A FORGOTTEN CONTRIBUTION:

RE-DISCOVERING THE PRODUCTION
AND RE-ESTABLISHING THE SIGNIFICANCE
OF NEW ZEALAND'S OFFICIAL
FIRST WORLD WAR
ARTISTS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
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Abstract

This thesis examines the history of New Zealand’s National Collection of First World War Art. It explores the reasons behind the establishment and collapse of New Zealand’s official war art programme and the unfulfilled intention to create a National War Museum. The analysis focuses on the two main contributors to this programme, the civilian artist George Edmund Butler (1872–1936) and the soldier-artist Nugent Welch (1881–1970). Both trained under James Nairn in New Zealand but their disparate careers and war experiences affected the manner in which each approached their official duties, particularly their choice of subject matter and themes. While Butler and Welch completed many field sketches documenting the activities of the New Zealand Division on the Western Front they were never given the opportunity to complete the larger commemorative museum project. Without a proper home their works were neglected and the collection quickly lost its relevance and was forgotten. This thesis explains why this occurred. It reassesses the collection and repositions Butler’s and Welch’s works within a contemporary context, comparing their production with those of their fellow New Zealand artists, including Horace Moore-Jones, Walter Armiger Bowring, Frances Hodgkins, Edith Collier, Archibald Nicoll and Francis McCracken, who each responded to the war from outside the official war art programme. Their works are also analysed against examples of official and unofficial art made by international artists, with a particular focus on British artists and those from the Dominions of Australia and Canada such as Paul Nash, C.R.W. Nevinson, William Orpen, Arthur Streeton, William Dyson, A.Y. Jackson and F.H. Varley. The thesis also explores the impact of photography on the programme, the effects of censorship, the role of propaganda and the challenges the artists faced on the battlefields. It concludes that New Zealand’s official war art has been unjustly neglected and argues that it should form part of a more complete understanding of twentieth-century New Zealand art.

Key words: New Zealand National Collection of First World War Art; New Zealand National War Museum; George Edmund Butler; Nugent Welch; Horace Moore-Jones; James Nairn; Frances Hodgkins; Western Front; Gallipoli; art, censorship and propaganda; art and photography.
A Forgotten Contribution? Introduction to New Zealand's National Collection of First World War Art

During the 1914–1918 War a Committee was formed in England to advise the Ministry of Information on the appointment of British Official War Artists. A number of eminent English Artists were so appointed and it was left to them to decide what aspect of the war they should portray in order to leave a permanent contemporaneous record of the epic struggle. The success of their efforts is evident in the Imperial War Museum in London. The New Zealand Government followed the lead of England in this matter and appointed two New Zealand Official War Artists: the late George Butler and Nugent Welch. Their work tells a vivid story not only of heroism and endurance in battle but also of comradeship and the grim humour of life in the trenches.¹

– G.G. Gibbes Watson, Chairman of the National Art Gallery Management Committee

At 8pm on Tuesday the 24 June 1952 the New Zealand Governor-General, Lord Bernard Freyberg V.C., presided over the opening of the Exhibition of Official War Paintings by New Zealand Artists. The ceremony at the National Art Gallery in Wellington was a grand event and Freyberg was a fitting guest of honour since it was his initiative, as Commander of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in the Second World War (2NZEF), which led to the recruitment of New Zealand's most famous war artist, Peter McIntyre. Those fortunate enough to be invited to the function could admire many of McIntyre's paintings of the recent war in Europe as they wandered through the Gallery alongside works by his fellow official war artists, Russell Clark and Allen Barns-Graham, who had documented the New Zealand Forces in the Pacific.

Had the guests taken the time to read the 'Foreword' by Chairman Gibbes Watson in the exhibition catalogue cited above, they might have wondered where the paintings from the First World War were hung. In spite of the Chairman's high praise of their merits, examples of works by George Butler or Nugent Welch were nowhere to be seen. Closer inspection of the catalogue would have alerted the viewer to the fact that works from the First World War art collection would not be sharing the gallery space with the official art from the Second World War. Instead the collections had been segregated into two separate time periods, with the latter taking precedence over the former.\(^2\)

Although seemingly done on practical rather than malicious grounds, this act was nonetheless a slight against the capacity of the First World War paintings to stand among and to equal the calibre of their artistic descendants. The National Art Gallery's brusque curatorial decision perfectly encapsulates the dismissive treatment that the First World War art collection has been subjected to since its inception in 1918. This was also typical of the rude handling that the National Art Gallery applied to the works when it was entrusted with the care of the National War Art Collection after the 1952 Exhibition had closed.

In 1968 the Cultural Branch of New Zealand's Department of Internal Affairs made enquiries with the National Art Gallery regarding the status of the First World War collection.\(^3\) As the official custodians of the war collection, the staff at Internal Affairs were understandably shocked by the condition report they received from the Gallery a year later. The works in question had been stored for years in the dirt floor basement of the Gallery. At least eight works presumed lost in their initial inventory

\(^2\) To be fair to the eminent Governor-General, Freyberg did briefly mention the absent First World War paintings in his address. As a veteran of the Great War, who had won a Victoria Cross for his outstanding gallantry at Gallipoli, Freyberg referred to Butler and Welch's paintings, stating that they "show as well as great craftsmanship, a delicate quality that may be absent in the pictures at present exhibited." He called on his audience to view the works at the future exhibition. But this does not alter the fact that the works were physically separated out from the Second World War Paintings by the National Art Gallery's Hanging Committee.  


\(^3\) Letter from Mrs E.M. Northmore, Secretary of the National Art Gallery to Mr C.J. Read, Group Executive Officer (Cultural), New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs, 24.07.1968; and letter from Mr H.T. White for Secretary of the New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs to the Secretary, National Art Gallery, 05.08.1968.  
ACGO, IA. 8333, 1. bx 2842. 124/52/8. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
had actually just been misplaced within the jumbled shelving and the majority of the paintings and drawings were also suffering from mould damage – a result of the uncontrolled humidity in the area. The Gallery’s Curator had cleaned off what bloom and brown spot foxing could be removed, but many of the works were permanently stained and it was concluded that a number of the portraits were in such poor condition "that restoration would not be worthwhile." Due to a severe lack of space and because the majority of the works were not considered suitable for display, the Secretary of the Gallery asked Internal Affairs for permission to de-accession several of the First World War works from their holdings. "Regrettably there is no other space for these paintings at the Gallery. I am, therefore, obliged to point out that the condition of these paintings can only deteriorate if they remain where they are."4

Internal Affairs was now inadvertently tasked with the duty of assessing the historical and cultural importance of New Zealand’s First World War art collection. The staff attempted to find a temporary location to house the collection with the Ministry of Defence but their pleas for assistance were unsuccessful. Despite being the original instigator of the official war collection through the First New Zealand Expeditionary Force (NZEF) and in disregard of the significant military subjects that they contained, Defence had no space to offer and no great desire to take over care of the works.5

In despair, Mr. C. Litt, a Group Executive Officer of the Cultural Branch, composed a report on the possible future of the collection. Although he believed it "unthinkable that the pictures be destroyed deliberately" he did conclude that, "the pictures have no use in the normal sense" and that although "the subjects of the paintings are either notable figures of the First World War or scenes of the war" he did not "imagine that very much interest would be shown in them today. The style of the

4 Letter from Mrs E.M. Northmore, Secretary of the National Art Gallery to the Secretary of the New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs, 27.06.1969 in -  
Ibid.
5 The Ministry of Defence did eventually offer storage in their buildings at Royal New Zealand Air Force Base in Shelley Bay, Wellington but this appears not to have gone ahead. Letter from D.A. Kerr, Group Executive Officer (Cultural), Department of Internal Affairs to the Secretary, National Art Gallery, 16.07.1969; letter from D.A. Kerr (for the Secretary for the Department of Internal Affairs) to the Secretary, for Defence, New Zealand Ministry of Defence, 16.07.1969; letter from L.R.D Willmott for the Deputy Secretary of Defence to the Secretary, Department of Internal Affairs, 5.8.1969; and letter from C.G.R. Ward for the Secretary of Defence to the Secretary, Department of Internal Affairs, 10.11.1969. Ibid.
painting is not much appreciated these days and in any case the logistical problems of shifting, let along hanging the pictures are formidable." His suggestion was that the original frames of the works, too large and cumbersome for modern tastes, should be removed and destroyed and the paintings, now as bare canvases, could then be made "available perhaps as archival material." If approved, Litt's report would have stripped the works not only of their frames but also of their status as artworks. While the callousness of this approach certainly grates against our modern sensibilities and contemporary preservation techniques, this was, essentially, the fate of the First World War art collection when it was finally transferred into the custody of the National Archives of New Zealand in 1981. It is the purpose of this thesis to explain how this outrageous turn of events could ever have occurred.

The following chapters will analyse the reasons why the official artworks produced by the War Artists’ Section of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force could so completely lose their artistic and cultural relevance within New Zealand. How could this have occurred when, outside of this collection, other official and official artworks from the First World War period have remained significant and even, in some cases, nationally iconic since their production almost one hundred years ago? From as early as the 1920s the collection was burdened by the indifference of the art gallery and museum community who denied the majority of the works a permanent place in their institutions. How was it that the collection could be relegated to a basement and left to suffer under woeful mismanagement and abysmal levels of neglect for decades? Although its circumstances began to brighten when it passed into the care of the National Archives, local and international art historians and social history scholars still largely overlooked its worth. Did the quality of the works really merit such treatment? Should they only be valued as historical documents of the war or can they be said to transcend their role as records – to instead become regarded as significant New Zealand works of art? It is the aim of this thesis to rectify the indifference that has plagued these works since their inception and, in doing so, to finally ascribe to New Zealand’s forgotten collection of First World War art the stature it deserves.

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6 Report by Mr. C. Litt, Group Executive Officer (Culture) from the Department of Internal Affairs, c. August 1969. Ibid.
With the intention of providing an art historical and social context for the work created during the First World War by New Zealand artists, my analysis opens with the question ‘Why War Art?’ Described by the Greek poet Heraclitus in the fifth century BC as “the father of all things” – warfare has been an accepted part of life throughout the ages. The story of human existence is an endless cycle of war and its’ counterpoint – peace. This history is intrinsically intertwined with the visual arts. Across the divide of cultures, artists have recorded the victories and tragedies of warfare and been called upon to glorify or vilify the feats of soldiers and their commanders. These two seemingly contradictory but equally fundamental elements of human society – war and art – have always intrigued me. It is the complex nature of their relationship that sits at the heart of this thesis. This chapter will summarise the major developments in the mutable relationship between art and the politics of war that occurred during the First World War, with an emphasis on the role played by the relatively new medium of photography in the documentation of the conflict. This chapter will include a discussion of the major official artworks created during this conflict, focusing in particular on the war art programmes of Britain, Australia and Canada. As the closest artistic contemporaries to New Zealand's official art programme, the works from these collections will be used for the purposes of comparison in the later chapters of this thesis.

The development of New Zealand’s official war art programme will be the subject of my second chapter. This history begins during New Zealand’s first major campaign of the war in Gallipoli when soldier-artist Horace Millichamp Moore-Jones (1867/8–1922) produced a series of watercolour paintings documenting elements of life on the Peninsula. These works were made in an unofficial capacity but are significant for being the first major artistic response to the war by a New Zealander. It would be several years before New Zealand acquired its first officially sanctioned artists. The complex process that led to this development will be explained throughout the

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8 The exact date of Horace Moore-Jones' birth varies between texts. His frequent biographer Anne Gray, in the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* entry for Moore-Jones, uses the above format. This date range will therefore be adopted for use in this thesis.
course of this chapter beginning with the hiring of official photographers in 1917 to document the New Zealand forces in the United Kingdom and on the Western Front. It was April 1918 before the New Zealand Expeditionary Force was belatedly prompted to commission its first war artist – Lance Corporal Nugent Hermann Welch (1881–1970), a soldier from the 2nd Battalion of the New Zealand Rifle Brigade. Welch was the establishing artist of New Zealand’s first official war art programme – the New Zealand War Artists’ Section.

