, and was therefore not binding. Colonel Watson of the Victorian Villers Bretonneux Fund addressed the September meeting, and the minutes of the meeting record that Watson gave “full particulars” of the dire conditions the people of Villers Bretonneux were exposed to, underlining the urgency of the matter by impressing on his audience the fact that many of the residents of the town were starving. In response to Watson’s appeal, the Allocation Committee of the VEDWRO Fund recommended that £2,500 be given to the Victorian Villers Bretonneux Fund. One of the Committee members, Mr Davey, enthused that he thought he “spoke for all” in the Department “in saying that the amount should be doubled”. Evidently he did not speak even for all his fellow Committee members—Mr Robinson objected, arguing that £5,000 was excessive, especially when there were so many necessitous cases within Victoria. Opinion amongst the remaining members of the VEDWRO Fund Committee was evenly split between those who supported Davey’s view, and those whose thoughts were more in accordance with Robinson; a neat illustration of the divisions within post-war Australia about how to honour and compensate those

whose lives had been changed by the war.¹⁸ Tate was constitutionally bound to vote in favour of the lower amount, however his concluding remark on the matter – that “the name of the Education Department should be linked with some worthy object in the town” of Villers Bretonneux–signalled that the Committee had not heard the last of Villers Bretonneux.¹⁹

Tate announced that he had in mind one such “worthy object” at the War Relief Fund Committee meeting held in December 1921. Charlotte Crivelli had informed him that the rebuilding of the Villers Bretonneux School, begun by Australian soldiers three years earlier, but interrupted by the coming of peace, could be completed for the cost of £10,000. As a result, Tate proposed that the Education Department donate not £5,000–as Davey had suggested at the September meeting - but twice that amount, specifically for the rebuilding of the Villers Bretonneux School.²⁰ He was unable to convince his colleagues however, and was forced to put his case for the reconstruction of the school forward again in February 1922. It was not until March that an agreement was finally reached: a further £10,000 was to be awarded to Villers Bretonneux for the purpose of re-building the school, on top of the £2,500 already agreed to in the previous September.²¹

The magnitude of the Department’s donation to the Victorian Villers Bretonneux Fund ensured that Tate played a prominent role in the direction the adoption scheme then took. In fact, his influence loomed so large that by 1923 the committee of the Victorian Villers Bretonneux Fund was virtually superfluous – it was Tate who received the plans for the new school, and it was Tate who gave his approval to them before issuing instructions that the work should proceed “at once.” He corresponded with the Villers Bretonneux architect, and he personally oversaw the selection of wooden frescoes used to decorate the assembly hall at Victoria College. It was also Tate’s responsibility to forward the “Golden Book”–listing the names of all those who donated to the Victorian Villers Bretonneux Fund–to the Prefect of the Somme. The only role left for Watson, by then Chairman of the Victorian Villers Bretonneux Fund, was to cable the Prefect of the Somme, telling him that Tate would be in London in May 1923 (to attend the Imperial Education Conference), and that he would be available to attend any ceremony which might be planned for the laying of the foundation stone of the school.²²

The date for the laying of the foundation stone of Victoria College was duly set (16 June 1923), and was declared a public holiday in Villers Bretonneux. Tate was there to represent the Victorian Education Department; others in the official Australian party included Mr John McWhae, Agent General for Victoria in London, and Mr Angliss MLC, both present as representatives of the Victorian people and their government. The day began at Amiens, and as the Australian officials motored towards Adelaide cemetery for the first of the official proceedings, they were greeted by “cheering crowds everywhere.” They were met at the cemetery by the mayor of Villers Bretonneux, the local school children, and the Prefect of the Somme, who laid a wreath at the Cross of Sacrifice. When the party then moved on to the French cemetery, Tate’s daughter laid a wreath in honour of the French victims of war on behalf of the school children of Victoria. Next stop was the makeshift town hall (an old army hut), where McWhae was presented with deeds renaming two of the town’s streets to Rue Victoria and Place du Melbourne. Then it was on to the site of the school, where the children sang a specially arranged French version of “Australia Will Be There,” before the official speeches were made, and Mrs McWhae laid the foundation stone of Victoria College.²³

