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Making the Memory Book: War-Time Loss and Memorialization through Ephemera

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Abstract: This article explores the way a family fashioned a memorial to a son 'taken by the war'. It focuses on the Robert's collection in Melbourne, Australia's largest bound collection of war time ephemera, and the making of what was called 'Frank's Memory Book'. It argues that families asserted ownership over their dead, crafting different modes of memorialization to authorized modes of remembrance, considers the way communities of mourners were brought together and highlights tensions between private loss and public memory. The making of ephemera is examined at length as is the part material culture plays in libraries and archives.

Keywords: ephemera; grief; memorialization; material culture; commemoration

In 1917 Edwin Lutyens embarked on a tour of the battlefields of the Western Front. For several days he traveled the quiet sections of the line, visiting a chain of 'temporary cemeteries' stretching across France. Appointed as an architectural advisor to the Imperial War Graves Commission that same year, Lutyens wondered how the Empire could ever hope to honor over a million dead. And he was struck by the chaos of a landscape torn asunder by war:

> The graveyards are haphazard... [There is] a ribbon of isolated graves like a milky way across miles of [shell torn] country where men were just tucked in where they fell...[Hundreds] of little crosses each touching each other stretch across the cemetery, set in the wilderness of poppies... and oh so pathetic. One thinks for a moment that no other monument is needed.[1]

One such monument was raised on the summit of Mont St Quentin in the final months of the war. It marked the site of what some considered Australia's "finest single feat of the war", where the badly depleted Second Division of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) captured a key German fortress and cleared the way for the Allied advance on the Hindenburg Line. The cross honored 11 men of the 21st Battalion, killed as they charged the strongest point of enemy lines. Their bodies were laid out in a shell hole in a brief lull in the fighting and the earth "tucked in" hurriedly around them.[2]

The Mont St Quentin Cross was fashioned from debris salvaged from the battlefield. Two planks of wood were nailed roughly together, and the inscription "21Batt AIF" "KILLED IN ACTION 1918" scratched deep in the base. The makers of this grave marker knew their tribute would be ephemeral. Shattered wood would not long withstand the elements and as the cross was raised artillery fire still swept the battlefield. Even so, the most sacred feature of this memorial—the names of the Fallen[3]—gestured towards permanence. With patience and care, the regimental number, rank, and name of all 11 men were punched in a sheet of tin and wrapped around the horizontal arms of the cross, an act of defiance against oblivion. A small rectangular brass plate with the diamond color patch insignia of the 21st Battalion (black over red) was then fixed to the central beam. The red would quickly fade to white—but to the men of the 21st, the color patch remained recognizable—evoking the comradeship of men who fought and died and were laid to rest side by side.[4]

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In time, most of these 'numinous objects' imbued (as Lutyens noted) with their own spiritual force would vanish from the battlefields (Greenblatt 1990; Furneaux and Prichard 2015). Replacing them would be the vast cities of the dead Lutyens and his colleagues on the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) would devise. In place of the improvised intimacy, there would be stern uniformity, headstones of the same height, colour, and design. Vernacular memorials—like that cross at Mont St Quentin—were makeshift and ephemeral; official commemoration claimed a kind of permanence—fashioned from stone, suffused with classicism, intended to outlast the ages. Lutyens himself suggested the centerpiece of every major cemetery—"one great fair stone, of fine proportions, twelve ft in length, lying raised upon three steps"—a 'monolith' weighing several tons, "an abiding and supreme memorial".[5] Few things further from this common Soldier's Cross, and the harsh materiality of wartime, could be imagined.

That cross at Mont St Quentin frames this discussion of wartime ephemera and the transmission of family and community memory. This brief and contested object biography reveals a kind of conflict between what scholars have termed 'national commemoration' and family and community-centered modes of remembrance. That first unauthorized initiative by soldiers in the field highlights the 'physicality of mourning', the way (as Ruth Toulonson and Zahra Newby aptly put it, "that grief and ritual are often entangled together, often through material culture" (Toulson and Newby 2018). It also demonstrates the way that the 'communities of mourners' (as Winter called them) exercised agency in the way they chose to remember and the mediums they worked with—especially in the time before the traumascapes of the battlefield were remade as the ordered (and sanitized) commemorative landscapes we are familiar with today (Winter 1998). In that sense, the Mont St Quentin Cross anticipates the way families on the home front created and displayed memory objects, forging (in the process) a link to distant graves oceans away. As Ann-Marie Foster's research suggests, "dynamic memorial practices, distant from national memorial ones, allowed families to decide on their actions as the bereaved and chose how to mourn their dead." (Foster 2019).

And in an even more direct way, the cross provides an anchor to the discussion to follow. One of those names, etched sharply in the tin, was that of Francis William Roberts, a private in the 21st Battalion. Through three years of war service and all the dangers of ordeals of France and Belgium, the men of C Company became a kind of surrogate kin, "my Aussie family" as Frank sometimes called them.[6] Their friendship for Frank, and the intimacy born of common suffering, was the driving force behind this at once simple and elaborate memorial. But Frank also had an actual family, a father, mother, wife, and daughter who would never stand by that distant grave. This article will explore the way the Roberts family drew on wartime ephemera to fashion their own distinctive memorial to Frank—welding their private loss in more public narratives of sacrifice and remembrance.