The second half of this chapter will examine the ambitions and motivations involved in the creation of this Artists’ Section and discuss the decision-making processes behind the selection of eleven, largely unknown, artists who were each deliberately plucked from their soldiering duties within the Expeditionary Force to serve as official war artists for New Zealand. In addition to these soldier-artists, the decision was made to recruit a small number of high calibre civilian artists into the New Zealand War Artists’ Section. Several talented individuals applied for these positions, including Walter Armiger Bowring (1874–1931), an established society artist based in New Zealand. Many were rejected or passed over by the Expeditionary Force’s War Records Section – the army unit in charge of administering the war artists’ programme. Eventually two disparate artists were selected to fulfil these duties, an English illustrator, Alfred Pearse (1857–1933), and an expatriate New Zealand painter, George Edmund Butler (1872–1936). The final section of this chapter will look at the reasoning behind these choices – explaining the qualities that each selected artist brought to their role and offering suggestions as to why certain artists were not considered suitable. The recruitment of Butler and Pearse also marked a turning point in the objectives pursued by those who had established New Zealand’s War Artists’ Section. This group of influential men dreamt of a purpose-built New Zealand War Museum that would commemorate the nation’s achievements and sacrifices during the war. Their implementation of this plan altered the tone of the programme away from pure documentation and affected the manner in which the New Zealand war artists approached their official duties.

As the artist who contributed the largest amount to New Zealand’s official First World War art programme, the work of George Edmund Butler will comprise the main bulk of my analysis. The third chapter of this thesis will focus on Butler’s production prior
to his commissioning as an official war artist in 1918. It will discuss his background and training, particularly the influence of James McLauchlan Nairn (1859–1904), a significant figure of the early New Zealand art community who, by coincidence, was a significant mentor to both Butler and Welch during the formative years of their artistic careers in Wellington. After examining Butler's work from the pre-war era, this chapter will analyse the work he produced in response to the war before gaining his commission as an official New Zealand war artist and will assess the changes that the conflict may have had on his practice.

Continuing this analysis, the fourth chapter will examine the principal themes that run through the official war art that Butler and Welch produced for New Zealand from 1918. Comparisons will be made with the work created by the other members of the New Zealand War Artists’ Section and with those New Zealand artists who produced artwork in response to the war from outside the official artists’ programme. Collectively this work will be analysed against examples of official and unofficial art made by a variety of international artists.

The battlefields of the Western Front where the New Zealand soldiers fought may dominate the works of the New Zealand war artists but how true to life are these landscape paintings? Did the need to create appropriately commemorative works lead the artists to alter the scenes they depicted for dramatic effect? The tensions that exist between documentary truth and the potential untruths required to successfully commemorate the war will be questioned throughout this chapter. With this in mind, I will explore the depiction of heroism and cultural stereotypes in the work of the New Zealand war artists by looking at how Butler and Welch chose to represent the acts of the New Zealand soldiers in the war. There is evidence to suggest that the varying level of exposure that Butler, as a civilian, and Welch, as veteran serviceman, had to the war environment, affected their approach to their official duties. It impacted on how they believed their work should function and the tone they took when dealing with the realities of the war. Butler was fascinated by the acts of the New Zealand Division and strove to capture their frontline action whenever possible whereas Welch steered relatively clear of depicting the conflict. Both artists were equally interested in recording the destruction of the landscape and infrastructure of the Western Front. Butler’s interpretation of this scenery was
influenced to a great extent by his ardent Christian faith. Many of his paintings contain religious iconography, a quality that is less notable in Welch's interpretation of the same locations. Collectively however, their works do appear to share a certain joint aesthetic. The possibility that this gives Butler and Welch's war artworks a quality unique to New Zealand will be cautiously assessed throughout the chapter.

Following this detailed exploration of New Zealand’s contribution to the visual history of the First World War, I will describe what happened to the nation’s official art after the war ended and discuss what this history says about how the works were perceived. Why was it that the works were considered irrelevant and why have so few people ever taken them seriously as works of art? In particular this chapter will look at the failure of the New Zealand War Museum and the repercussions that this has had on the history of the First World War art collection. This chapter will attempt to explain why both scholars and those institutions charged with their keeping have persisted in disregarding the artistic significance of these works.

No publications have previously bothered to examine the role of the official war artists prior to the transfer of the collection to the National Archives of New Zealand in 1981. There is evidence that the works produced for the official war art programme were exhibited in the 1920s and again after the Second World War but apart from brief mentions in exhibition catalogues, the works were not taken up and discussed for their individual or collective merits. There are no monographs related to the major players in New Zealand’s official First World War art, despite Welch having a prominent post-war career as a landscape and marine artist based in Wellington. Welch’s work is discussed in a variety of exhibition catalogues and in surveys of New Zealand landscape artists but his official war paintings are not specifically analysed and his status as a one-time war artist is only mentioned as a cursory detail.9

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The exception to this seemingly comprehensive lack of interest in New Zealand’s First World War art are the unofficial artworks produced by Horace Moore-Jones. The scholarly fascination with Moore-Jones’ Gallipoli watercolours and his painting *Simpson and his Donkey* (c.1917) is bound up in the mythology surrounding the Gallipoli Campaign and the emotive nationalism of the Anzac legend. Moore-Jones himself capitalised on the high level of interest in Gallipoli. After the positive response to his Gallipoli landscapes in London, he toured his work throughout New Zealand and published a hugely successful print series with accompanying catalogue. Following his untimely death in 1922 there have been multiple exhibitions of his work, a variety of articles on his contribution to the visual history of Gallipoli and countless reinterpretations of *Simpson and his Donkey*. The attention given to Moore-Jones’ Gallipoli works can mainly be attributed to their physical separation from the rest of the New Zealand First World War art collection. Moore-Jones eventually sold the works to the Australian War Memorial in the 1920s. This museum recognised the commercial potential of Moore-Jones’ paintings and encouraged their exposure, meaning that Moore-Jones’ works have been seen by a much broader audience than any other piece of New Zealand First World War art.

The New Zealand war art collection did undergo a small renaissance in the public consciousness when it passed into the custody of New Zealand’s National Archives (now referred to as ‘Archives New Zealand’). This institution began the process of documenting the un-catalogued collection in 1981 and in the June 1982 publication of the magazine *Archifacts: Bulletin of the Archives and Records Association of New Zealand* archivist Tony Murray-Oliver reported on the slow progress that his institution was making towards this aim. “On completion of the present exercise,” he states “the National Collection of War Art will have been brought under control, as far as is humanly possible, and fully organised, will offer a useful research resource,

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both in war history and in art history.” In 1987 another archivist, David Colquhoun, gave a paper at the ARANZ conference *Off the Beaten Road* that was published in the association’s *Archifacts* magazine in 1988. This provided an update on the project and a brief outline of the history of the war art collection pieced together through the official war documents also held by National Archives.\(^{13}\)

The first academic study to engage with the subject of New Zealand’s official First World War artists was a 1984 Bachelor of Arts Honours thesis by Wayne Stagg, a student in the History Department of Victoria University, Wellington. The analysis in *Wars of Seeing* is limited to a comparison between Butler’s work and that of official Second World War artist Peter McIntyre (1910–1995). Within the limited word length of this thesis, Stagg touches on several important concepts regarding Butler’s representation of the war landscape and the soldiers fighting in its midst. However Stagg’s study had almost no exposure and, unfortunately, he did not pursue his ideas further in any higher-level academic investigation. In this thesis I will draw on the questions raised by Stagg and explore their implications in further detail.

After such a long period of neglect, 1990 was an unusually busy year for the collection. In this year the prominent military historian, Christopher Pugsley, curated *The Honorary Rank of Captain: Artists of the Great War*, a touring exhibition produced in conjunction with National Archives. The show featured a broad spectrum of New Zealand’s official and unofficial First World War era artwork. Pugsley had taken an interest in the ramshackle war art collection soon after it arrived at National Archives and did much good work assisting in its documentation. The accompanying catalogue to his exhibition fleshes out Colquhoun’s summary to present a brief but detailed historical account of the development of the war art collection as a whole.

The 150th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1990 provided an opportunity for artists and scholars to explore the development of New Zealand’s cultural identity. Based on this premise, the 1990 Commission, New Zealand Art

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Gallery Directors’ Council and the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand provided funding and support for curator Tony Martin’s major touring exhibition *Images of War*. Hosted by the Manawatu Art Gallery, this show examined the varying ways in which New Zealand artists have responded to international and internal wars throughout the history of the nation – from colonial times up to the then present day. The work of official and unofficial First World War artists Butler, Welch, Arthur John Lloyd and Walter Armiger Bowring featured prominently across the exhibition’s main divisional themes: ‘New Zealand War Art’; ‘Art and Propaganda’; ‘The Heroic Code in Art’; and ‘The Interpretation of Reality’.

The dynamics of the relationship between art and war in the New Zealand context was also discussed briefly in Hamish Keith’s 2007 publication *The Big Picture*. Although he touched on some thought provoking concepts, Keith’s examination was slight due to the nature of the publication as a commercial accompaniment to a popular television series of the same name. *The Big Picture* also suffers from the same cultural blind spot that mars Keith’s earlier art historical survey, *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting 1839–1967*, which he co-authored with Gordon Brown. According to these works, there was very little going on in New Zealand art between the rise of Nairn in the 1890s and the dawn of New Zealand’s new school of landscape ‘abstraction’ in the 1930s.14 Perhaps to counterbalance the limitations of these works, Brown did produce a highly detailed series of publications on New Zealand Painting published for the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand in the 1970s. The volume covering 1900 to 1920 includes many references to Butler’s pre-war career in New Zealand, which were extremely useful in helping me piece together this artist’s development and influences. Brown did include a handful of war paintings by Butler, Welch and Moore-Jones in the exhibition that accompanied this publication. All the works used were pieces from the official war collection that had been loaned out to the Auckland War Memorial Museum and

Brown’s interpretation of them was limited only to brief descriptions rather than a full analysis of their artistic merits.\(^\text{15}\)

In more recent times, an aspect of the New Zealand war art collection was highlighted in historian Jenny Haworth’s 2007 study of New Zealand’s official Second World War artists *The Art of War*.\(^\text{16}\) Her work contains little art historical analysis of the paintings but does contain interesting interviews with surviving veterans of this war that give insight into the production of art work within a war zone. She is in the process of publishing a companion study on the First World War.