The school was eventually completed in 1927, and since then references to Victoria College in both popular and more scholarly literature note that it is a memorial school, but the analysis of who or what is being memorialised has been somewhat blinkered. Allan Blankfield and Robin Corfield interpret the school as a memorial “for all the Victorian soldiers who served, as well as those who died in France.”²⁴ Prue Parlicki begins her discussion of the Villers Bretonneux School with the confident assertion that “the purpose” of Victoria College, in common with “all war memorials” is “to remember lives lost in battle.”²⁵ Those who were involved in the attempts to memorialize the war could not be so confident however. Just as the post war years were marked with disagreements over who made the greatest sacrifices for the war, communities were also divided over whose war, or which war, should be remembered, and how.²⁶ Just who or what was being remembered by the Villers Bretonneux School was similarly contested: initial newspaper reports in Melbourne stated that the school would be “a constant reminder to the children of the district” of the “sacrifices” Australians had made in and around the town, and that it was to be

“dedicated” to the Australian soldiers who had died in the area.²⁷ But Victoria College was invested with a number of meanings and purposes, not simply as a memorial to the Australian soldiers, as the ceremony at the laying of the foundation stone made abundantly clear.

The speeches, made by the mayor of Villers Bretonneux, and by Frank Tate and McWhae, all contained references to the friendship and “mutual esteem” of France and Australia, the nearby graves of soldiers, and the hope for a better future for the world—highlighting the many layers of meaning, or purpose, invested into the memorial school. The first two of the themes were largely a by-product of the relationships which had been formed between Australians and the French as a result of the war, but were also niceties of international diplomacy. McWhae suggested that the school would serve as a “memorial to the friendship existing between us”. Tate spoke of “the warmth of the feeling which we Australians have for France” and told his listeners that Victorians could never forget them because of their proximity to “graves they will never see.”²⁸ The mayor of Villers Bretonneux emphasized the shared sacrifice of both Australian and French men, commenting that “under the poppies of France” slept over a million and a half French along with the Australian dead. He hoped that future generations of Australians would recall that common sacrifice, highlighting the fact that it was not only Australians who were stressing the pre-eminence of the sacrifices made by the combatants in war, and the need to remember them.²⁹

The speeches also expressed a feeling of hope that this friendship and mutual esteem - forged on the battlefields, strengthened by the care the people of Villers Bretonneux bestowed on the nearby Australian graves, and cemented via the adoption scheme - would help to prevent future wars. This sense of hope for the future also permeated much of the British League of Help literature, and it tied in neatly with Tate’s attitude towards the war and its aftermath. The British League of Help argued that, through rendering assistance to the devastated regions, the various benefactors were, in effect, shoring up the friendship between France and the British empire—“on which the world’s peace and welfare so largely depends.”³⁰ In the same vein, when Tate spoke at the laying of the foundation stone of the school, he declared that “the peace of the world” was ensured by “the cultivation of mutual esteem between peoples,” and

congratulated those involved in the adoption scheme for playing their part in that process.³¹

Tate’s speech was more than just rhetoric. He genuinely believed that the war was the perfect opportunity to prove the line from Shakespeare’s *Henry V* that “There is some soul of goodness in things evil / Would men observingly distil it out”—as he never tired of quoting, both during and after the war years. During 1916 he wrote a series of articles for the Melbourne *Herald* under that title, and as early as 1914 he suggested that “rightly used, this dreadful war might produce lasting good to Australia.”³² The war presented teachers with a wonderful opportunity, according to Tate, to mould a “better type of citizen.” This was to be achieved through encouraging the children to learn to enjoy working for the wider community, eventually growing into responsible, reliable, duty-bound “good citizens.”³³

In deciding to rebuild the Villers Bretonneux School Tate had his gaze firmly fixed on the future peace of the world, hoping that, as each generation of pupils passed through the classrooms at Victoria College, they would be instilled with feelings of “goodwill and affection” towards Australia and the British Empire.³⁴ But Frank Tate also held hopes that the school would serve yet another purpose. When he addressed the crowd which had assembled to witness the laying of the school’s foundation stone in 1923, he proclaimed that the completed school was to “stand as a memorial of the fine work” the school children of Victoria, and by implication the entire Education Department, “did for their country in raising nearly £600,000 in money and in kind for war relief.”³⁵