It should be noted from the outset that the war which claimed Frank's life was a defining event in Australian history. It was not just the scale of loss—Australia suffered one of the highest casualty rates of any Allied army. Or the common mythology that this was the nation's 'baptism of fire', disregarding earlier colonial engagements and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their traditional lands. The Great War stalled a program of progressive legislation that had distinguished the young Commonwealth as the 'social laboratory' of the world and it left in its wake a more conservative, inward-looking, and xenophobic society. It also fashioned the whole mythology of 'Anzac', valorizing military service and leaving an entire generation (including the Roberts family) to wrestle with their grief.[7]

1. The Nothingness of Loss': Garry Roberts and the Moment of Bereavement

Public commemoration and private loss often sit at opposite ends of the spectrum of remembrance. The former, amply documented in text, ceremony, and memorial, had been the subject of much historical inquiry. Recreating the private world of grief and mourning, and (as Annette Becker and Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau put it) "glimpsing grief at an

intimate level" has proved a far more difficult enterprise.[8] Over time, compartmentalizing one's loss became a common response. The national days of remembrance, most notably (in an Australasian context) Anzac Day and Armistice Day, labored to demarcate and contain the messy business of mourning; monuments were raised—surrogate tombs for men whose actual bodies were lost to war, speeches were made, rationalizing the sacrifice of loved ones, the 'Big Words'—honor, duty, glory—belied the sordid business of dying and killing. How effective these publicly condoned modes of mourning were in assuaging the loss of a generation is open to question. They certainly offered insufficient solace to Garry Roberts, Frank's father, and the other members of his family.[9]

Garry Roberts heard of his son's death twelve days after he had been killed—and not through what was usually called 'official channels'. Anxious for Frank's welfare, he had cabled London on 14 August, several weeks before the battle at Mont St Quentin actually began. The postal authorities responded some time later, and well before the military authorities compiled their final lists of dead, wounded, and missing. "I regret to inform you that London advises that your cablegram of the 14th of August to 6874 Roberts as being undelivered, the addressee having been killed in action". Garry kept that flimsy sheet of paper for the rest of his life, its creases and folds suggest it was read and re-read time and again. And Garry's diary, kept assiduously for over half a century, became in that moment a space to declare his grief. "Friday, 13 September 1918: the most awful day of our lives".

For some, that simple statement might have said enough. It is not surprising silence became so central to commemorative practice: for those whose loved ones had been 'taken by the war' the grief was a void too great to be spoken. By contrast, Garry Roberts carefully documents his anguish. His diary, letters, and above all else, the monument of ephemera he assembled, allow us to chart the contours of that emotional landscape, re-live the moment of loss, and enter an 'intimate world' of loss and mourning.

Roberts 'wrote up' and rewrote much of the diary in the weeks to follow. The diary became in and of itself an act of grieving, detailing Garry's response to the death of his son and the way the ordered world of this successful civil servant caved in around him. Friday the 13th September was a working day for the manager of Melbourne's Cable Car network and it had begun (the diary tells us) much as any other. Garry recorded the way he had boarded his usual tram at Princes Bridge and set off—unsuspectingly—for his offices in the city. The cablegram was waiting on his desk—OHMS printed starkly in the corner. Garry possibly assumed it was an urgent communication from the Tramways Board: "I opened it and read to my dismay and grief that my dear brave soldier son had been killed in action".[10]

His first response was confusion, disbelief, and denial—to this day, the cable carried his angry notation. "Received before 10.00 a.m., Friday 13th September before any news had come from the Military Authorities". The diary faithfully narrates a shifting surge of emotion. Frank had survived over two years of war, and now that war was fast approaching its end. Could the authorities be mistaken? Like many faced with the death of a loved one, Garry Roberts harbored the guilty hope that this might just be someone else's grief:

I went immediately to the Red Cross enquiry office [he wrote slowly and deliberately] but they knew nothing. I then went to base records office and had my fears confirmed. I returned to the Red Cross enquiry office and gave them a donation and thanked them.

For a time, Garry returned home to the family's town house in Hawthorn. He spent over five hours in that empty building crowded with memories. Then, the diary tells us, came a long and jolting journey from the city to the Bush. He would break the news to his wife Berta at the family's weekender in the Dandenongs.

> A wearisome and depressing walk [he recorded], a hot wind blowing. Berta met me at the [bottom of the] hill . . . with a faint hope that I would not confirm the sad news. But I had to tell my brave son's mother that our first born had died a hero's death in France to save mankind.[11]

The next morning, the couple made their way to Warwick farm, a neighboring property where their daughter-in-law—and once their son—had lived:

> We tried to comfort the poor girl as best we could but it was a distressing time. . . . Ruby greeted me with "it isn't true father, is it?" And I had to reply, "yes, [darling] it is" and she cried out "Oh! My Frank. My little Nancy will never see her father".

Frank Roberts had sailed off for war within a few weeks of Ruby falling pregnant. He would never hold his only child.

There were some things that offered the Roberts family comfort—first and foremost the memory of Frank himself.

> Berta and I sat in the drawing room at 'Sunnyside' and spoke of Frank there for five happy years, clearing the ground, planting trees and his joy in the country life and how the place was endeared to us by a thousand memories.

There was his parting message, too, a counsel of courage they clung to.

In a letter (read together by the family one evening at 'Sunnyside') Frank had said "death has lost a lot of the terror and mystery it had for me. I've seen too much of it over here: it is those left behind I think about". Both parents would commit those words to memory over the weeks and years to come.[12]

Frank Roberts' life was over. What began now was the business of remembering. Every other week in his diary Garry noted some kind of anniversary, marking the time when it seemed to have ended, landmarks in what historians have called the 'nothingness of grief'.[13]

> 22nd of July: 'it would have been Frank's birthday'; eighth of August: 'Frank in big battle', fourth of January 1920: 'my dear son Frank (Pte FW Roberts No 6874 C Company 21 Battn AIF) was killed in the capture of Mt St Quentin in France this day 16 months ago. His body lies in a cemetery near Perrone'.