In 2011 Grace Alty produced a Master of Arts thesis through the University of Auckland – *New Zealand war artists: exploring the heroic code in official New Zealand war artists*. This thesis attempts to cover the whole history of New Zealand official war art from the First World War to Afghanistan with a focus on the depiction of combat and soldiering. This work does not offer an in-depth analysis of the official First World War artist programme. It also overlooks the aspect of the official artworks that fits most effectively into the New Zealand art lexicon – their representation of the war landscape.\(^\text{17}\)

Recognition of New Zealand’s contribution to the visual record of the First World War is virtually non-existent in studies outside New Zealand. Margaret Hutchison, a PhD candidate in the History Department of the National Australian University, Canberra, will be addressing New Zealand official war art for the purposes of comparison in her forthcoming thesis ‘Painting War: Memory-making and Australia's official war art scheme, 1916–1922’ (working title). Surprisingly, Hutchison’s work will be the first to provide an overarching study of the Australian war art scheme.\(^\text{18}\)


Prior to this, the main published accounts relating to Australian war art were produced as monographs or exhibition catalogues relating to a select group of high profile artists who worked for the official programme. Arthur Streeton (1867–1943),19 George Lambert (1873–1930)20 and William Dyson (1857–1936)21 have received the most scholarly attention over the years despite there being eighteen official Australian war artists employed in the First World War. Although its title suggests otherwise, of all the essays featured in Anna Rutherford and James Murray Wieland’s 1997 edited collection War: Australia’s Creative Response, only Will Dyson, and those few artists who painted the contribution of Australian women in the First World War were singled out to represent this conflict.22 Women artists themselves are the subject of Catherine Speck’s Painting Ghosts, which examines the work produced by female Australian artists in response to war – covering unofficial art from the First World War period and both official and unofficial art from the Second World War.23

Almost all other references to Australia’s First World War art have been produced as exhibition catalogues in conjunction with the trustees of Australia’s official art collection, the Australian War Memorial. Artists in Action, edited by Lola Wilkins, showcases selected pieces of official and unofficial war art in the Australian War Memorial.

21 Ross McMullin, Will Dyson: cartoonist, etcher and Australia’s finest war artist (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1984).
22 Anna Rutherford and James Murray Wieland, eds., War: Australia’s creative response (St Leonards, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 1997).
Memorial’s collection from the First World War to the early 2000s. It contains short essays by a variety of historians on individual works chosen to represent the oeuvre of key Australian war artists. Scott Bevan's *Battle lines: Australian artists at war* and John B. Reid’s *Australian artists at war* contain similarly selective overviews and summaries which do not have room to explore the aesthetic or stylistic implications of the Australian First World War works in any great detail.\(^{24}\) The Australian War Memorial itself has also regularly published articles examining aspects of their collection holdings in their in-house publications the *Journal of the Australian War Memorial* and the magazine *Wartime*.

Although limited in its scope, the Australian War Memorial’s continued interest in the promotion of its collection has resulted in a steady stream of discussion related to that nation’s use of art in the First World War. The same cannot be said of the Canadian official war art programme, despite this collection being, arguably, the equal of the Australian scheme in terms of its aesthetic calibre. The seminal Canadian text is Maria Tippet’s *Art at the Service of War* published in 1984.\(^{25}\) Laura Brandon has also done much research on the topic of war art and, while curator of War Art at the Canadian War Museum, produced the exhibitions *Canvas of War* (2000)\(^{26}\) and *Art or Memorial?* (2006). The text accompanying the latter includes a discussion of the Canadian First World War art collection but is less comprehensive in scope than Tippet’s work.\(^{27}\) There are also several books on the topic of The Group of Seven – the Canadian artists’ collective, established around the time of the First World War, from which several members were employed as official Canadian war artists. These texts typically only discuss the subject of official art as a chapter within the broader history of this movement. However, as many of the artworks produced for Canada were actually made by well-known British artists, there are various publications that, although focused on Britain’s official war art, do make reference to the Canadian material. As will be discussed in the following chapter, the

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\(^{24}\) Lola Wilkins and Australian War Memorial., eds., *Artists in action: from the collection of the Australian War Memorial* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 2003).


\(^{27}\) Laura Brandon, *Art or Memorial?: The Forgotten History of Canada’s War Art*, Beyond Boundaries Series, vol. 2 (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2006).
Canadian and British First World War art programmes also share a joint heritage through the influence of Lord Beaverbrook, meaning that these two separate art collections are often linked together when discussed by scholars.

It is British artists who make up the bulk of First World War art history. Two of the most comprehensive studies on the British official war art programme are Nigel Viney’s *Images of Wartime* and *Modern Art, Britain and the Great War* by Sue Malvern.  

More recently Paul Gough readdressed this territory in *A Terrible Beauty*. These books all cover, in roughly chronological order, the development of the British official programmes, covering the main theatres of the war and the usual series of artist protagonists including Muirhead Bone (1876–1953), William Orpen (1878–1931), Augustus John (1878–1961), John Lavery (1856–1941), John Singer Sargent (1856–1925), William Rothenstein (1872–1945), Eric Kennington (1888–1960), C.R.W. Nevinson (1889–1946), Paul Nash (1889–1946), Percy Wyndham Lewis (1882–1957), Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), William Roberts (1895–1980), John Nash (1893–1977) and David Bomberg (1890–1957). In addition to these general histories, there are a plethora of detailed monographs outlining the contribution that each member of this highly influential group made towards the visual history of the First World War and their subsequent artistic developments in the post war period. Amongst these, a work that was of particular interest to my research was the doctoral thesis by Paul Gough, ‘Painting the Landscape of Battle’

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30 Full name Christopher Richard Wynne Nevinson, to be referred to henceforth as ‘Christopher Nevinson’ or simply ‘Nevinson.’  
(1991) that contains much thought provoking analysis of how the British official artists approached the landscapes of the Western Front.\(^{32}\)

Outside the scope of official war art programmes, there are a variety of books examining how European artists and artistic collectives responded to, or were influenced by, the events of the First World War. Around the late 1990s and early 2000s, a flurry of edited essay collections were published by scholars such as David Peters Corbett, Ysanne Holt, Fiona Russell and Lara Perry that specifically addressed the aesthetic fluctuations that occurred in the English art world in the years during and immediately surrounding the war.\(^{33}\) Of particular note is Richard Cork’s *A Bitter Truth*, which details the effect of the war on experimental artists of varying fame from a broad spectrum of nations.\(^{34}\)

The existence of a New Zealand war official art programme is completely overlooked by all of these publications. It was in response to this general lack of a comprehensive analysis that I began my research in 2007. I have since attempted to raise awareness of the New Zealand First World War Art Collection by presenting papers at a variety of national and international conferences and seminars and by publishing several articles on the subject. I hope to continue this work once my thesis is completed.\(^{35}\)


\(^{35}\) I presented papers on the subject of New Zealand's First World War Artists at the following conference events:

- Caroline Lord, "Capturing the Liberation of Le Quesnoy : an examination of the artistic contribution of the official New Zealand war artist George Butler to the development of New Zealand culture", *France and New Zealand during the Great War. Le Quesnoy, France, 3-5 November 2008*;
- Caroline Lord, "New Zealand's First World War Artists", *Department of Art History and Theory Departmental Seminar*. University of Canterbury, Christchurch, 7 May 2010;
- Caroline Lord, "Rediscovering the Forgotten Contribution of New Zealand's First World War Artists", *UC Postgraduate Showcase*. University of Canterbury, Christchurch, 2 September 2010;
- Caroline Lord, "The View 'From the Uttermost Ends of the Earth' : New Zealand's First World War Artists", *Other Combatants, Other Fronts : Competing Histories of the First World War, 5th Conference of the ISFWWS*. Imperial War Museum, London, 10-12 September 2009;
- Caroline Lord, "What Lessons can we Learn from Forgotten History? Re-establishing the significance of New Zealand's First World War artists", *New
This thesis will conclude with a discussion of the possible reasons why the New Zealand First World War art collection has been consistently disregarded, mishandled and undervalued up until now. The re-evaluation of these works is long overdue. As the following chapters will show, the national and international significance of this collection should be irrefutable. As the centenary of the First World War is observed worldwide, the comprehensive reassessment provided by this study will prove that the production of New Zealand's first official war artists deserves to be recognised and celebrated within these commemorations.
1) Why War Art? Representing the First World War: Methodologies and Ideologies

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie; Dulce et Decorum est
Pro patria mori.

Wildred Owen, *Dulce et Decorum est*, written on 8 October 1917

Just days after this famous British war poem was originally drafted, the New Zealand Expeditionary Force suffered its worst defeat of the entire First World War at the Battle of Passchendaele. On the slopes of Bellevue Spur on the 12 October 1917, 845 New Zealand officers and men perished within hours. 3700 more became casualties as they struggled through a sea of thick mud in a vain attempt to capture the German position ahead of them. This was not only the lowest point of the New Zealand campaign it also remains the darkest day in the short history of the nation –

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after almost one hundred years, there has never been such a massive loss of life on a single day. The significance of Passchendaele for New Zealand is undeniable. However it was not until the end of the war that George Edmund Butler, the New Zealand Expeditionary Force’s official war artist, was given the opportunity to capture the location in a quick battlefield sketch.

![Image of George Butler's sketch](image)

**Figure 1 – George Butler, Bellevue from Gravenstafel (c.1918).**

Through the fateful twists of circumstance, Butler was never authorised to develop this sketch into a painting that could adequately express the immensurable tragedy that occurred along this seemingly unassuming road. No major artwork was ever made by an official New Zealand artist of Passchendaele. This oversight is itself a great misfortune but its occurrence was symptomatic of the failures that plagued the New Zealand War Artists Section from its inception in February 1918.

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At the time of the Battle of Passchendaele (also known as the Third Battle of Ypres, July–November 1917), New Zealand had no official war artists in its employ. There was one official photographer, Henry Armytage Sanders (1886–1936), present on the Western Front during this battle. Sanders did produce an important series of photographs of New Zealand’s involvement in this action but due to the cumbersome nature of his equipment, he was only able to capture events before and after the battle and behind the lines, far from the actual fighting. Sanders' role in the New Zealand Expeditionary Force will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter but it is worth noting here why artists, with their sketchpads and travel

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40 A large collection of the official war photographs made by Henry Armytage Sanders is available at the Alexander Turnbull Library - National Library of New Zealand, Wellington. [http://natlib.govt.nz](http://natlib.govt.nz). Sanders’ images from the Battle of Passchendaele/Third Battle of Ypres were taken behind the frontlines after the New Zealand Division’s first major engagement in the Battle, the successful attack on Gravenstafel Spur on 4 October 1917 (supporting an Australian attack of nearby Broodseinde Ridge). These images were followed on the 12 and 13 October 1917, by a series of works documenting the aftermath of the failed assault on Bellevue Spur. Christopher Pugsley, "Who is Sanders? New Zealand’s Official Cameraman on the Western Front 1917-1919," *Stout Centre Review*, 5. 1 (March 1995); AABK. 18805. AccW5550. bx 112. 0101607. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
canvases, were considered an essential component of a successful military operation by almost every other nation that fought in the First World War, except New Zealand.

Art vs. Photography – the case for battlefield artists in the age of the cameraman

Artists have been used throughout the centuries to document warfare. The First World War was no exception. Although the concept of an official war artist is unusual to our modern sensibilities, the tradition continues even now, with official artists from a variety of nations being attached to branches of the armed forces and deployed into contemporary conflict areas such as the Middle East and Afghanistan. These artists perform the same function as their predecessors in the Great War – to document the actions of the military unit they have been assigned to and to commemorate specific events within these warzones. By 1914 this role, which had typically been the domain of the sketch artist, was, for the first time, significantly challenged by photography. Due to crucial advancements that had improved the medium in the early twentieth century, some of the traditional duties of the war artist were transferred to official photographers.