The response to the war by the Department of Education and the children of the state schools of Victoria certainly deserved to be memorialized. The Department leapt into action in August 1914, with every member of staff and every scholar of the Department expected to contribute to the war effort. The Department could boast of fifteen hundred enlistments from within its ranks, and school days became saturated with references to the war, with the focus of lessons always being the war. Patriotic observances, such as saluting the flag, became a compulsory part of the school day during the war years, and the making of “comforts” for the soldiers serving overseas was incorporated into the children’s education. Individuals and schools were

applauded by the Department for donating impressive sums to the VEDWRO Fund.³⁶ In fact the mood of the Department was such that RW Armitage, District Inspector for the schools in the north east of the state, was able to tell his teachers that the war effort of the schools was actually more important than lessons.³⁷

The most impressive facet of the Department’s war work, as Tate mentioned in his speech at Villers Bretonneux in 1923, was the work of war relief. For four years school children had busied themselves with knitting socks, sewing shirts and pyjamas, rolling bandages, and making balaclavas for the men in the trenches.³⁸ They donated their pocket money, but by and large, they were expected to *earn* money which could then be donated. This they did by growing and selling flowers and vegetables, catching and selling fish, doing odd jobs at home and around the neighbourhood, giving concerts, raffling livestock, competing in sports days, and anything else that might return a profit, so that their war effort, fostered by the Department of Education, extended well beyond school hours.³⁹

The state school children of Victoria were not the only children who had worked for the war effort during 1914-18. Children right across Australia had been raised as “little patriots” prior to the war via observances such as Empire Day. Stewart Firth and Jeanette Hoorn have detailed the ways school children in NSW were used mercilessly for the war effort, pressured to carry out such tasks as persuading eligibles to enlist,⁴⁰ and McKernan suggests that the desire to knit comforts and donate pocket money was “typical” of children right across Australia.⁴¹ But the scale of the involvement of the Victorian children, and the fact that the state school children were effectively conscripted into the war effort – through making war work part of the school day—differentiates it from the war experiences of the children in the other states. While there is an extensive literature in the Australian historiography of the Great War on adult attitudes towards the conscription of men for active service,⁴² the experience and impact of the “conscription” of the state school children of Victoria for the war effort conducted on the home front remains unexplored territory.

James Marten has identified that children have taken part in wars as casualties, soldiers, and surviving veterans,⁴³ but he does not acknowledge the very real ways children have taken part in wars without ever touching, feeling, hearing, or seeing a

gun or a bomb. Of course non-combatants contribute to a country’s war effort: Joan Beaumont has noted the importance ascribed to the voluntary efforts undertaken by Australian women at the time of the war, for instance. There was also an understanding during the Great War, at least as far as those in the Department were concerned, that the war work the children of Victoria were doing was vitally important.⁴⁴ Children read in the *School Paper* in December 1914 that, since they could not take up arms, they must find “other ways” to serve their country and their empire, and that “all who help to swell the Fund are really, in a sense, fighting their country’s battles.”⁴⁵ The school children were encouraged to keep “doing their bit” with promises of recognition—in 1915 the *School Paper* predicted that “The practical help that is being rendered by the teachers and pupils of Victorian schools will not soon be forgotten.”⁴⁶

We can see through this comment that Frank Tate and his colleagues expected that the war effort of the schools, just like the efforts of the AIF, would be recognized and remembered during and after the war. Sometimes this happened; in North Eastern Victoria the efforts of the local school children were honoured by the returned men, who organized picnics for them, and gave them free entry to their sports days and gymkhanas after the war.⁴⁷ But this example was far from typical. By 1918 there was a mood of disquiet amongst members of the Education Department that the war work carried out by the school children was being overlooked. Tate was especially annoyed by criticism of the Department in pages of the *Age* and the *Argus*, and was both frustrated and hurt when the Department was attacked in the Press over its supposed “militarism.”⁴⁸ Further, while the war relief efforts of the Department, and Tate’s role in directing them, were recognized by both the French and Belgian governments after the war, Tate remained privately very bitter about never receiving the recognition he felt he deserved from his own government.⁴⁹