And, in a quite literal sense, Garry began to compose Frank's memory, crafting an image of his son through photograph and obituary, memorial notice and personal memoire, object, and ephemera. On Saturday 14 September—a day after the news of Frank's death—"Beta spoke of getting a memorial of Frank printed". Both parents "planned out [a] memorial card for Frank" in the weeks to follow and consulted Ruby on the image they might use. "Ruby chooses Paris photo for the memorial card", an entry on the 28th September recorded. It proved a poignant choice for all the members of the family. Like many a soldier on leave, Frank had commissioned a photograph of himself from a studio in Paris. Freshly bathed and shaved, dressed in a clean uniform, and relaxed after several days of sightseeing, the image exudes hope, strength, and confidence. Sending it as a memento to his family, he had promised (again) to come home. This was the last photograph of Frank ever taken—just six months later he was dead. Garry pasted the same photograph reverently in the 'Record Book', alongside an extract to his cousin Lucy, claiming (incredulously) to have seen "most of the historical and beauty spots" the city had to offer.[14] Catherine Moriarty has highlighted the importance of such photographs in the construction of memorialization after the First World War. She argues that studio photographs, like the one chosen for Frank, reminded all who viewed them, within and well beyond the family circle, of what she calls 'the humanity of the dead'. For Garry, Berta, and Ruby, Frank's photograph was a way of visualizing the lost, summoning up a husband or son from otherwise impenetrable emptiness, and giving a face to a father Nancy would never know (Moriarty 2008).

Predominantly black and white but with a small color insert the memorial card was an elaborate production, and an expensive one. Garry Roberts had several hundred printed, much to the delight of Roths, a Melbourne printing firm that hungrily commodified commemoration. Memorial cards, as several scholars have noted, were ways that families drew on established commercial networks to disseminate their grief. As such, they operated on the intersection of personal and public memory—a private memento (that cherished last photograph) shared with friends, relatives, and a wider community of mourners. As Garry's diary attests, he would send 'Frank's memorial card' to virtually every soldier and

family he corresponded with—by way of thanks for their condolence, but also as a means to 'share' his grief. And that intersection between private and public memory functioned at another level as well. Frank's 'memorial card' displayed "the colours of the Battalion on front". This was both an allusion to the family of soldiers that had raised Frank's cross at Mont St Quentin and a reminder to Garry that "the worst [day] of my life [was] yet the proudest". In 1918, it was possible, indeed imperative, to believe that a beloved eldest son had died in the 'War to End all Wars' and what Garry called "the righteousness" of the Allied cause justified his sacrifice.[15]

Frank's memorial card is the most common item of war-time ephemera in the Roberts collection—several dozen of the cards are still pasted in both Garry's diary and the memorial book that came to accompany it. But it was not the only occasion Garry mobilized print media for the purpose of remembrance. A voracious reader, he scoured the daily press for items that related Frank's life and death. A clipping from the *Melbourne Herald* was set beside his diary entry for 28 September. "The Digger-How He Fought at Perrone", the headline read, "Never Deserts a Mate" the line that followed. A second article, from *The Age*, competed for patriotic pathos. It described the action at Mont St Quentin as "a Somme Golgotha", likening (in awkwardly mixed metaphor) Australia's capture of the summit to "a Homeric Assault". A few weeks later yet another piece from *The Age* detailed the Imperial War Graves Commission's efforts to gather in "the gallant dead". None of these articles mentioned Garry's son by name, but that hardly mattered. Clippings like these provided context to the action that took Frank's life—it cast his loss in a wider national narrative and loaned meaning and purpose to his sacrifice.[16]

Obituaries cut with a reverent hand from the daily press frame the diary entries around 18 September. The visual impact of these items in a diary largely kept by hand is striking. Dark, blocked print served to underscore this text of mourning. Each clipping evokes a circle of mourners, Frank was a "beloved elder son", "a dearly loved husband", and "loving father". And they cite, by way of solace, some of the last words he had written to them: "Death has lost a lot of the terror and the mystery it had for me. I've seen too much of it over here: it is those left behind that I think about."[17] Garry Robert completed this ensemble with a brief biography (praising Frank's 'quiet heroism') published in the *Melbourne Herald.* A grieving family ensured it featured that studio photo from Paris. They would choose the way Frank was remembered.[18] Clearly, this eclectic use of ephemera served many purposes. It confirmed the agency of the bereaved as they asserted their 'ownership of the war dead'. At the same time, provided public sanction for their loss.

2. The Making of Memory: Frank's Memorial Book

Garry Roberts' diary was one conduit for the transmission of family memory through ephemera. What he liked to call 'Frank's memorial book' was another. In the late nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, scrapbooks were very much the medium of the antiquarian imagination. A compulsive collector, Garry began assembling his 'home made encyclopedia' in his early 20s. This involved the "purchase . . . of 4000 of the best magazines second hand, and from these [Roberts] extracted all the articles of any interest, classified them, and had them bound". The scrapbooks—numbering well over a hundred volumes—spanned literature, biography, and history, including "a complete record of the federation movement". The war—and eventually Frank's death—generated enough material for several additional series. A reporter from *The Herald* scoped the size and character of the collection:

> First there is the Anzac volumes, containing a history of the campaign in the form of soldier's letters, photographs and trophies, and then come large nine volumes containing hundreds of maps, letters, cuttings and photographs dealing with the rest of the war. Another volume in the series is of tragic interest. It deals with Mr. Robert's son Frank and includes several hundred portraits of the gallant young soldier in his infancy, his letters and his war diary.[19]

In fact, 'Frank's book' came to colonize other parts of Garry Roberts' collection—and was not one volume but several. 'Bk One' (as Garry himself labeled it) appears to have begun as a general family history, tracing the Roberts line back to Ireland. But Frank's death prompted Garry to revisit the volume. The boyhood pictures of Frank are framed by copies of the memorial book and Roberts' grim notation: "On Sun Sep 1st 1918 Frank was killed in the capture of Mont St Quentin France." A curator of the collection described these childhood photographs as especially 'poignant'.[20] Perhaps because they returned Frank's memory to a safer time, recovering a life snatched away by wartime.