By the 1880s, a case for the medium of photography acquiring the status of art was becoming increasingly viable. In the catalogue essay to the Museum of Modern Art's major 1989 exhibition Photography Until Now, John Szarkowski explains that "The issue of the artistic status of photography, and thus of the photographer, was intimately related to the recent technical revolution. As long as photography was perceived as being an arcane and difficult craft, an aura of prestige clung to the

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41 The New Zealand Defence Force has employed Matt Gauldie since 2005 as the official artist for the New Zealand Army. Since the First World War the Australian Defence Force has continually deployed official war artists, in association with the Australian War Memorial, to every major conflict and peacekeeping operation that this nation has attended. The same is also true of Britain, which has also maintained an official war artist programme in conjunction with the Imperial War Museum. http://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/war_artists/1945today
practice. However this prestigious status was short-lived. When Kodak released the Box Brownie in 1900 it was an immediate international success. The founder of the company, George Eastman, had wanted "a camera in every household" and he was not disappointed by the results the Brownie gave him "the first five thousand sold immediately," with orders cascading in to the point where demand outstripped production. The subsequent Vest Pocket Autographic model, released in late 1915, was marketed as "The Soldier's Kodak" and was carried off to war by many enthusiastic men, including New Zealanders keen to document their small part in the 'Great Adventure' they expected the war to be. As Sandy Callister comments in her study of New Zealand photography in this period, "At the same time, Kodak tirelessly promoted the argument that there could be no better way to strengthen the bonds between the home front and soldiers than by sending the troops photographs of the 'folks at home.' The saturation of the popular market with inexpensive cameras made unofficial images of the First World War ubiquitous.

This thorough adoption of photography by the masses forced professional photographers to carve out a niche for themselves within the arts. In 1901 Charles Caffin published *Photography as a Fine Art* which asserted "There are two distinct roads in photography – the utilitarian and the aesthetic: the goal of the one being a record of facts, and of the other an expression of beauty." Photographic societies that promoted pure aestheticism were founded throughout the world around the turn of the century to counteract the common snapshot. However, the art community were wary of photography's infiltration into their highly specialised territory. Although many artists used the medium within their practice, photography was not, at this point in history, accepted as the equal of painting or sculpture within the artistic canon upheld by venerable institutions such as the British Royal Academy of Arts.

44 Ibid., 179.
The widespread use of photography further lessened the case for its adoption as 'art.' Photography's affiliation with documentation trumped its pure-art application despite attempts to eliminate this aspect of its character. Caffin and his compatriots believed they could emulate conventional artistic imagery by picturing "facts but not as facts." This was, of course, a farcical endeavour for as Szarkowskksi notes "the facts of life seem more factual – more specific, harder, less plastic – in a photograph, where they are motionless and single-faced, than in life where they have many aspects, and never twice seem quite the same."47

The tensions between these two branches of photographic practice are essentially the same as those that occur between official and unofficial war art – the former having the aura of prestige while the latter is imbued with a sense of immediacy and the genuine sentiment. The box brownie was, as Tony Martin puts it, "the poor man's sketch book." Although the "urge to portray what can be seen remains a powerful need" the act of sketching while at war was something that could be accomplished by only a select few soldiers "with the skills and inclination to draw.... Drawing required time, and energy and concentration; and men struggling to survive had few of these resources. To sketch was an unnecessary luxury."48 With a few specific exceptions, this study will concentrate on the practice of official war art and photography. For the purposes of clarity, this is here defined as those works that were produced with the intention of creating a (national) commemorative record of war by professional artists rather than those images that were made for personal use by an amateur.

Photography and art will be treated as separate terms. An accurate definition of official photography in the First World War period as 'art' is indeterminable. It will here be treated in the manner that it was mainly used in the war, as a form of documentation with strong artistic overtones. Although the aesthetic potential of much official war photography is certain, in this war the medium was seen mainly as utilitarian and was upheld for this potential to create accurate records. As Susan Sontag explains in On Photography, "the camera justifies. A photograph passes for

47 Ibid., 160.
incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened. The picture may distort; but there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what's in the picture.\textsuperscript{449}

In April 1915, the French were the first major nation in the war to set up a photographic unit to document their troops. According to Sue Malvern this Section Photographique de L'Armée employed "fifteen photographers with eighty-six assistants and thirty laboratory technicians and mobile laboratories that produced more than 150,000 plates." The following year Germany established the Bild und Filmamtes, known as BUFA or the Picture and Film Bureau, consisting of seven mobile film units that "produced 200,000 slides and 30,000 negatives by 1917." From March 1916 Britain secured its first official photographer, Ernest Brooks (1878–1936). In July, Brooks was joined in this vocation by John Warwick Brooke (1886–1926). Together they produced the majority of the 40,000 British official negatives (28,000 of which cover the Western Front).\textsuperscript{50} Just a month after Brooks was sent into the field, Canada too gained an official photography unit as part of the Canadian War Records Office, which had been established with the support of the Canadian Government by Sir William Maxwell 'Max' Aitken (1879–1964).\textsuperscript{51} A millionaire industrialist and journalist with a seat in the British Parliament and interests in the British newspaper The Daily Express, Aitken was quick to recognise the political advantages of wartime photography. He understood the need for the public "to see our men climbing out of the trenches to the assault before we can realise the

\textsuperscript{50} Brooks and Brooke remained the only British official war photographers until December 1917 when two professional newspaper photographers Tom Aitken (freelance of Glasgow) and David McClellan (formerly of the \textit{Daily Mirror}) were hired to assist them and sent to the Western Front. Aitken struggled from ill health but remained on the Western Front until the end of the war. McClellan also focused on the Western Front until being transferred to document the Royal Flying Corps. Armando Consolé of the \textit{Daily Mail} joined the British photographic unit in January 1918 but his contribution was limited. Like Aitken, he suffered from poor health in the trying conditions of the Western Front and his official posting came to an abrupt end in April when he was hit by a shell burst, losing his leg. With the arrival of new official photographers on the Western Front, Ernest Brooks was transferred in 1918 to cover British Naval subjects and the British forces in the Italy.


\textsuperscript{51} 'Max' Aitken was knighted in 1911. He did not receive his peerage until 1917 after which his full title became Sir William Maxwell Aitken, 1st Baron Beaverbrook. After becoming a Baronet he was commonly referred to as Lord Beaverbrook or (Sir) Max Aitken.

Brandon, Art or Memorial?; The Forgotten History of Canada's War Art, xiv; Carmichael, First World War Photographers, 17-20.
patience, the exhaustion, and the courage which are the assets and trials of the modern fighting man." These images would do "much to maintain patriotism and enthusiasm and eager interest in our Army in France." Aitken saw the historical and cultural value of these images. They would be, he said, "records of enduring interest to Canadians of the present and future generations."\(^{52}\)

The professional photographers who acted for these nations were generally employed by major studios, cinematography units or news agencies. Both New Zealand's official war photographers, Sanders and Thomas Frederick Scales (b.1890) were seconded from the British branch of the highly regarded French cinematography company, *Pathé Frères*. Sanders had already been to the Western Front, reporting on the war for the *Pathé Gazette*.\(^{53}\) Experts such as these were preferred because of their experience with the new genre of photojournalism.

Advances in photomechanical printing around the time of the First World War meant that photographic images could be widely distributed through illustrated newspapers and magazines. First developed in the 1880s, this method of reproduction could be done quickly and cheaply. "By projecting photographs through a screen which broke up their solid blocks of colour into tiny dots. Because of the eye's limited resolving power, the dots, which were grouped according to the original densities of black and white, created the necessary illusion of shades of grey. Transferred by mechanical means to the printing block the process allowed the apparent reproduction of a full range of tones through a medium which used only black and white paper."\(^{54}\) This technology ushered in a great age of news photography, a genre which "worked best when directed not toward issues of large historical moment but to ubiquitous Dickensian incident – routine felonies, petty defeats and exemplary victories, spectator sports, packaged ceremonies, vulgar display." However, John Szarkowski explains that "when newspapers first began to incorporate photographs into their pages they were seldom trusted to bear the entire weight of illustration, with good reason, since they were often static file shots of the ship before it sank, or a conventional head shot of the victim before the outrage was committed. Drawing and

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calligraphy and flashy graphics provided the drama, while photography added a suggestion of documentary authenticity.⁵⁵

At the turn of the century widespread experiments with photomontage or collage using photographic layering, mixed media or multiple exposures were conducted in the attempt to overcome the visual restrictions and implied didacticism of photography.⁵⁶ A great innovator in this field was Frank Hurley (1885–1862) an official photographer for the Australian Imperial Force in the First World War. Despite substantial improvements in the design and calibre of professional cameras, lenses, film and equipment, it remained problematic to obtain satisfactory action images of the First World War, particularly on the Western Front. The two main types of camera favoured by the professionals were the Goerz Anschutz, a hand held folding plate type, and the single lens reflex Auto Graflex. Both were relatively compact and portable. Both took excellent quality images using pre-prepared or dry glass plate negatives, the standard size of which was 5 x 4 inches. Much detail could be captured within this sized frame, but, as Jane Carmichael explains, "a recurring problem in war photography was to convey the scale of events and two very different methods were occasionally tried as alternatives to the standard press camera; either small panoramic or very large field cameras."⁵⁷ These however were much larger and more complex pieces of kit and given the volatile nature of the frontlines it was extremely dangerous to set up any such camera gear without becoming a target. Even with the smaller cameras, the awkward nature of the terrain, with its lack of decent vantage points, made viewing a battle frequently impossible. The British sector trenches were also subject to strict censorship.⁵⁸

Restricted access to the Western Front battlefields left Frank Hurley frequently dismayed. "To include the event on a single negative, I have tried and tried, but the results are hopeless. Everything is on such a vast scale. Figures are scattered – the atmosphere is dense with haze and smoke – shells will not burst when required – yet the whole elements are there could they but be brought together and condensed..."⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Ibid., 197-209.
⁵⁷ Carmichael, First World War Photographers, 8-10.
⁵⁸ Gough, A Terrible Beauty: British Artists in the First World War, 36.
On developing my plate there is disappointment! All I find is a record of a few figures advancing from the trenches – and a background of haze." Frustrated that "Nothing could have been more unlike a battle," Hurley responded by creating what he called 'combination printing' – "if negatives are taken of all the separate incidents in the action and combined, some idea may be gained of what a modern battle looks like." This technique produced "war pictures of striking interest and sensation."  

![Figure 3 – Frank Hurley, Over the Top (c.1918)](image_url)

Hurley's images complicated the authenticity that had been complicit in documentary photography. The official Australian War Correspondent and Historian, Charles Bean (also known as C.E.W. Bean, 1879–1968) was highly dismissive of Hurley's composite images, calling them little more than fakes. Although he appreciated the need for a visual record of the war and took his own photographs of events before helping to establish the Australian War Record Office in April 1917, Bean's perception of the role of the official photography unit under his command was diametrically opposed to that of Hurley's. As Carmichael eloquently states, Bean was

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"trained as an historian with an innate respect for the record in preference to the sensational, he was, from the first more concerned with the long term." Hurley, by contrast, was determined to express the drama of the war through whatever means necessary, unconcerned that his results muddied the waters of veracity.⁶²

Hurley was not the first photographer to manipulate images of war to his advantage. Roger Fenton (1853–1856) was one of the first photojournalists; using the new medium to document the events of the Crimean War between 1853 and 1855. Prior to the war and after his return to England, Fenton's photographic practice focused on the documentation of architecture and landscapes. He was particularly renowned for his interpretation of the latter – a critic from the *Journal of the Photographic Society*

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wrote in 1858 that, "No one can touch Fenton in landscape... there is such an artistic feeling about the whole of these pictures... that they cannot fail to strike the beholder as being something more than mere photographs." The author of a 1999 article on Fenton in the *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* explores this concept further, suggesting that Fenton's photographs transform topography into something imbued with an intense spirituality.\(^{64}\)

Fenton was given the unique opportunity to deepen the breadth of his allusory landscape images when was commissioned by the publisher Thomas Agnew to travel to the Crimea with Prince Albert’s royal introduction, allowing him to follow the British forces near the frontlines. His most famous work of this series is the desolate *Valley of the Shadow of Death* (1855) that uses a vista of cannon balls, strewn across the barren ground, to represent the many casualties of this war. Indeed, at first glance, the detritus littering the landscape looks remarkably like sun bleached bones and skulls. Fenton strategically positioned his camera to accentuate the desolation of the image.