Tate was not alone in thinking that the Education Department’s war efforts were being ignored. Three years after the war Professor Smyth, of the Teachers’ College in Carlton, expressed his view to Tate that:

The press of our state had never given the notice, the publicity, and the praise to the patriotic work which our schools [,] and the amount of money and kind raised by them[,] deserved.⁵⁰

Instead, the war memorials which were erected across the state in the wake of the war recorded the names of the men who had volunteered to serve their country; and only the returned men were allowed to march on Anzac Day. Feminist critiques of Anzac have highlighted the way this pushed women’s sacrifices to the sidelines of official commemoration,⁵¹ but the clamouring and jostling by various sections of society in the 1920s, over whose sacrifices were most worthy of remembrance, also drowned out the voices of the children.

As a result, the Department of Education set about memorialising their war effort themselves. This process had begun during the war, with the decision to provide money to build and equip twelve wards in the Caulfield military hospital, which were named after the Department.⁵² Then in 1917 the Department published a booklet entitled *How We Raised the First Hundred Thousand: An Account of Two Years Work for the Education Department’s War Relief Fund*. Tate penned the introduction, and commented that the Executive Committee of the VEDWRO had decided to publish the record “in the hope that it might become a permanent record of a worthy and most significant bit of war work.” The varied war relief activities of the children were detailed in the booklet, and were accompanied by pictures of “little helpers” doing their bit for the war with knitting needles.⁵³

After the war, Sir Ernest Scott was consulted about the feasibility of publishing a weightier tome to better do justice to the efforts of the Department. Although Scott noted that the Department had undertaken war work from the home front, he did not suggest including the work of the schools and the children in the proposed book. Instead, he recommended that the book should include the names, dates of enlistment, and military records of the Department’s teacher soldiers, and suggested that the Department contact those men who had returned so that they could share their own part of the war.⁵⁴ In doing so he was reflecting the prevailing opinion as to whose sacrifice should be honoured, and whose could be ignored.

But Tate had a broader concept in mind for the book, and in 1921 the Education Department’s *Record of War Service* was published, recalling the efforts of the entire Department, not simply those who had enlisted.⁵⁵ Scott’s advice on giving a run-down of the military exploits of the teacher-soldiers was followed, but the details of each

man were used to highlight the effort and loyalty of the Education Department as a whole. In fact one teacher-soldier, Sgt-Major William Allen, had his military record summed up as “that of a good and able teacher.” The loyalty of the staff of the Department was highlighted in the chapter on “Inspectors, Teachers, and Other Departmental Officers whose sons or brothers died on service.” The story of the schools’ efforts was also told in the book by listing the amount of money raised by each school; and there was a chapter devoted to the multitude of comforts sent to the men overseas, and another on how the schools memorialised the men who went to war. Likewise, the chapter on “The Men Who Returned” was used to demonstrate the Department’s commitment to the war effort, by pointing out that no teachers were disadvantaged – in terms of promotion or job opportunities when they returned from overseas.⁵⁶ While all and sundry had made that promise during the war to try and induce enlistment, the Education Department was one of the few organisations to honour that commitment.

Tate sought advice from C.E.W. Bean, Official Historian of the war, regarding where he could distribute copies of the book “to the best advantage,” further suggesting that he felt passionately about publicizing the war efforts of the Education Department. Bean’s reply was unimaginative—he mentioned “those returned soldiers who are called upon constantly to make speeches” and suggested “publicists” such as Keith Murdoch and F.M. Cutlack of the *Sydney Morning Herald*.⁵⁷ Tate looked further a field than simply Australia though, sending copies of the book to libraries and institutions across the Empire and beyond, including the New York Public Library, the Imperial Library in Calcutta, and the Bibliotheque et Musee de la Guerre in Paris, for example.⁵⁸

The fact that Tate was so keen to have the name of the Victorian Education Department connected with a “worthy object”—which was highly visible—in Villers Bretonneux indicates that he wanted the school to serve a similar promotional purpose to that of the *Department’s Record of War Service*. A school building could stand as a much more permanent symbol of the Department’s good work than, for example, simply sending money to Villers Bretonneux to feed and clothe necessitous cases, as many of the other towns adopted under the auspices of the British League of Help had received. The value of financing tangible structures—in terms of gaining kudos for those who donated the funds—had also been recognized by the British League of Help.