The retrospective charting of Frank's war service began in March 1919, six months after he had been killed and not long after his child took her first faltering steps. From his 58th birthday to the day of his death, there was barely a single day that Garry did not 'tend' to the books. Often, Garry worked well into the night, pasting and 'planning', reading and re-reading, and annotating any item of 'special' interest. Exacting work, but also a means of keeping despair at bay. As Roberts confided in his diary, rewriting his son's words meant "the dear chap" was "always with me".[21] The framework of each book is provided by those extracts from the popular press, and Garry's scissors went to work on reports by war correspondents, government communiques, and even an 'official' history of the war serialized by *The Times*. But braided through these published accounts charting the ebb and flow of battle are the items of intimate significance: They include the cablegram Gary received informing him of his son's death and the last letter he sent to his son—returned in an envelope marked UNDELIVERABLE-DECEASED. Gary removed a tiny sprig of heath from his letter and pressed it into the scrapbook, sealing the scent of home in his ephemeral memorial. Ruby gave "the dear chap's last letter" to her father-in-law. Signed by her "true & loving husband Frank asked her 'to kiss our little darling Nancy for me'". That letter, and others just as intimate to Berta, were offered up to Garry's memorial project and duly pasted into the volumes.[22] This was a family enterprise, as are many such projects negotiating grief through memory and ephemera. In the making of Frank's memorial book his father, mother, and wife shouldered the burden of bereavement together.[23]

Each volume of 'Frank's book' numbered around 500 pages—as impressive a monument as any obelisk carved in stone. And, for a time, there were hopes of the project being published. A minor author in his own right, and well placed within Melbourne's literary milieu, Garry Roberts had all the connections to make that possible. A single 'memorial volume' might well have found a market, not just amongst Garry's friends and families but also amongst the comrades his son served with and an (ever-widening) circle of the bereaved. But that transition (in the taxonomy of librarians) from 'material culture and ephemera' to 'printed matter' never came about. Two years into the project, and well into the 8th volume, Roberts' obsession with collating and preserving continued unabated. Publication mattered less than tending this memorial in a private sphere. Frank's book belonged behind closed doors, devoted to the faithful few who shared his loss—it was not a commodity for a mass market.[24]

Bulky they may be, but Frank's books are also fraying, fragile, and ephemeral. Prior to their transfer to the Heritage Reading Rooms of the State Library of Victoria, they were read, re-read, and often annotated by family members. In humidity-controlled conditions, the books were sealed in thin polyester film, an archivist's attempt to keep further deterioration at bay. Breaking that seal is like entering the world of Garry's bereavement. As one turns the pages, heavy with layers of paper glued fastidiously together, each volume's spine seems to creak. Dust, dislodged clippings, and even that treasured memorial card for Frank sometimes drifts away from the bindings. The most experienced of researchers can find the process of reading such ephemera challenging. The physical effort of handling so heavy a volume, the emotional toll of what seems an intrusion on a family's grief.[25]

It is possible to chart something of the geography of Garry's project. 'Bk 2′ began the great enterprise of transcribing virtually all of Frank's letters. Most (in this volume) deal with his training. Garry Roberts' son had enlisted out of a sense of duty—knowing he could not stay at home when others gave their all, believing his country and his family were in

danger. But Frank, as his own words attest, was always a reluctant soldier. Intelligent, well-read, and sensitive, he was ill-suited to army life—the 'rot' of rules and regulations, the endless weeks of discomfort and boredom, the terror and brutality of battle. This volume, like all the others, is therefore carefully curated, the skillful use of image and ephemera framing and re-molding one soldier's story. The photographs of training—and the men with whom Frank served—illustrate the text, all putting a brave face on their ordeal. The press accounts of the 'heroic' evacuation from Gallipoli and a colored commemorative brochure for Anzac Day 1917 appear in the final pages, celebrating a nation's 'baptism of fire', valorizing military service, evoking the Legend of the Landing. Yet amidst these heroic tropes, Garry also finds space for more intimate, domestic moments. The volume includes a 'final' photo of Frank with Ruby by his side at their childhood school—a parting glimpse of the family world Frank would soon leave behind him.[26]

Book 3 continues this narrative arc, chronicling Frank's passage to war. There are amusing accounts of shipboard life: transcribed extracts from diaries and letters make light of all the dangers awaiting him. A map is included charting that voyage across the globe, drawing a kind of imaginary line from Melbourne to Fremantle and then on (via Cape Town) to Plymouth. Through this particular volume of Frank's memorial book Garry Roberts embarked on a vicarious journey. A full itinerary charts his son's first visit to the Imperial metropolis—Garry even took the trouble of pasting in Mundie's *Guide to London*, and Frank's Leave Pass. Frank's account of his adventures is supplemented by an annotated map of the town and pictures and articles on special points of interest. The last appears to have been collected by the father rather than the son. Wartime ephemera thus engineered a kind of re-union between them. Both this volume and the one to follow it, bulge with post cards and souvenirs of Frank's visits to Salisbury, Ireland, and London. The colored illustrations of historical and tourist sites are labeled, 'Frank here'. The post cards proved the least expensive and arguably most effective way of locating Garry's son in time and space. They were, as scholars have noted, ephemera that mapped meaning. Little wonder they proved so popular for both sender and receiver. The post cards' aesthetic appeal, their souvenir status, the role they performed in providing short and effective communication, and the fact they carried Frank's words across the ocean, secured their privileged place in Garry's scrapbooks. They literally and visually embodied his journey.[27]

Roberts' project continues as Frank is posted to the front line. The next four books, from the time of Frank's arrival in France to his death at Mont St Quentin, map what remained of his son's life with encyclopedic precision. Every moment mattered, every word, every incident, a bulwark against forgetting.