![Figure 5 – Roger Fenton, Valley of the Shadow of Death (1855).](image-url)


The title of Fenton's photograph deliberately capitalises on the immense fame of Alfred, Lord Tennyson's poem, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*: “Half a league, half a league / Half a league onward / All in the valley of Death / Rode the six hundred. / "Forward, the Light Brigade! / "Charge for the guns!" he said: / Into the valley of Death / Rode the six hundred.” Written in response to the notoriously mismanaged and ill-conceived British cavalry assault against a position heavily fortified by Russian artillery during the Battle of Balaclava (25 October 1854), the repeated lines of Tennyson's work evoke Psalm 23 from the Old Testament: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." Fenton's own allusion to the Psalm gives a sense of hope to the bleak, abandoned landscape – offering the possibility of divine redemption and heavenly rebirth to the soldiers who died here. The use of such an evocative title transforms this simple image into a piece of commemorative war art.

66 Alfred Lord Tennyson, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, published on 9 December 1854 in *The Examiner*, London. According to Tennyson's account, he wrote the work on 2 December straight after reading about the battle published in *The Times* newspaper.
67 The complete Psalm 23 is as follows: "1 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. 3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. 5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." The Holy Bible: Authorised King James Version, Containing the Old and New Testaments. Translated out of the original tongues and with the former translations diligently compared and revised by his Majesty's Special Command. Appointed to be read in churches., 1949 ed. (London and New York: Collins’ Clear-type Press, 1949).
The subtle use of religious symbolism in Fenton’s war images appealed greatly to his Victorian audience. The photographs were extremely successful when exhibited to the London public. "The first widely published propaganda photos did their job. They show well-tended soldiers on the mend, as well as empty battlefields with only hints of the destruction that had occurred and not a single corpse." However the reality of the campaign was a diabolic shambles "written reports from the field revealed death in abundance a lack of food and clothing, and a raging cholera epidemic." Fenton was dedicated to his work but found the censorship he was obliged to adhere to difficult and his photographic equipment unable to effectively capture true to life battle images. His work, he believed, suffered from a "total want of likeness to reality."69 The tensions between truth and censorship in Fenton's work are further exacerbated by Susan Sontag's assertion in Regarding the Pain of Others that the landscape depicted in Valley of the Shadow of Death was not the location of the famous charge by the Light Brigade and that the scene captured was carefully

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manipulated to enhance the aesthetics of the composition and give the work a greater sense of drama. "In the first version of the celebrated photograph... the cannonballs are thick on the ground to the left of the road, but before taking the second pictures – the one that is always reproduced – [Fenton] oversaw the scattering of cannonballs on the road itself."\textsuperscript{70}

\begin{figure}[h!]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Alexander Gardner, \textit{Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter, Gettysburg} (1863).\textsuperscript{71}}
\end{figure}

Fenton's 'editing' of his image to suit his purpose unsettled the use of photography as a documentary tool in warfare. It was however, far less perturbing than the fabrications that occurred during the American Civil War (1861–1865). As Sontag also mentions in her influential critique of war and conflict, it is now well known that the photographer Alexander Gardner (1821–1882) moved corpses around Civil War battlefields and 'stage dressed' these victims in order to increase the poignancy of his compositions. It is understood that his photograph, \textit{Home of a Rebel

*Sharpshooter, Gettysburg* (1863), was completely contrived – with the eponymous soldier's body having been dragged several metres to a more photogenic location. Debates over the authenticity of this image were first raised in the 1960s when close analysis of the image and sources revealed the startling facts behind its creation. Surprisingly however, although controversy has fluctuated around the authenticity of this photograph, the general consensus of scholarship is that, 'at the time', the manipulation of images was commonplace.\(^{72}\) This negates the almost inconceivable grotesqueness of the act.

![Image](image.jpg)

Figure 8 – Alexander Gardner, *Antietam – Confederate dead by a fence on the Hagerstown Road* (September 1862).\(^{73}\)

Equally shocking were Gardner's candid images of the battlefield at Antietam littered with the rotting carcases of dead Confederate and Union soldiers. The Battle of Antietam (or Sharpsburg) on 17 September 1862 was one of the bloodiest of the Civil War. Although other artists witnessed the event, Gardner's brutal photographs brought the carnage of war into the homes of American civilians. Within a month of


\(^{73}\) Gardner's photographs from Antietam were created with this assistance of James Gibson. Alexander Gardner, *Antietam - Confederate dead by a fence on the Hagerstown Road*, September 1862.
the Battle, the images created by Gardner were exhibited at the New York studio of Mathew Brady (1822–1896), reproduced in Harper's Weekly magazine and made available for sale as prints to the public throughout the North.\textsuperscript{74} Credited as one of the first professional photographers to recognise the commercial potential of documenting the Civil War, Brady had hired Gardner and a group of over twenty other photographers, including Timothy O'Sullivan and George Barnard, to document the War as it unfolded.\textsuperscript{75} These men represented just a handful of the hundreds of professional and amateur photographers who documented the war but it is their works, thanks to Brady's astute publicity, that are the most recognisable images of the conflict. 'Brady's Photographic Corps' transformed the American public's understanding of the medium of photography. It "contributed to the modernising process" becoming a tool of communication "as omnipresent as the corps of balloon, telegraph and signal operators – part of a vast, intricate network of [the] military" and "offered a new public experience: eyewitness pictures almost immediately after the events."\textsuperscript{76}

Brady himself also recorded several battles and his work was highly regarded by his contemporaries for its truthfulness. "The public is indebted to Brady of Broadway for numerous excellent views of 'grim-visaged war' ... His are the only reliable records at Bull Run. The correspondents of the Rebel newspapers are sheer falsifiers; the correspondents of the Northern journals are not to be depended upon, and the correspondents of the English press are altogether worse than either; but Brady never misinterprets. He is to the campaigns of the republic what Vandermeulen was to the wars of Louis XIV."\textsuperscript{77}

The irony of this supposed authenticity was that Brady often attributed the work of his employees to his own name. The tensions this created led Gardner to break his

\textsuperscript{75} Gustavson, Camera : A History of Photography from Daguerreotype to Digital, 42-43.
association with Brady, eventually publishing his war photographs in the two volume *Photographic Sketch Book of the War* (1866). As Szarkowski explains, this work was "a strange and unsettling collection that documents the war mostly by describing a random set of sites and artefacts that circumscribed the action: a farmhouse that was once a temporary headquarters, a mud-spattered wagon, a temporary pontoon bridge. Interspersed with these are scenes showing the rusty indolence of camp life, and then without preparation, pictures of fields covered with distending bodies." This statement highlights the limitations of photography in the Civil War period. By the outbreak of the War photography had been popularised to such an extent that photographic studios, like the ones run by Brady in New York and Washington, were inundated by families wishing to acquire portraits of their loved ones before they went off to fight. Static images such as these were simple to create but the technology of the era was still not sufficiently advanced to effectively capture the action of a battle. The cumbersome nature of the equipment used made it difficult to get close to a battlefield meaning that most photographic works of this period were forced to focus on the aftermath of war.

The public's desire to see the War as it unfolded therefore led to the employment of a variety of ‘Special Artists’ by illustrated newspaper and magazines including, *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, Harper’s Weekly* and the *Illustrated London News*. Using the traditional sketch method, these artists could capture the action and drama of battles that contemporary photography could not. As Harry Katz remarks in *A Sketch in Time*, "The world came to understand the Civil War through the eyes of battlefield artists. Living alongside the troops, combat illustrators risked death, injury and disease to convey the blow-by-blow of battle with pencil and pen, charcoal, and crayon. Their work, sketched in the direst of circumstances, shows terrible violence but also moments of grace." Artists such as Alfred Waud, Thomas Nast, Edwin Forbes, Frank Vizetelly and Winslow Homer took enormous pride in the documentary accuracy of their work, which was often acquired through great

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personal discomfort and often by getting audaciously close to the frontlines. Several artists were arrested as spies, others were wounded and one, James R. O'Neill, was taken prisoner and killed by Rebel guerrillas. Theodore Davis, one of the few artists who followed the war throughout its whole duration, described his duties as requiring a "total disregard for personal safety and comfort; an owl-like propensity to sit up all night and a hawk style of vigilance during the day; capacity for going on short food; willingness to ride any number of miles horseback for just one sketch, which might have to be finished at night by no better light than that of a fire." Once completed, the sketches made by the ‘Special Artists’ were sent by the fastest means possible back to their publishers, where the best works were engraved then printed, using electrotype metal plates, and distributed for the eager consumption of both national and international media agencies. The whole process could take several weeks but, by the standards of the age, it was revolutionary. The ‘Special Artists’ brought the full drama and pathos of the Civil War to the American people. The importance of their work was recognised by Harper's Weekly in 1865, "The fierce shock, the heaving tumult, the smoky sway of battle from side to side, the line, the assault, the victory – they were a part of all, and their faithful fingers, depicting the scene, have made us a part also." Even with all the refinements of photographic technology that occurred by 1914, as Frank Hurley came to appreciate, photography remained the inferior medium to express the spirit of modern warfare. "Given the problems of access to and the difficulties of taking successful pictures in the frontline and the unlikelihood of publication of photographs of the dead which offended contemporary standards of decency, the inclination of the photographers was to concentrate on those items of human interest." Photography could easily record scenes behind the lines and show the landscapes where campaigns had been fought but the camera struggled to capture battlefield action. Its fundamental nature restricted its ability to reconstruct unseen events. Without straying into the problematic terrain of editing through photomontage, it also lacked the ability to compose discriminate elements into new forms and meanings – a methodology which is so innate to the mediums of painting

81 Katz, "A Sketch in Time: Civil War Battlefield Art."
82 Ibid.
83 Carmichael, First World War Photographers, 144.
or sculpture. It soon became clear to the officials in charge of the information units in the belligerent countries that war artists were still required to participate in recording the First World War. After realising that his War Records Office photographers had failed to document the Canadian Expeditionary Force's pivotal role in the Second Battle of Ypres (21 April – 25 May 1915), and that the photographs that they had taken would likely decay over a lifespan of just twenty-five years, even Sir Max Aitken (now elevated by a Baronetcy peerage to the title of Lord Beaverbrook), a passionate advocate for the medium, was eventually forced to conclude that only painting could provide "the permanent and vital form in which the great deeds and sacrifices of the Canadian Nation in the war could be enshrined for posterity." Lord Beaverbrook's concession confirms Szarkowski's statement that "Each method of transmitting information has its own structural prejudices, its own favourite kinds of information, which are those that it describes most easily and most precisely." Photography had its limits. In order to successfully commemorate the war, other, more traditional means, were required.