Lord Derby wrote in the *First Annual Report* of the British League of Help that the British benefactors should consider the “importance ... of concentrating on some useful building which shall stand for all time as a witness of the sympathy of a British town.” He cited the examples of Sheffield, whose donations had funded a crèche in the adopted town of Bapaume; and the money sent from Newcastle to Arras to fund worker’s allotments – to be known as “Jardins de Newcastle.”⁵⁹ There were more examples in the British League of Help *Annual Report* for 1922–Poix du Nord was to become home to Keighley Hall for example—and, significantly, the examples were listed under the heading “Lest They Forget.”⁶⁰

The playground and classrooms at Victoria College also implored the children to “Noublions jamais l’Australié”—or “never forget Australia.” But who, or what, it is that the children should never forget is not spelled out for them. Is it the Australian soldiers who re-took their town from the Germans in 1918? The Victorians who adopted the town in 1920? The Victorian state school children who had raised so much money during the war? Or Tate and his colleagues who sent the money to rebuild the school? Tate attempted to ensure that the state school children of Victoria would not be forgotten when he positioned them alongside the men of the AIF in the inscription he penned for the façade of Victoria College. He wrote:

This school building is the gift of the school children of Victoria, Australia, to the children of Villers-Bretonneux, as a proof of their goodwill towards France. Twelve hundred Australian soldiers, the fathers and brothers of these children, gave their lives in the heroic recapture of this town from the invader on 24th April 1918, and are buried near this spot. May the memory of great sacrifice in a common cause keep France and Australia together forever in bonds of friendship and mutual esteem.

The plaque is clear evidence that Tate wanted the school to be a reminder of not just those Australians who fought and died at Villers Bretonneux, but also of the war effort the Victorian Education Department had waged from home. But it is unclear who was being reminded. The plaques around the school to “noublions jamais l’Australie” are accompanied by an English version, presumably for the benefit of visiting Australians.

The war service of the men of the Australian Imperial Force in and around Villers Bretonneux during 1918 saw the genesis of a relationship between that town and

Australia. In 1920 ex-AIF leaders lent their support to the movement to “adopt” the town of Villers Bretonneux, and when the Victorian Education Department decided to contribute money to rebuild the school at Villers Bretonneux they were funding a project which had been begun by Australian soldiers there in 1918. Although the school has often been interpreted as simply a memorial to those Australian soldiers who died in defense of the town, the Education Department donated money for the construction of the school in an attempt to ensure that the war efforts of the state school children of Victoria were never forgotten., and is evidence of the competing voices trying to be heard in the memorialisation of the Great War by Australians.

Notes

¹ *Argus*, 4 August 1922, p. 9.

² Cutlack, F.M., *The Australians: Their Final Campaign, 1918*, Marsten: Sampson Low, 1918, pp. 236-38; Bean, C.E.W., *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-18, Vol V, The AIF in France, 1918*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1939, p. 604; Gammage, Bill, *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War*, Victoria: Penguin, 1974, p. 197; McMullin, Ross, “ ‘Perhaps the Greatest Individual Feat of the War’: The Battle of Villers-Bretonneux, 1918”, *Wartime*, 2, April 1998, pp. 51-55.

³ Scates, Bruce, *Return to Gallipoli: Walking the Battlefields of the Great War*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 145. Nathan Wise has also issued a reminder to historians that the men of the AIF were not just soldiers – they were also men – in ‘Different Worlds, Different Lives: Social History approaches to histories of the military’, *Alpheus*, vol. 2, March 2005.

<http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/research/ejournal/archives/mar05/nwise.html>. Accessed 10th May 2006.

⁴ *Robinvale Sentinel*, 5 May 1984, p. 2; National Archives of Australia (NAA) A663 O100/1/102, Attachment G.

⁵ Mayor of Villers Bretonneux, 15 July 1919. NAA A663 O100/1/102, Attachment G.

⁶ *Brighton Southern Cross*, 1 October 1921, p. 2.