The memorial books may have been a private undertaking—undertaken in domestic space, and confined (for the most part) to a close familial circle. Paradoxically, they reminded Garry Roberts he was never alone in his loss. Hundreds of sympathy letters are pressed securely in Book 8 of the collection, and (with an accountant's eye for order) Roberts provides a ledger for each. All these correspondents clutch for words that might deliver comfort: "pride" in a "duty nobly done"; hope for "strength in God"; reassurance that "in time the burden of sorrow will be easier to bear". Some resort to mass-produced sympathy cards designed to commemorate Deaths on Active Service—a flag unfurled beside a wreath, black ribbons and crossed rifles, a bugler at attention sounding the Last Post. There are those who question the value (though not the sincerity) of such sentiments. Pat Jalland concedes (on one hand) the 'therapeutic value' of condolence letters, but doubts such patriotic and religious cliché served mourners well—the most elegant, well-chosen words simply lost their meaning in the continued face of mass death. But the care with which Roberts preserved this testimony, indeed the massive labor of collecting (and replying to) hundreds of condolence letters in the first place, qualifies that analysis (Jalland 1996; cf. Scates and Frances 1997b; Meyer 2011). These sentiments were valued by Garry because they affirmed the value of his loss, because they shared, and in that sense lessened his grief. Arguably, the most eloquent letters are also the sparsest. "I feel I don't know what to say to you", Edith Jones wrote after "seeing the news about Frank in last night's *Herald*".

"Oh why did he go, I am so sorry for you." And amidst the "deep heartfelt regret" there is also bewilderment and anger. "This horrible war!", Annie Duncan declared, "When will it end? It is draining this country of the very best". Annie understood "the terrible blank" left in Gary Roberts' life.[28] Though the letters are ordered chronologically, Book 8 has also been carefully curated. It begins with images of Frank followed by the studio portraits of soldiers with whom he served. Of 36 men featured (all bar one in uniform), ten have the sparse annotation "Killed" at their base. The volume ends with press clippings charting the progress of battle—the souvenir pictures of ruined villages underscoring the devastation war had wrought. An ornate, colored print of Rudyard Kipling's *Hymn Before Action* is fixed to the back cover. It takes the form of illuminated scripture, the poet's ornate symbolism—Anchor-hope; circle-eternity; oak-strength; rose-England and Cross-redemption—fashioning an iconography of loss.

3. "So Passed My Dear, Gallant Son": Gathering the Testimony of the Witness

As it turned out neither Frank's final letter, nor for that matter the signing of the armistice, signaled the end of Garry's memorial project. On the contrary, the end of the fighting in Europe and the return of Frank's comrades home to Australia granted his labor a new lease on life. In the space of a few months, Garry received several accounts of his son's death. Some in Frank's platoon claimed he had died 'instantly', a 'gallant lie' perhaps intended to soften a father's loss. Jack Castle said his friend had "been hit in the chest by a bullet and died in about two minutes". Others in the same Lewis gun party saw him "hit by a bomb in the abdomen mortally wounding him". "He fell at my feet", later Private Godfrey Dodson's account continued, "and asked me if I would turn him over and straighten out his legs which I did". Frank died "10 minutes later", his face yellowing before Dodson's eyes. All these accounts were gathered by the Red Cross Missing and Wounded Inquiry Bureau some months after the battle and precise of the same were forwarded to Garry between January and July 1919.[29] Like most other inquiries the Bureau conducted they were incomplete and contradictory. But at least they confirmed the finality of Frank's death. There was no such 'closure' for the families of the 'missing', their unresolved fate likened grieving to a kind of limbo (Oppenheimer and Kleinig 2015). And, in a perverse way, the most graphic account of a death delivered the most certainty. Roberts duly pasted the Red Cross reports into yet another volume of his scrapbook. In doing so, he took comfort in the thought that Frank had not suffered too long, that the action in which his son died had saved the lives of several others, that the "ground was held".[30] Dodson's account was written out, word for word, in Garry's diary. Repeating those words underscored their veracity and they enabled a father to witness, vicariously, his boy's death: "In a few minutes a yellow look came over Frank's face and he died and so passed my dear, gallant son".[31]

Determining how and when a loved one died was one obsession of the bereaved. Ensuring they were buried decently another. In October 1918 AIF 'Base Records' had informed Ruby her husband had been buried "in an isolated group of graves, in a shell hole, in a valley, near a lane, just east of Mont St Quentin". The army knew from experience that grieving families craved such details—and locating a grave so precisely was another way of somehow containing loss. But characteristically, Garry demanded more and sought further information from the Red Cross. Dobbie's account again proved a comfort: "[Frank] was [buried] about 20 yards from where he fell, and I helped to bury him. A cross was erected with his name number and unit on it". It was Ruby's brother Ted, also serving in France, who took the first photograph we know of that common grave and the "very nice cross" that marked it. As with other such images he received, Garry Robert promptly crafted the photograph into the memorial, printed ephemera marshaled yet again in the work of remembrance. By 1921, Roberts had obtained studio portraits of all the men buried beside Frank—these are clustered in a montage around an image of yet another cross erected to their memory. A second page of the leaflet (like Frank's memorial card, the whole ensemble was designed for distribution) featured the text Garry had chosen.

To the Memory of Francis William Roberts

And his Comrades of the 21st Battn, AIF

Killed in the Capture of Mont St Quentin, France

On Sunday 1st September 1918

Buried Together on the Mont, and Afterwards at Perrone.[32]

The montage of the 21st Division's dead was posted to all the families of the deceased. This ephemera marking their common loss bound them together as a community of mourners. It also served the purpose of a pilgrimage by proxy. Even before the cemeteries of the Great War were completed, a steady stream of the photographs of the graveyards made their way from the battlefields to Australia. The YMCA, the Red Cross, and even the overworked officers of the War Graves registration Units produced photographs, usually 'post card size' and (wherever possible) clearly displaying the name of the casualty. One wooden cross or later regulation tombstone looked much the same as any other. This memorabilia was produced on mass and included details of the nearest town and any rail network within reach of often isolated cemeteries. Both the Australian government and the Imperial War Graves Commission also produced special publications illustrating (with sketch and photograph) graveyards great and small overseas, and for an obvious reason. Few families of the dead could afford to make that costly journey overseas. This—like Roberts' montage—was the only way of visualizing a loved one's final resting place. As late as 1928 (the tenth anniversary of Frank's death), Garry ordered no fewer than six photographs of his son's grave. Several are pasted between images of the battlefield, several more pages of Obituary, and yet another photograph of the Mont St Quentin cross, in Frank's memorial book.[33]