When Butler visited the site of the Battle of Passchendaele in late 1918 he had a unique advantage that a war artist has over a war photographer. Butler had not seen the events that occurred at Bellevue Spur in October 1917 but he had seen many photographs of the scene taken at this time, including those made by Henry Sanders. These showed Butler the poor terrain, the bad weather and how this affected the morale of the men as well the quality of roads that they were attempting to move down. He could see from these images the war machinery within the sector and how the heavy artillery guns had become stuck in muddy ground, hampering the success of the assault. He could even make out the models of these guns and the type of uniforms the men were wearing. By talking with the New Zealand soldiers who took him to visit the battlefield and consulting written accounts, Butler could gain an even deeper sense of what the experience had been like for the men involved. Bringing together all these elements to complement the first-hand sketches of the landscape he had made from a variety of perspectives, Butler would have been able to create a painting that could successfully capture the essence of this battle. Using

photography as a tool within his repertoire, Butler could easily negotiate the delicate issues of battlefront censorship by omitting certain details whilst strategically emphasising others. While Roger Fenton had struggled under the conditions of the warzone to create sufficiently commemorative images of Crimea, Butler could impose layers of symbolism to his work with ease, to achieve what Tony Martin in *New Zealand Images of War* calls a "more vital and arresting impact" which "allowed the viewer to identify more readily with the sentiment of the subject." New Zealand's military hierarchy did eventually acknowledge, "that artists had certain advantages over photographers" in their ability to memorialise the events of the war. Unfortunately for New Zealand, they lacked enough conviction to follow through with this realisation.

Commemoration & Persuasion, Patriotism & Propaganda – the recruitment of official war artists in the First World War

The importance of artists to our understanding of the First World War should not be underestimated. Shortly after the outbreak of the war it became apparent to many of those involved that this conflict would have a profound and unprecedented effect on communities around the world. The majority of the belligerent nations recognised early on that there was a need to document their society's involvement in this war, both at home and abroad. Throughout the world artists of all disciplines were employed in an official capacity to complete this task. The primary function of all these artists was to document and commemorate the events of the war for posterity. There is however, another aspect to these works that is often not immediately obvious. The politicians who ultimately controlled the funding for these national war art programmes were keenly aware of the persuasive power of the visual arts to

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86 Letter from Cpl. J.D. Hall to Officer Commanding the War Records Section, NZEF, 11.02.1918. Martin and Manawatu Art Gallery., *New Zealand Images of War*, 91-92; ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/1. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
shape the opinions of those who viewed their work in favour of the righteousness of their national war effort. The conditions brought about by this war had, as stated in *Theories of Mass Communication*, made propaganda in the form of war art "essential to mobilise sentiments and loyalties, to instil in citizens a hatred and fear of the enemy, to maintain their morale in the face of privation, and to capture their energies into an effective contribution to their nation."  

Official war art, of the type produced for various nations during the First World War, is nothing new. From ancient times art has been commissioned by those in power to justify the legitimacy of their warmongering, celebrate their victories and cement their claims to power. Since the vast majority of artists throughout history were reliant on the patronage of the wealthy elite who held this power, the history of warfare’s depiction in the visual arts is a thinly veiled procession of propaganda. In their influential and continually updated treatise on the subject, Jowett and O’Donnell explain that "The use of propaganda as a means of controlling information flow, managing public opinion, or manipulating behaviour is as old as recorded history." The visual arts have been a key tool within this practice of social engineering. There are myriad examples of paintings, sculptures and artefacts throughout the history of art that "use the equivalent of modern-day propaganda techniques to communicate the purported majesty and supernatural powers of rulers and priests. In a largely preliterate age, dazzling costumes, insignia, and monuments were deliberately created symbols designed to evoke a specific image of superiority and power."  

In the aftermath of the First World War, political scientist Harold Lasswell felt compelled to assess the massive output of persuasive doctrine that had been poured into the public sphere by semi-secret organisations within the governments of all the major belligerent nations. "During the war period it came to be recognised that the mobilisation of men and means was not sufficient; there must be a mobilisation of

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In Propaganda Technique in the World War, Lasswell attempts to unravel the ominous sense of manipulation that surrounds this highly emotive word. We live among more people than ever, who are puzzled, uneasy, or vexed at the unknown cunning which seems to have duped and degraded them... These people probed the mysteries of propaganda with that compound of admiration and chagrin with which the victims of a new gambling trick demand to have the thing explained... Some of those who trusted so much and hated so passionately have put their hands to the killing of man, they have mutilated others and perhaps been mutilated in return, they have encouraged others to draw the sword, and they have derided and besmirched those who refused to rage as they did. Fooled by propaganda? If so they writhe in the knowledge that they were the blind pawns in plans which they did not incubate, and which they neither devised nor comprehended nor approved.90

Propaganda has come to be pejoratively defined as "the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist."91 However the original usage of the word propaganda was considered to be neutral. The term was coined in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV to describe the committee of cardinals – Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide – that he established to promote the Roman Catholic Church and counteract the effects of the Reformation. The Committee's role was 'to propagate' the faith through foreign missions. Henceforth 'propaganda' became a term for the dissemination of information.92 The negative connotations now associated with propaganda did not develop until around the start of the nineteenth century, becoming widespread by the outbreak of the First World War. The exploitation of public opinion through the persuasive power of propaganda is connected to the increasing nationalism of this period. As stated by Marja Vuorinen in Enemy Images in War Propaganda, the formation of nationalistic sentiment requires the definition of the 'self' – creating an exclusive community from which

90 Ibid., 2-3.
certain individuals are prohibited. The division that this conception establishes between nations does not necessarily cause strife "but it can be used to motivate just that."  

Both the official photographer and the official artist were used as instruments of nationalistic propaganda in the First World War. Although their work was controlled by Government censorship and could be presented to the public within manipulative circumstances, artists were certainly not victimised or coerced by sinister authorities into making these persuasive images. In general, the artists featured in this study produced their official artwork in happy complicity with the patriotic messages that their Governments advocated. As will be explained, the concept of self-censorship was endorsed within most official war art schemes. This practice is longstanding within the arts as a whole and not limited to the documentation of warfare. In On Photography Susan Sontag's asserts that artists are innately prone to "narrowly selective interpretation." Although the documentary qualities of photography give it an edge in "the presumption of veracity," photographers, like all artists are "still haunted by [the] tacit imperatives of taste and conscience." All art is therefore, according to Sontag, complicit in the "shady commerce between art and truth."  

In A Bitter Truth: Avant-Garde Art and the Great War, Richard Cork explains that the French were quick to dispatch "artists to the Front under the auspices of the Mission des Beaux-Arts" but it was Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire who were the first nations "to exploit the possibilities of official war art, setting commissioned artists to work soon after hostilities commenced. After a few months German and Austrian painting of the war, at home as well as on the battlefield, began to penetrate American publications. Galleries in Vienna, Weimar and Berlin displayed similar pictures soon afterwards." As the principal antagonists of the conflict, this action was a particularly noteworthy attempt to utilise the emotive potential of the arts.  

Unfortunately for the Central Powers, both the German Government and their armed forces had an undeveloped appreciation for the sensitivities required to produce

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94 Sontag, On photography, 6.
95 Cork, A Bitter Truth: Avant-Garde Art and the Great War, 139.
successful wartime propaganda and failed to capitalise on key events that could have swayed international public perception in favour of their campaign. The British were the leaders in this field. It was obvious, even as early as 1927 when Harold Lasswell published his seminal text on the nature of modern propaganda that the German public believed "that their army was never defeated by the battering of Allied battalions, but that the nation collapsed behind their lines because all the alien and radical elements in the population were easy marks for the seductive bait of foreign propaganda." As Lasswell states, this surprising delusion was considered "plausible to the public because people were everywhere warned during the war to beware the noxious fumes of enemy propaganda." 96 This attempt to save face had alarming repercussions as Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell point out in Propaganda and Persuasion. "Long after the war, many in Germany attributed their loss to the superiority of British propaganda; foremost among these was Adolf Hitler, who in his book Mein Kampf (1939) praised the British efforts and noted that the British had understood that propaganda was so important that it had to be handled by professionals" – a lesson that he took on-board when establishing the political philosophy that would eventually inform the Nazi regime of his German Reich (1933–1945).97

Liberal politician and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Charles Frederick Gurney Masterman was the mastermind behind the British propaganda machine that Hitler so highly praised. On 8 August 1914, just days after entering the war, the British Government passed the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA), giving Parliament full control over the distribution of information. They then established a network of pro-war related propaganda agencies to maintain public support of their decision.98 Masterman was given the task of justifying British policy on the war to her allies and any to neutral or undecided countries, particularly the United States of America. His Propaganda Bureau was run covertly from Wellington House, the London premises of the National Health Insurance Commission of which Masterman was Chairman. Under Masterman’s guidance, Wellington House produced a subtle, anti-sensationalist style of so-called ‘ethical propaganda.’ This concept was based on the

96 Lasswell, Propaganda technique in the World War, 3.
97 Jowett and O'Donnell, Propaganda & Persuasion, 239.
98 Malvern, Modern art, Britain and the Great War: witnessing, testimony and remembrance, 22-23.
principals of wartime Liberalism that sought to defend the right to national, cultural and individual freedoms – the “body, mind, and soul.”99 Masterman purposefully utilised “facts and general arguments based upon those facts”100 to rationally appeal to the educated minds of the British and foreign public, “the principle being that it is better to influence those who can influence others than to attempt a direct appeal to the mass of the population.”101

Figure 9 – Louis Raemaekers, *Thrown to the Swine – The Martyred Nurse* (1915).102

99 The term ‘ethical propaganda’ is used by Malvern to describe Masterman’s methodology. She quotes the editor of a collection of anti-German cartoons by Dutchman Louis Raemaekers published by Wellington House: “We must fight to the death. Either German philosophy is to be established, and freedom of body, mind and soul crushed beneath the iron heel of Prussian Kultur or else, at whatever the cost, this fearful menace to the peace and liberty of nations and individuals has to be destroyed root and branch.” The publication also printed the words of Liberal Prime Minister Asquith who described the images as giving “form and colour to the menace which the Allies are averting from the liberty, the civilisation and the humanity of the future.”

Ibid., 21.

100 Report from the Propaganda Bureau Wellington House, 7 June 1915.

Ibid., 17.

101 British Ministry of Information records, 3 December 1914.


102 This image is one of the most famous by Raemaekers from the First World War period. It capitalises on the inflamed passion incited by allied countries, and particularly the British, after the execution of Nurse Edith Cavell (a British national living in Brussels, Belgium) by order of German military court-martial in October 1915 for her participation in the smuggling of British and French soldiers and Belgian civilians out of German occupied Belgium into the Netherlands or Allied held territories. Raemaekers originally published this work in the Dutch newspaper *De Telegraaf* to help provoke support for the neutral Netherlands to join the war on the side of the Allies (Britain and France). It was subsequently widely used in British propaganda campaigns and featured on the front cover of *The Land and Water Edition of Louis Raemaekers’ Cartoons* (1916).
In the beginning Wellington House was focused on creating purely text-based propaganda, produced by men of the literary intelligentsia and those with a critical influence in the arts – a staff that included future eminent authors Arthur Conan Doyle and John Buchan. However, Charles Masterman realised the need for visual imagery to add potency to his propaganda arsenal after Wellington House’s involvement in the distribution of Louis Raemaekers’ enormously successful series of scathingly anti-German cartoons in late 1915.103 In February 1916 Wellington House created a Pictorial Propaganda Department to manage the flow of photographic images of the war to the public. As stated in a preliminary report, it was the intention of this Department to capitalise on the widespread popularity of the illustrated press, “The enormous circulation of pictorial papers reveals, as much as the crowds at the cinematographs, that there are millions of voters (who ultimately control the policy of Governments) in all countries who will not read the letter press, but from whom the demand for war pictures is unlimited.”104 In response to this demand the Department established The War Pictorial, an illustrated monthly magazine populated with carefully approved official photographs and given a substantial worldwide distribution of 700,000 copies (110,000 of which were in English).