⁷ The anxiety of the bereaved in Australia over their inability to visit the graves of their war dead is an area of expanding historical interest. See Damousi, Joy, *The Labour of Loss: Mourning, Memory and Wartime Bereavement in Australia*, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1999; Ziino, Bart, *A Distant Grief: Australians, War Graves and the Great War*, Crawley: University of Western Australia Press, 2007; Luckins, Tanja, *The Gates of Memory: Australian People’s Experiences and Memories of Loss and the Great War*, Fremantle: Curtin University Books, 2004; Jalland, Patricia, *Changing Ways of Death in Twentieth Century Australia: War, Medicine, and the Funeral Business*, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2006; Scates, Bruce, *Return to Gallipoli: Walking the Battlefields of the Great War*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

⁸ Winter, J.M., ‘Communities in Mourning’, Coetzee, Frans and Shevin-Coetzee, Marilyn (eds.), *Authority, Identity and the Social History of the Great War*, Providence: Berghahn, 1995, p. 326; also his chapter of the same title in Winter, Jay, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

⁹ Minutes, Victorian Education Department War Relief Fund, 16 August 1916, Public Records Office of Victoria (PROV), VPRS 14009/P/001, Unit 1.

¹⁰ See minutes of Victorian Education Department War Relief Fund meetings held 17 August 1916, 16 October 1916, 1 December 1916, 7 May 1917, 17 July 1917. PROV, VPRS 14009/P/001, Unit 1.

¹¹ For brief details on Charlotte Crivelli and her patriotic work during the war, see *Punch (Melbourne)*, 11 July 1918, p. 44.

¹² See especially minutes of Victorian Education Department War Relief Fund meetings held 12 May 1916, 19 June 1916, 17 August 1916, 16 October 1916, 1 December 1916, 7 May 1917, 17 July 1917. PROV VPRS 14009/P/001 Unit 1.

