sorts of injuries were received by the general public, nor what sort of support was offered by the Repatriation Board, nor any assessment of the mental and medical issues that would have dogged many such cases. They are simply beautiful water colours of disfigured men.

The *Home Front: Australia During the First World War* does not break any new ground: there are some incredibly interesting objects on display here but more interpretive information is required to create a cohesive and engaging exhibition. Objects will illicit emotions, but without the necessary context of those objects these emotions will surely be superficial at best. Working with a subject of this magnitude, in a fresh way, with budgets constantly being slashed is nothing short of challenging. *The Home Front* offers a great deal, but feels a little unfinished.

**Australia’s many stories of war**

*Joan Beaumont*

*Strategic and Defence Studies, Australian National University*

*Keepsakes: Australians and the Great War*

Guy Hansen, Felicity Harmey, Susannah Helman, Denis Shephard and Walter Kudrycz, curators


The centenary of the First World War has spawned countless documentaries, cultural productions, ceremonies, installations and exhibitions in Australia. *Keepsakes* is the National Library of Australia’s contribution to remembering the war, showcasing ‘its unique collection of manuscripts, ephemera, art, photographs and documents from this defining period in Australian history’ (exhibition display).

The poster advertising this exhibition depicts a young couple at their marriage in 1915, the groom in uniform, the bride tentative and modest. Given the terrible loss of Australian life, it is fitting that the exhibition itself should start with the war’s human story, as evident in family photographs, postcards and even an embroidery of ‘Remembrance’ created as a souvenir of France. But the strength of the exhibition is its treatment of the wider political and social dimensions of the war.

The NLA’s documentary collection is truly unique. Its papers include many of the figures who led Australia and the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) from 1914 to 1918: Prime Ministers Andrew Fisher and
W.M. (Billy) Hughes; Liberal leader and later deputy prime minister, Joseph Cook; Governor-General Sir Ronald Craufurd Munro Ferguson; commander of the Australian Corps Sir John Monash; senior staff officer General Sir Cyril Brudenell White; and journalist and de facto public relations manager of Hughes, Keith Murdoch. These, and other rich collections, are mined to explore key episodes of the war. One was Murdoch’s extraordinary intervention in the Gallipoli campaign when, in association with the British journalist Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, he wrote a letter to the British prime minister exposing the gross mismanagement of the British command. Another was the controversy surrounding Monash’s appointment as Corps commander in mid-1918 when the war correspondent Charles Bean colluded with Murdoch and the official war artist Will Dyson, in an effort get Brudenell White appointed instead – an unsavoury incident which, as the NLA concedes, may have owed something to anti-Semitism. The display of some of the original correspondence relating to these disputes is, for any historian of the war, intrinsically engaging. So too – to name only a few of the more interesting documents – are notes made by Hughes at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919; Cook’s annotated copy of The Conditions of Peace issued to him also at the Conference; Brudenell White’s handwritten note to his child (a rare window into the personal life of a general); and a letter from the commander of the AIF, General William Throsby Bridges, to Munro Ferguson as he left Egypt for Gallipoli on 21 April 1915: ‘It’s going to be a cold, hungry and thirsty business’. It was also to be the cause of his death a few weeks later.

The NLA’s collections of non-textual records is also used to great advantage, not just in a wall-collage of posters, cartoons and news clippings, but in displays about specific artists, cartoonists and photographers, including Dyson, his wife, Ruby Lind (who later died of the Spanish flu), Cecil Hartt, Stan Cross and David Low, whose caricatures of Hughes remain classics. Particularly memorable among the photographs are Melbourne’s Trades Hall festooned with anti-conscriptionist banners, warning Australians of the slavery to come if they voted Yes, and photographer Frank Hurley’s depiction of Australian wounded near Zonnebeke station at the height of the Third Battle of Ypres, 12 October 1917. Bean, ever concerned with eye-witness accuracy, took issue with Hurley’s ‘manufactured images’ but who cares, given their emotional and aesthetic power?

First World War propaganda is almost visceral in its appeal to the emotions. The exhibition inevitably displays some of Norman Lindsay’s
scaremongering posters, including his famous image of a leering German ape grasping the world with blood dripping from his claws. But of equal interest (if lesser known) is the poster depicting two images of the ‘Hun’: one a Viking-like male with long hair and shield, in 451 AD, and the other a First World War soldier complete with picklehaube. The message ‘Always Huns! Enlist. Protect our Women and Children’. Were Australians at home really convinced by such silliness?

Indeed, at home there was not only a sophisticated and passionate debate about conscription which became the nemesis of the federal Labor government in 1916. There was also heavy-handed repression of dissent by Hughes’ ‘wartime police state’, which resulted in the crushing of the radical Industrial Workers of the World and the often arbitrary internment of residents of enemy extraction. Patriotic and ‘loyal’ Australians meanwhile threw their energies into fundraising, promoting war loans and contesting the growing (but never dominant) anti-war movement. All these dimensions of the war are represented in the exhibition, not only in displays on, for example, Mary Booth the founder of the Anzac Fellowship of Women, and C. J. Dennis, author of the best-selling The Sentimental Bloke, but also in material culture: Violet Day badges, war bonds sheets, postcards and books. Among the latter is a translation of Erich Maria Remarque’s 1929 All Quiet on the Western Front (the confronting realism of which Australians found not to their taste) and the splendid The War A.B.C. In this children’s illustrated book, we learn that:

- I is for dauntless infantry.
- J for Jacka first V. C.
- K is for the King we love so well.
- L is for Lancers facing shells.
- M for mines in Seaways found.
- N for Neutral Homeward bound.

The captions on the exhibition displays are always measured and blessedly free of the parochialism that infuses so much of Australian memory of war. There is also a useful timeline of the war provided for visitors who may not be familiar with its chronology or contours. At times, the documents are positioned at the rear of display cabinets which makes them difficult to read. But, this quibble aside, Keepsakes is a fine testament to both the exceptional collections of this national cultural institution and the complexity of Australians’ experiences of the First World War.