Although this initiative was very successful, the Department struggled to source enough images to populate this publication at first. The British Government’s failure to establish an official photographic unit until March 1916 meant that there was a

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103 Cartoons by Raemaekers were distributed by Wellington House in conjunction with the Foreign Office as a booklet at the 1915 Bristol Trade Unions Conference and were exhibited at the Fine Arts Society (Bond Street, London) in December 1915. They were also used as part of a campaign to prompt America to join the war throughout 1916 and 1917.


The illustrations for these illustrated papers were produced by the photogravure method. Some of the artists employed by Wellington House were indirectly involved in the making of these images (though not employed specifically by the PPD). The main distribution of these photographs was for use in international newspapers – to combat the deficit of quality photographic images of the war.

Malvern, Modern art, Britain and the Great War: witnessing, testimony and remembrance, 38, 72, 207.
general shortage of usable images available for the press or other propagandist agencies in the early war period. Until the arrival of Ernest Brooks and John Warwick Brooke on the Western Front, the Pictorial Propaganda Department was initially reliant on the work of unofficial professional press photographers and the inconsistent contribution of privately produced photographs provided by amateur soldiers, civilians or semi-official sources like Sergeant Christopher Pilkington of the Artists’ Rifles, who was privately commissioned by the 2nd Battalion of the Scots Guard to document their activities from September 1914 to January 1915. The photographic work supplied from the frontlines by both official and unofficial sources was also heavily censored and, as has already been discussed, the ability of these images to capture the combat of the battlefield was limited and frequently unreliable. As Malvern explains, "artists were recruited at least in part to remedy the deficit in visual propaganda but this also changed the nature of British propaganda."106

Figure 10 – Muirhead Bone, The Battle of the Somme (August 1916).107

105 Carmichael, First World War Photographers, 26-35.
106 Malvern, Modern art, Britain and the Great War: witnessing, testimony and remembrance, 48-49.
Wellington House recruited Muirhead Bone as its first official war artist in July 1916.¹⁰⁸ A few weeks later Bone had been attested into the British Army, assigned the honorary rank of a 2nd Lieutenant and sent to document the Battle of the Somme in northern France, armed with little more than a few pieces of charcoal and a sketching pad.¹⁰⁹ Bone spent two major stretches on the Western Front between August and December 1916 and April to June 1917, after which he was assigned to document Britain’s activities on the Home Front, focusing in particular on the shipyards of his hometown, Glasgow. He was extremely productive during this period, creating several hundred sketches and watercolours, many of which were reproduced by Wellington House in a sixteen part magazine series The Western Front (1916, 1917). These were distributed throughout Britain and America in limited but significant print runs of 30,000 copies. Individual works by Bone were also made available for sale as high quality lithographic prints and postcards.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Bone was first proposed for duty as an official war artist as early as May 1916 by the recommendation of his friend A.P. Watt, who was then working in the literary section of Wellington House. With the endorsement of Campbell Dodgson, Keeper of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum, Masterman agreed to the appointment. Bone does not appear to have been hired officially until July 1916.


¹¹⁰ Of the print run for each edition, 6000 were sent to America and 12,000 were put on sale in Britain. The rest was used for what Gough calls the “myriad uses of pictorial propaganda.” A series entitled With the Grand Fleet of Bone’s works following the British Navy was also published.

Malvern, Modern art, Britain and the Great War: witnessing, testimony and remembrance, 13-14; Viney and Imperial War Museum (Great Britain), Images of Wartime: British art and artists of World War One, 22-24; Gough, A Terrible Beauty: British Artists in the First World War, 45-46; Tippett, Art at the Service of War: Canada, art, and the Great War, 23.
Bone roamed relatively freely behind the lines, during his two expeditions to the Western Front. His works, rendered almost entirely in black and white, focus on the landscape of the battlefield, the destruction of French and Belgian villages and the infrastructure of the British Army. There is however, a notably marked shift observable between the style and content of the work Bone produced during his two assignments. During his first visit, Bone found his work limited by the terrain of the battlefield, “On the Somme nothing is left after such fighting as we have had here – in many cases not a vestige of the village remains let alone impressive ruins.” His paintings and sketches from this period are mainly landscapes and scenes of soldiers working behind that are characterised by their broad execution and

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111 Muirhead Bone, A Stable on the Western Front, c.1916, 1918. Imperial War Museum, London.
112 The relatively lowly rank of 2nd Lieutenant assigned to Bone did not give him full access to move wherever he wished while he was working on the Western Front. Malvern describes how Bone was arrested at least once while carrying out his duties. His rank and assignment made him the equivalent of press correspondent – a group whose presence on the Western Front was accepted but not very fully trusted by the military authorities. Malvern, “WAR AS IT IS: The art of Muirhead Bone, C. R. W. Nevinson and Paul Nash, 1916-17,” 505.
113 Letter from Muirhead Bone to Ernest Gowers, 12.11.1916
sweeping washes of tone that suggest they were executed briefly en plein air.\textsuperscript{114} The sense of immediacy created by this technique greatly pleased those at Wellington House, who believed the lack of finish would integrate perfectly with their propagandist agenda – appealing to the public’s desire for authentic, un-manipulated images of the war that were, as Malvern puts it, “unpretentious, genuine and personally observed, not fabricated.”\textsuperscript{115} Instead, these early works were criticised for the limited perspective they offered of the war. Paul Gough remarks that, “his flat, journalistic language, although ideally suited to mechanical reproduction for newspapers and posters, fell short of describing the newness of modern warfare.” Malvern’s appraisal of the 1916 series is similarly dismissive, stating that, “The forms of his drawings suggest the detachment of a travelogue composed by an uninvolved spectator.”\textsuperscript{116}

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{Muirhead Bone, The Great Crater, Athies (May 1917).\textsuperscript{117}}
\end{figure}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{114} The en plein air painting technique refers to works executed out of door, directly from nature. The technique will be discussed further in the following chapters.
\textsuperscript{115} Malvern, Modern art, Britain and the Great War: witnessing, testimony and remembrance, 26.
\textsuperscript{116} Gough, A Terrible Beauty: British Artists in the First World War, 48; Malvern, Modern art, Britain and the Great War: witnessing, testimony and remembrance, 24.
\textsuperscript{117} Muirhead Bone, The Great Crater, Athies, May 1917. Imperial War Museum, London.
\end{footnotesize}
When Bone made his second tour to the Front, the deserted villages left in the wake of the German Army’s hasty withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line provided the artist with a greatly expanded range of subject matter to work with. Architectural studies of these ruins, in finely rendered detail dominate Bone’s 1917 works. His elegant compositions are characterised by a bold use of line, contrast and a meticulous attention to detail. Bone had an eye for the picturesque and a fascination with architecture. Before the war, his masterful ability to reveal the dramatic potential of his subjects had earned him a reputation as Britain’s successor to the Italian master Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–1778) – a title that was confirmed through his dexterous execution of such works as The Great Crater, Athies and The Seven Cranes.118

118 Gough cites Bone’s moniker as being the ‘London Piranesi’ and Viney quotes an unattributed source that called Bone “the greatest virtuoso of architectural drawing since Piranesi.” Gough, A Terrible Beauty: British Artists in the First World War, 45-46; Viney and Imperial War Museum (Great Britain), Images of Wartime: British art and artists of World War One, 22.
However worthy of praise they might have been, the reception for Bone’s official war production was extremely mixed. Bone had been employed on the basis that his work had the potential to appeal to the general public and the cultivated art connoisseur both within Britain and overseas but even those in charge of Bone’s activities were divided about his ability to capture both these audiences. While certain factions believed his representations of the Home Front would be popular with “engineering workmen” and would “serve to advertise British industrial capacities to a post-war trade world” others believed they should focus their

Figure 13 – Muirhead Bone, *The Seven Cranes* (1917).^{119}

marketing of his work towards “an educated and artistic class already pro-ally.”\textsuperscript{120} As a result \textit{The Western Front} series had been deliberately published in conjunction with the magazine \textit{Country Life} whose readership was firmly aimed at the upper class elite. Bone was informed that there was no need to publish a “cheap popular edition” in addition to this as “you have your own public who will pay a good price for your work”\textsuperscript{121}

Although \textit{The Western Front} sold relatively well, a 1917 exhibition of Bone’s work at Colnaghi’s in London attracted a pitifully small audience of just 386 visitors over a month. A provincial tour of the same works was much more successful however with 25,000 visiting the Sheffield exhibit in just one week.\textsuperscript{122} Contemporary critics were also divided: \textit{The Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects} and several newspapers including \textit{The Daily Telegraph} and \textit{Manchester Weekly Times} and \textit{The Studio} magazine all praised his work in 1917, while critics from the influential art journals \textit{The Graphic} and \textit{The Burlington Magazine} dismissed the majority of Bone’s production as lacking any true artistic merit.\textsuperscript{123}

Wellington House was understandably bemused by the contradictory reactions Bone’s work incited. A report to Masterman bemoaned that fact that while “the Bone publications were produced at a popular price, in order that they should filter through to the homes of the workers. This effect has not been secured. There was no obvious reason for the failure because the standard of draughtsmanship was high, the subjects are understandable to everyone.”\textsuperscript{124} In her 1986 essay ‘War as it is’, Malvern suggests that the reason behind the contradictory perception of Bone’s work lay in the timing of his appointment. Muirhead Bone had arrived on the Western Front at a strategic turning point in the visual history of this sector. By August 1916 Ernest Brooke had been present in France and Belgium as Britain’s first official photographer for several months and had recently been joined by John Warwick

\textsuperscript{120} Malvern, “WAR AS IT IS': The art of Muirhead Bone, C. R. W. Nevinson and Paul Nash, 1916-17,” 496-97.
\textsuperscript{121} Letter from Ernest Gowers to Muirhead Bone, 4.10.1916. Ibid., 496-97, 512.
\textsuperscript{122} Malvern, Modern art, Britain and the Great War: witnessing, testimony and remembrance, 38-41; Gough, A Terrible Beauty: British Artists in the First World War.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
Brooke. Both photographers had witnessed the dramatic beginning of the Battle of the Somme on the 1 July 1916 and their images of this event were being consumed with rabid interest by the British public. Prior to the arrival of Brooke and Brooks, the void left in the absence of a consistent supply of photographs had been filled by teams of special war artists employed by the illustrated press who created often wildly fanciful images ‘reconstructing’ the events of battles from reports that filtered back from the frontlines. These works gave the public a skewed view of the war that focused on gallant heroism and adventure, often at the expense of rigorous factual accuracy or attention to detail. However incorrect, this type of work did offer the curious viewer a rough sense of the modern combat scenarios encountered by soldiers in contemporary warfare and, as a result, these works were hugely popular with the masses. Muirhead Bone’s works were, by contrast, unambiguously factual and arguably of a much higher artistic quality than the reconstructed battle scenes printed in the press. The popularity of Bone’s production nonetheless suffered from the same limitation that hampered the official photographers of the period – an inability to get close enough to the fighting to record the action of the battlefield. Critics were quick to point out this similarity. While *The Studio* declared that Bone had “completely established the superiority of the artist’s vision over that of the camera” *The Burlington Magazine* accused him of “mere illustrated journalism” and of producing works that offered nothing more insightful than could be captured by a photograph.125

In November 1917 C.E. Montague attempted to refute the contemporary objections to Bone’s work. A highly respected writer and critic, Montague had written the text accompaniment in *The Western Front*. His admiration for his friend Bone’s work comes through plainly in this prose. His rebuttal centred round the notion that there was no need for Bone’s to show the “mysterious horror which is ‘really’ war, war ‘as it is’” because the British public were already well aware of the heavy casualties and destruction that the war had caused. In 1917, he argued, it was the duty of Britain to bear through the grim realities of the war of attrition. Although “war is a thing to be first avoided by every honourable means” now that it had begun it had to continue until it was “won by every honourable means” – seeing battlefields strewn with

125 Ibid.
bodies would not “make the world lay down its arms on the sport, the nations kiss and be friends.” As Malvern puts it, Montague saw “the function of art was therefore not to present images of the terrifying task that faced the population, but to affirm the value and validity of the renewal of life which must follow the winter of death and sacrifice.” 126 While Montague’s argument may have seemed perfectly reasonable to his contemporaries, his justification feels strained and does not take into account the notion that Bone’s works should have been recording the full scope of the war for posterity.