The Mont St Quentin Cross was not the only memorial raised to the men buried on the Mont. Even before the war had ended, General Charles Rosenthal had chosen the summit as the site of the Second Division's Memorial and appointed two Australian artists, Charles Web Gilbert and May Butler-George, to sculpt it. Scouring the local and British press for the news of Australia's commemorative labors abroad, Roberts heard of the proposal. And not long after, Gilbert (a close personal friend) approached him. Most divisional memorials Australia raised on the Western Front took the form of a simple obelisk—stern and simple, they mark the ground Australians had taken.[34] Gilbert's work would be figurative, lifelike, and dynamic, capturing the fighting qualities of the men of the First AIF. It would rest on a 'pedestal' of Australian stone, planting home on the battlefield. Gilbert asked if he could "incorporate Frank's head for the figure as a compliment to your good self". This was not just a gesture to console a grieving father. Gilbert (and his wife Mabel) had met with Frank in London and a strong rapport had grown between them. Garry Roberts promptly agreed to Gilbert's request. Then, the intended design was explained to him. Over 13 feet in size, weighing over two tons, and mounted on a pedestal bearing Butler-George's bar reliefs, the Australian soldier would be shown driving his bayonet into a Prussian eagle "fighting for life on its back at his at his feet". Whilst others would balk at the statue's chauvinism and militarism, Garry found the concept entirely appropriate: "As Frank appears to have lost his life while attacking with the bayonet, the design suits his ending rather well".[35] From that point on Roberts divided his time between the curation of Frank's memorial book and the co-production of an actual memorial. He viewed Gilbert's early sketches and provided "a large photo of Frank's head as [a] model". Then, three further photos were sent, to better "show the lines on the face". After inspecting a clay model, Garry arranged a sitting with Frank's brother Bert. The striking resemblance between them ensured his stance and features would take form in the artist's hands. Gilbert duly "altered the expression on the face of the life size clay model closing the lips and making it look more like Frank". This was closer to a likeness than any of his (many) studio portraits came.[36] The Second Division's memorial would be raised at Mont St Quentin in 1925; at the unveiling, Marshall Foch praised Australia's feat of arms and paid tribute to the heroism of diggers who helped 'deliver' France. But for Garry Roberts, Gilbert's "beautifully modelled" tribute was a personal rather than a national memorial. It was his boy captured in bronze. A press

account of the same was duly clipped from *The Herald* and added to the scrapbooks.[37] So too were the photographs of May Butler George's bar reliefs of the muscular soldiers featured at the monument's base. Like the figure of Frank above them, they were described as "life like in the extreme". Ephemera had made the absent present again.[38]

4. The Family Have Still Held on to That': The Transmission of Family Memory

Garry Roberts died in 1933. Until his last years, he continued corresponding with Frank's friends and comrades and adding cuttings to the scrapbooks. What became of so substantial a collection, with its creator, curator, and custodian gone? In her pioneering study of wartime ephemera and the transmission of family memory, Ann-Marie Foster charts the way families elect to deal with wartime ephemera and all the 'memory objects' gathered in the wake of war.

> There are two main ways that families have attempted to link their memory of the object with the physical item: when they donate an item to a museum they pass on their stories about family life and the importance of the object, or, when items remain in the family, they keep memorial narratives alive through the transmission of family memory.[39]

Garry Roberts' family seems to have adopted both approaches. As early as 1919, Frank's diary was forwarded to the State Library of NSW—and by Garry himself. The Mitchell Library's 'European War Collection Drive' acquired over 500 private records in the post-war period, paying between £5 to £75 for "high quality accounts" (Condé n.d.). But Garry sought recognition rather than remuneration. Hugh Wright, Mitchell's Chief Librarian, shared Roberts' 'kink' for collecting ephemera and a love for 'Australian rarities'.[40] It would be several years before the AWM commissioned a similar collection.[41] Roberts would see Frank secure in a national collection well before then.

The bulk of the collection remained in the family until several decades after Frank's death. The storage of the scrapbooks had always been an issue, colonizing the study, storeroom, and cellar of Roberts' retreat in the Dandenongs.[42] Keen to supplement Roberts' published holdings, the State Library of Victoria duly took charge of its largest single collection of bound ephemera.

Even so, the family kept—and still treasure—Frank's most precious and most intimate possessions. One cold evening in July 1919 Garry opened a parcel from Web Gilbert containing "Frank's effects and clothing": poetry books and khaki Shirt, tooth brush and post cards, whistle and lanyard, a small Packard camera, letters, guidebooks, and his diary. Like two other parcels sent from the AIF Kit Store—effects (like Frank's identification discs) "Received from the Field"—they became "a memorial to my dear and gallant son". With the exception of the diary, all appear to have remained in the family. So too did the wedding ring Frank was wearing when he died, wrested from his finger by one of his comrades, before that body like so many others, was 'ratted' for valuables.[43] But the real value of these items was only really known by the families who mourned their original owners. Military issue stores and private possessions, material artifacts and flimsy ephemera, the clothing they had worn, the prayer book they had carried, all served, as several historians have observed, as a point of connection with the lost. "They contained the smell, touch and emotions of the dead." (Jalland 2002). Garry Roberts took to sleeping in his son's bed when he first heard of his death—a way of wrapping himself in Frank's memory, of feeling close to him again. The family cradled that khaki shirt and handled that ring for much the same reason.[44] Ruby retained the brooch issued to women who had surrendered their men to war for much the same reason.