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- ¹³ Minutes, Victorian Education Department War Relief Fund meeting 26 November 1919. PROV VPRS 14009/P/001 Unit 1; *Education Gazette and Teachers' Aid*, 9 December 1919, p. 193.
- ¹⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 July 1920; *Argus*, 21 July 1920, p. 8; Melbourne City Council Town Clerk to John Monash, 29 July 1920, Monash Papers, National Library of Australia, MS 1884, Box 21, Folder 188; Charlotte Crivelli to John Monash, 4 August 1920, Monash Papers, Box 21 Folder 189; Parlicki, Prue, *Interpreting Icons of Remembrance: The Villers Bretonneux Memorial School and the Construction of Australian War Memory*, BA Honours thesis, University of Melbourne, 1992, p. 19.
- ¹⁵ *Argus*, 8 October 1920, p. 6; *Melbourne Herald*, 7 July 1921, p. 7; *Argus*, 8 July 1921, p. 7.
- ¹⁶ McQuilton, John, *Rural Australia and the Great War: From Tarrawingee to Tangambalanga*, Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2001, Chapter 12; Damousi, Joy, *The Labour of Loss: Mourning, Memory and Wartime Bereavement in Australia*, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1999, especially chapter 2; McKernan, Michael, *The Australian People and the Great War*, Victoria: Nelson, 1980, pp. 207-8.
- ¹⁷ Minutes of Victorian Department of Education War Relief Fund meeting, 8 August 1921. PROV VPRS 14009/P/001, Unit 1.
- ¹⁸ For further discussion see Inglis, K.S., *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape*, Carlton: Miegunyah Press, 1998.
- ¹⁹ Minutes of Victorian Department of Education War Relief Fund meeting, 12 September 1921. PROV VPRS 14009/P/001, Unit 1.
- ²⁰ Minutes of Victorian Education Department War Relief Fund meeting, 13 December 1921. PROV VPRS 14009/P/001, Unit 1.
- ²¹ Minutes of Victorian Education Department War Relief Fund meetings, 14 February 1922 and 22 March 1922. VPRS 14009/P/001, Unit 1.
- ²² *Argus*, 9 February 1923, p. 8; 13 February 1923, p. 7; *Education Gazette and Teachers' Aid*, 20 January 1927, p. 28; 19 May 1927, p. 140.
- ²³ *Argus*, 18 June 1923, p. 9; *School Paper*, 1 September 1923, pp. 118-121.
- ²⁴ Blankfield, Allan, and Corfield, Robin, *Never Forget Australia: Australia and Villers-Bretonneux 1918-1993*, Melbourne: Villers-Bretonneux 75th Anniversary Pilgrimage Project Committee, 1994, p. 101.
- ²⁵ Parlicki, *Interpreting Icons of Remembrance*, p. v.
- ²⁶ See, for example, Inglis, K.S., *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape*, Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2001; McQuilton, *Rural Australia and the Great War*; for European examples of the same process see King, Alex, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain: The Symbolism and Politics of Remembrance*, Oxford: Berg, 1998; and Winter, Jay, and Sivan, E, (eds.), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- ²⁷ *Argus*, 4 August 1922, p. 9; 9 August 1922, p. 14.
- ²⁸ *The School Paper*, 1 September 1923, p. 121.
- ²⁹ *Argus*, 18 June 1923, p. 9.
- ³⁰ *Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard*, 6 November 1921, included in Glenesk-Bathurst Papers, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds, MS 1990/1/2031.
- ³¹ *School Paper*, 1 September 1923, p. 121.
- ³² Selleck, R.J.W., *Frank Tate: A Biography*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1982, p. 218; Victorian Department of Education, *The Education Department's Record of War Service, 1914-1919*, Melbourne: Government Printer, 1921, p. 206.
- ³³ Wallace, Gilbert M., *How We Raised the First Hundred Thousand: An Account of Two Years Work (1915-16) For The Education Department's War Relief Fund*, Melbourne: Lothian, 1917, p. 31; Victorian Department of Education, *The Education Department's Record of War Service, 1914-1919*, p. 4; Blake, L.J., *Vision and Realisation: A Centenary History of State Education in Victoria, Volume 1*, Melbourne: Education Department of Victoria, 1973, p. 1226; Parlicki, *Interpreting Icons of Remembrance*.
- ³⁴ *Education Gazette and Teachers' Aid*, 21 August 1923, p. 138.
- ³⁵ *School Paper*, 1 September 1923, p. 121.
- ³⁶ For a more detailed discussion of the Victorian Education Department's war effort see for example McKernan, *The Australian People and the Great War*, chapter 3; Selleck, *Frank Tate: A Biography*; McKinlay, Brian (ed.), *Young Anzacs: the contribution of Victorian Schools to the Gallipoli Campaign, 1915*, Melbourne: Ministry of Education, 1990; Spaul, Andrew, 'The Response of Australian Schools to the Two World Wars', in Smart, Judith and Wood, Tony (eds.), *An Anzac Muster: War and Society in Australia and New Zealand, 1914-18 and 1939-45*, Clayton, Victoria: Monash Publications in History, Monash University, 1992, pp. 130-142.

- ³⁷ McQuilton, *Rural Australia and the Great War*, p. 142.
- ³⁸ McKernan, *The Australian People and the Great War*, chapter 3.
- ³⁹ Wallace, *How We Raised the First Hundred Thousand*; McKernan, *The Australian People and the Great War*, McQuilton, *Rural Australia and the Great War*, chapter 8.
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- ⁴¹ McKernan, *The Australian People and the Great War*, p. 48.
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- ⁵² *School Paper*, 1 October 1915, p. 140.
- ⁵³ Wallace, *How We Raised the First Hundred Thousand: An Account of Two Years Work (1915-16) For the Education Department’s War Relief Fund*.
- ⁵⁴ *Education Gazette and Teachers’ Aid*, 11 September 1919, p. 143.
- ⁵⁵ Victorian Department of Education, *The Education Department’s Record of War Service*.
- ⁵⁶ Victorian Department of Education, *The Education Department’s Record of War Service*, p. 27, 102, 107.
- ⁵⁷ Tate, Frank to Bean, C.E.W., 20 October 1921; Bean to Tate, 29 October 1921. PROV VPRS 892/P1, Unit 114, Item 1275.
- ⁵⁸ Le Secretaire General, Bibliotheque et Musee de la Guerre to Victorian Government Printer, no date [1923]; Mons. Fontana, Le Secretaire General, Ministre de l’Instruction Publique, to Tate, 12 March 1924. VPRS 892, Unit 114, Item 1275.
- ⁵⁹ British League of Help, *First Annual Report*, London, 1921, Glenesk-Bathurst Papers, 1990/1/2037.
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