In the case of the Roberts family, there were also the actual relics of the dead. The family kept a lock of hair clipped from Frank's head as a baby. This was common practice in the nineteenth century when so many children died in infancy. By the time of Frank's birth infant mortality was in decline, and parents no longer expected to bury their children. The war abruptly reversed that trend (Luckins 2004). And with Frank's remains buried overseas, a lock of hair also became a focal point of mourning, and not the only one. In

the lead-up to the Centenary of the First World War, Deb Tout Smith and several of her colleagues in Museum Victoria curated an exhibition charting Family Memory and Wartime Loss. 'Love and Sorrow' remained open to the public for over four years and attracted tens of thousands of visitors.[45] Part of Tout Smith's task was to locate and exhibit the scattered holdings of the Roberts family, encompassing diaries, letters, ephemera, and memorabilia. Library collection and family heirloom were reunited, gathered together just as they had once been in the drawing room at 'Sunnyside'. "The thing about Frank Roberts and his tragic loss" Tout Smith explained, "is that his father's grief and his family's grief has reached out to us across a century". The meticulously compiled scrapbook, the folios of photographs, the transcripts from diaries, letters, and a veritable mountain of ephemera have lost none of their eloquence. "It is also the story where we see the women as well as the men suffer and the children and the later generations suffer so we get this intense poignancy that reaches out over time". And there was one item in particular that embodied all this, encapsulating, as Tout Smith saw it, an inconsolable loss:

> . . . one of the most heartbreaking parts of [this exhibition] is the story of a little pair of booties that [Frank's] wife decided to send over to Frank to connect him with [their] little daughter Nancy. So, she kept one bootie and sent the other over with a note purporting to be from his daughter saying "Dear Daddy, I bet you can't fit your foot into this shoe but one day soon the pair will come back together again". But the real tragedy was that by the time it arrived in France where Frank had been fighting, he had already been killed. And that very parcel was returned to the family marked "return to sender". And the family have . . . held onto that. . . . when you think about an object which expresses the [waste] of war, those two little booties, one wrinkled from that trip to France and the other smooth from staying at home and being treasured, it's just heart rendering.[46]

5. Conclusions

Deb Tout Smith described the Roberts collection as "unique"—a pardonable exaggeration. In fact, just across the border, the Harrison family in Adelaide assembled very similar tributes to their departed son. A thin metal plate bearing Private Harrison's name is stored alongside memorial cards, photographs, and the scraps of a soldier's uniform. It had once marked Private Harrison's grave on the Salient in Flanders. Included in the collection is the Cemetery Register. It falls open on the page where George Harrison's grave is marked by row and number and a line of biography still links the dead man to his family. Folded alongside it is a copy of *The Kings Pilgrimage*, detailing George V's celebrated visit to the war graves. Harrisons might never see their son's final resting place, but their Sovereign made the journey for them. What is the most interesting about this collection is the way these formal statements of commemoration have been carefully individualized—just as they had in the case of the Roberts family. The commemorative plaque sent to the Harrisons—a gleaning brass medallion embossed with the soldier's name, a lion, and Britannia—has been set in a soft honey-colored frame with maple. The wood has been carved by the careful hands of a loved one, bordered with a pattern of Australian wildflowers. George's presence is secured by pressing his uniform buttons deep into the wood; alongside them are two deep depressions, still bearing the red wax of what may well have been candles. The plaque has become a Shrine, a memorial as real and as lasting as any tombstone raised in Belgium.[47]

Not all Australian families could afford such an elaborate display of mourning. The Roberts and Harrison collections constitute a kind of performance, one undertaken by the privileged, the patriotic, the powerful. But similar ensembles of ephemera and material culture could also be found in working-class households; medals and commemorative scrolls, memorial plaques, and a single photograph of a soldier's grave were issued free of charge to the next-of-kin across the Empire.[48] We can imagine them resting alongside a scrapbook of press clippings, inexpensively but lovingly assembled, a cable returned to Australia to its 'dreaded pink envelope', a few tattered letters, a disc still encased in

soil.[49] These 'memory objects' were entrusted to the intimate spaces of domestic life. They secured "a continuing, every day bond with the dead" (Hallam and Hockey 2001; Klass et al. 1996).

This article began with the Mont St Quentin Cross; it will end in the same way. Normally, these grave markers were temporary and ephemeral. If not destroyed by shell-fire or the elements, they would be removed by the War Graves Commission in the early 1920s. Frank's cross survived—and hardly by accident. Keen for relics from the battlefield and mindful that families at home needed some point of connection to their loved ones' distant graves, the Australian War Records Section retrieved it from the graveside and dispatched it to the War Museum's collection depot.[50] By 1921, it formed a part of a public display of wartime artifacts fielded by the AWM in Melbourne's Exhibition Buildings, alongside a diorama depicting the battle for Mont St Quentin (Wellington 2017). "Saw . . . the original large cross that was erected to Frank and his comrades with their names punched in tin", Garry recorded in his diary.[51] It seems to have impressed him just as much as Web Gilbert's model of the Second Division memorial. One name, etched in the tin, stood out for Garry amongst the others.

In time, Web Gilbert's clay model was cast in bronze and raised on the summit where Frank died. Intended as a permanent tribute to the men of the AIF, it was unceremoniously removed (in 1940) when the German army marched again through Mont St Quentin. Web Gilbert's bellicose digger was one of the few war memorials they destroyed—the sight of their butchered national symbol simply 'too much' for them[52]. But a simple, temporary cross raised by Frank's comrades still survives, as does that baby booty, and the scrapbooks and the diary where a loving father remembered his son. From the galleries of the Australian War Memorial, the archives of the State Library, and from the home of Garry's descendants, grief 'reaches out' across the ages.

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Notes

1 Lutyens (1985); for details of Lutyen's pilgrimage and his work with the IWGC see Scates (2006b).

2 Monash (1920), For more measured assessments see Bean (1938) and Stanley (2009).

3 For the role of crucial role of naming in challenging the anonymity of mass death in the Great War see Sherman (1998); Smith et al. (2000); see also Laquer (1994).

4 This description is based on personal observation of the Mont St Quentin Cross in the First World War Gallery of the Australian War Memorial (AWM) and curator's notes AWM RELAWM00954.

5 Kenyon (1918); see the celebrated speech by Winston Churchill during debates in the House of Commons, British Parliamentary Debates, 4 December 1920.

6 Roberts Diary, 14 January 1920.

7 For a general introduction to the impact and legacy of the conflict see Beaumont (2013).

8 Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker (2002); for early (Australian) inquiries along these lines see Scates and Frances (1997a); Damousi (1999).

9 This article builds on my earlier (and briefer) study of Roberts Scates et al. (2015); see also Scates (2006a).

10 John Garibaldi Roberts Diary, [henceforth Robert's Diary], 13 September 1918, SLV Ms 8183.

11 *ibid*.

12 ibid., 14 September 1918.

13 I owe this observation to Annette Becker.
14 Robert's Diary, 14, 28 September 1918; extract from letter to Lucy, 12 March 1918, John Robert's Scrapbook, [henceforth Robert's Scrapbook], SLV, Ms 8508, Bk 4.
15 Roberts' Diary, 18 December, 18 September, 1918.
16 ibid., 28 September 1918.
17 Clippings, *Age*, *Argus*, 17 September 1918; Robert's Diary, 18 September 1918.
18 Clipping, *Herald*, 23 September 1918, Robert's Scrapbook, Bk 8.
19 Clipping, *Herald*, 5 August 1920.
20 Deb Tout Smith interviewed by Bruce Scates for the 100 stories project. https://onehundredstories.anu.edu.au/stories/interview-deb-tout-smith Accessed 1 January 2024.
21 ibid., 14 February, 1/10 April, 9 August 1919.
22 Frank Roberts to Ruby Roberts, 23 August 1918 in Robert's Scrapbook Bk 6.
23 Publically, women were lauded as key mourners, and were also the primary producers of such scrapbooks. The Robert's case shows a man taking part in a typically feminine mode of memory making. For further consideration of the way gendered roles in wartime see Roper (2010).
24 On family archives war and ephemera see Barrett and Stallybrass (2013).
25 The scrapbooks are now stored in Corex boxing and pillows are still issued to researchers to distribute each volume's weight. I thank Rosalie McIvor, of the Heritage Reading Room, SLV for her helpful advice on changing preservation practice for fragile ephemera.
26 Frank Roberts to Gary Roberts, 27 December 1917 in Roberts' Scrapbook, Bk 6.
27 Robert's Scrapbook, Bk 3; Rogan (2005); Huss (2000). I thank Anne-Marie Foster for drawing my attention to these sources.
28 Sympathy letters from Annie Denholm (undated), Edgar Peacock (18 September 1918), Ian McDougall (18 September), Edith Jones (24 September) and Annie Duncan (13 September) Roberts Scrapbook, Bk 8.
29 Roberts (n.d.); Ms 8508, vol 7, SLV.
30 Red Cross Reports, in Robert's Scrapbooks, Bk 7.
31 Robert's Diary, 7 May 1919.
32 Robert's Diary, 14 September 1921; Robert's Scrapbook, Bk 7.
33 S. Richardson (War Graves Department, The Church Army) to JG Roberts, 12 December, Robert's Scrapbook, Bk 7.
34 Meeting of Australian Battle Memorial and Soldiers' Graves Committee, 20 March 1919, NAA A2902 AGS6/95; Battlefield Exploits Memorials—Australian, CWGC 1/1/10/B/WG; Bruce Scates, 'Colonising the Commemorative Landscape: the Villers-Bretonneux Project and Australian Intervention on the Western Front, in Becker and Tison (2018).
35 Robert's Diary, 8 January, 7 February 1919; C. Web Gilbert to Garry Roberts, 20 November 1918; Clipping, *Bulletin*, 6 February 1919, Roberts Records Book, B 7, 8.
36 Robert's Diary, 19 October 1920; 21/22 March; 10 July 1921.
37 Clipping, *Herald*, 5 October 1925; Robert's Scrapbook, Bk 7.
38 Clipping, *Table Talk*, 9 September 1925, ibid.
39 Foster, 'The Ephemera of Remembrance', p. 19.
40 Clipping, *Sun*, 9 June 1918, Roberts Scrapbook, Bk 4.
41 AWM Circular appeal letter to Mrs CE Howell, 3 October 1932, AWM 93 12/11/8443.
42 Clipping, *Argus* 25 April 1931.
43 Robert's Diary, 22 July 1919; Service Dossier, NAA: B2455, ROBERT WILLIAM ROBERTS; Noble Norwood to Ruby Roberts, 19 September 1918, Robert's Scrapbook, Bk 7.
44 For the visceral reaction to the clothing of the dead see Brayshaw (2018).
45 Scates and Harris (2020). A MOOC fielded by Monash University in the course of the Anzac Centenary introduced the exhibition to global audience, attracting over 50,000 learners. https://onehundredstories.anu.edu.au/articles/remembering-and-forgetting-war accessed 1 January 2024.
46 Deb Tout Smith interviewed by Bruce Scates for the 100 stories project https://onehundredstories.anu.edu.au/stories/interview-deb-tout-smith Accessed 1 January 2024. For further analysis along these lines see Ziino (2010); Noakes (2018); Roper (2023).
47 GR Harrison Collection, PRG 1022, Mortlock Library of South Australia.
48 This statement cries out for qualification. Commemoration favoured families resident in the British Isles and the Empire's white dominions. For the (belated) recognition of 'Unequal Commemoration' see the Report of the CWGC Non Commemoration committee, https://www.cwgc.org/our-work/news/cwgc-non-commemoration-review-2022-is-now-published/ Accessed 1 January 2024.

[49] *Red Cross Record*, June 1917.

[50] Photographs of the cross erected over the graves of the men of the 21st battalion AIF at Mont St Quentin, AWM93 17/1/11/100; McKernan (1991).

[51] Garry Roberts Diary, 2 August 1921.

[52] 'CEW Bean, Visit to Pozieres-Ypres Battlefields, 1951, Records in respect of Dr Charles Edwin Woodrow Bean', AWM, DRL 6673 series 3, file 419.8.1.

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