Essentially, Bone was the wrong artist for the job, employed at the wrong time and whose artistic sensibilities were the wrong fit for the official role to which he was assigned – a fact that he himself openly acknowledged. Bone was well aware of his own artistic limitations and recognised that his contribution to the record of the war would be better served if it was complemented by artists with strengths in other areas. As a result, he was influential in pushing Wellington House to expand their war artist programme. As Bone was no great portraitist, he recommended fellow Glaswegian (and his brother-in-law) Francis Dodd (1874–1949) to fulfil these duties. Bone also put forward applications proposing that Eric Kennington and Christopher Nevinson, two up-and-coming young artists with he had recently become acquainted, would be excellent candidates as war artists. With the support of his friend Campbell Dodgson, Keeper of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum, both placements were secured in 1917. In turn, Nevinson helped his former acquaintance from the Slade School of Art, Paul Nash to gain a war artist’s commission, while Kennington endorsed the appointment of William Rothenstein. Dodgson also used his influence to arrange for the multi-talented self-taught artist James McBey (1883–1959) to be sent to follow the British campaign in Egypt and the Middle East. 127 In addition, Gerald Spencer-Pryse (1881–1956) and two extremely highly regarded society painters, William Orpen and John Lavery, were each given roles within Wellington House. 128

126 From ‘War as it is’ by C.E. Montague in the November 1917 issue of The Western Front, volume II. Ibid., 512.
127 Ibid., 498, 502-03; Viney and Imperial War Museum (Great Britain), Images of Wartime: British art and artists of World War One, 22-24.
128 It should be noted that several of these artists earned knighthoods, partially as an acknowledgement of the duties as British war artists: Lavery and Orpen in 1918, Rothenstein in 1931, Bone in 1937.
Charles Masterman’s acceptance of this greatly expanded war art programme with its diverse range of artists was visionary. The presence of upwardly mobile artists like Dodd, McBey and Rothenstein with well established society artists like Orpen and Lavery satisfied the needs of traditionalist factions within the public and the military who required their art to be conservative, easily accessible and not overly challenging. Meanwhile, the recruitment of more experimental younger artists like Nevinson and Nash, pleased the art critics and intelligentsia interested in the highly fashionable cultural arena of the avant-garde. Also, Nevinson, Nash and Kennington had all served on the frontlines and had each only just come to the public’s attention in 1917 through exhibitions inspired by their war experiences. This made their

Malvern, Modern art, Britain and the Great War: witnessing, testimony and remembrance, 181-83.
appointments by Wellington House appear as an altruistic ‘rescuing’ of British talent from their imminent slaughter of the battlefield.

![Figure 15 – C.R.W. Nevinson, Returning to the Trenches (1914).](image)

However, as Malvern explains, the decision to take on these potentially controversial artists brought with it its own set of unique problems. "In order to carry conviction and have authority, in other words to be seen as art and not rhetoric, artists had to work free of constraint but this also made it impossible to predetermine or control all the meanings works of art when circulated might provoke. This was especially the case with younger artists, more likely to have served in the war and therefore the most compelling witnesses, but also the ones who had the most at stake establishing or maintaining reputations as modernists and independents."

The manner in which these artists responded to restrictions imposed on them by their official duties will be dealt with to a greater extent in the following chapters. In terms of the significance of their assignment, the appointment of this divergent group of artists ensured that Britain’s visual record of the war would encompass all the stylistic variants at play.

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130 This work by Nevinson drew much critical praise when he exhibited it in London. The reception he received was a key factor in his selection to act as an official British war artist. C. R. W. Nevinson, *Returning to the Trenches*, 1914. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

within its contemporary culture. The decision also effectively covered all Britain's bases in regard to future criticism as to which styles could best be said to convey ‘the truth about the war.’

Figure 16 – Paul Nash, *We are Making a New World* (1918).\(^{132}\)

In May 1918 the illustrated newspaper, *The Graphic*, touched on this issue in its critique of the official war art made by Nash and Nevinson, suggesting that these artists had the potential to present the war more successfully than any photograph. “Chosen from what may be called the esoteric schools, or at any rate, from the ranks of artists who appeal mainly to art connoisseurs. The idea seems to be to supply pictures which afford complete contrast to the highly detailed inventorying work of the camera.”\(^ {133}\) As this opinion was inevitably not going to be shared by all, the range of work offered by the British war art programme could be used to appeal to a wide variety of public tastes – making the programme’s production an extremely versatile and effective tool within Wellington House’s arsenal of manipulation.

\(^{132}\) Paul Nash, *We are making a New World*, 1918. Imperial War Museum, London.

However, although Muirhead Bone had been hired “to make appropriate war scenes at the Front and in this country for the purpose both of propaganda at the present time and of historical record in the future,” the propaganda aspect, which underpinned his and all the other official appointments to the British official war art programme, was handled with such delicacy that its presence was almost imperceptible to public scrutiny.\(^{134}\)

Figure 17 – Augustus John, \textit{The Dawn} from 'Britain's Efforts and Ideals' (1917).\(^{135}\)

\(^{134}\) Quotation from E.A. Gowers at Wellington House to Muirhead Bone, 12 July 1916, in the Bone Papers, Imperial War Museum Collection.

\(^{135}\) Tippett, \textit{Art at the Service of War: Canada, art, and the Great War}, 23, 117.

\(^{136}\) Augustus John, \textit{The Dawn} from 'Britain's Efforts and Ideals', 1917. Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, Wellington Office.
Indeed, it was soon found that the employment of officially endorsed artworks for overtly persuasive means greatly reduced the effectiveness of their message. In 1917 Wellington House had attempted to manufacture a highly emotive series of works to use for national and international propagandist purposes. It assigned a group of eighteen artists, including George Clausen (1852–1944), Augustus John and Frank Brangwyn (1867–1956), to produce a body of work based around very specific subject matter and themes. Collectively they produced *Britain’s Efforts and Ideals* – an ambitious portfolio of sixty-six lithographic prints separated into two separate series: the ‘Ideals’ – large colour images based on abstract idealised concepts and abstruse allegorical scenarios; and the ‘Efforts’ – monotone realistic illustrations of wartime realities on the home and war fronts. The pragmatic scenarios shown in the 'Efforts' were relatively popular but the media and critics, particularly in Britain, rejected the ‘Ideals’ for being too blatantly propagandist in tone. The works were toured throughout England and exhibited in Paris, New York and Los Angeles.

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137 George Clausen and Frank Brangwyn were also knighted after the war – Clausen in 1927 and Brangwyn in 1941.
Although they were given substantial publicity, sales of the works were poor and the project was ultimately deemed unsuccessful.\textsuperscript{138}

Partially as a result of this commercial failure, by 1918 the British programme revised its promotional approach, adopting a methodology that if their official artworks passed the war censor regulations they were thereafter not physically tampered with. Instead, the propaganda aspect of the operation was essentially contextual. Throughout the year a series of exhibitions were held in London to showcase the work of Nevinson, Nash, Kennington and Lavery. A full-colour monograph accompanied each exhibit. Produced with the specific authorisation of British General Headquarters – the catalogue essays and caption texts accompanying the visual content of each edition of the \textit{British Artists at the Front} were assiduously crafted to heighten their patriotic appeal, placing particular emphasis on the intrinsic 'Britishness' of the artists and their work.\textsuperscript{139}

Masterman’s desire to maintain a subtle approach to Britain’s propaganda campaign ensured that the works produced by Bone and his successors for Wellington House were never overwhelmed or lost beneath the politicised context that surrounded this institution. Indeed, as G.R. Searle stipulates in his \textit{New Oxford History of England}, Masterman’s approach was in keeping with the general British public’s extreme distaste for the manipulation of overt propaganda. “Many Conservatives seem to have been less worried about the spread of industrial unrest and pacifism than they were about the emergence of a newfangled agency” – the Department, later Ministry of Information.\textsuperscript{140}

When David Lloyd George replaced Henry Herbert Asquith as British Prime Minister in December 1916, the War Office called for all the disparate British war propaganda agencies to be restructured into a Department of Information.\textsuperscript{141} Although Wellington

\textsuperscript{138} Malvern, \textit{Modern art, Britain and the Great War: witnessing, testimony and remembrance}, 41-44, 72.

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 29-35.


\textsuperscript{141} Prior to this appointment, Lloyd George was the British War Minister (July–December 1916) and had formed a rapport with the War Office so was quick to oblige their request. The various “multifarious activities of these unintegrated [propaganda] organisations” were however, originally under the control of the Foreign Office, a situation, which the War Office thought should be rectified.
House and the new Department were, in essence, propaganda agencies, the British system took great pains never to refer to them as such, preferring to use the coded title of ‘information’ and only the Department of Propaganda in Enemies Countries included the objectionable word in its title. John Buchan was promoted from his literary duties at Wellington House to become the new Director of the Department. As a consummate politician acutely aware of the strains facing Britain at home and overseas, Lloyd George pushed Buchan to increase the national output of propaganda. Buchan found his task strenuous – "I saw at close quarters the intricate mechanism which directed the War at home, one of the strangest mixtures of amateur and professional, talent and charlatanry, the patriot and the arriviste which history has known, with behind it the dynamic figure of the Prime Minister, generating heat and somehow turning it into power... he was the flame at which all warmed, and many scorched their hands." 

Meanwhile the cultural operations at Wellington House were reorganised into a specific Literary and Art Section by February 1917. The official artists programme continued and flourished with Treasury funding and was encouraged to increase the scope of its official appointments while maintaining its underlying objective of using the artwork produced for the purposes of pro-war propaganda. However, by March 1918 the Department’s status was increased again to become the Ministry of Information. At the same time, an essential shift occurred in the orientation of British war art production from propaganda to memorial. Operations at Wellington House ceased. The Literary and Art Section was downsized and moved into much smaller premises and Lord Beaverbrook replaced Charles Masterman.

Following on from his work at the Canadian War Records Office, Lord Beaverbrook had established, with the assistance of his personal funding, the Canadian War

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142 Viney and Imperial War Museum (Great Britain), *Images of Wartime: British art and artists of World War One*, 25.
143 Carmichael, *First World War Photographers*, 17.
144 Malvern, *Modern art, Britain and the Great War: witnessing, testimony and remembrance*, 14; Viney and Imperial War Museum (Great Britain), *Images of Wartime: British art and artists of World War One*, 25.
145 Malvern, *Modern art, Britain and the Great War: witnessing, testimony and remembrance*, 69; Viney and Imperial War Museum (Great Britain), *Images of Wartime: British art and artists of World War One*, 53.
146 Brandon, *Art or Memorial?: The Forgotten History of Canada’s War Art*, xiv.
Memorials Fund in November 1916. Inspired by Beaverbrook’s desire to record the deeds of his countrymen for posterity, this project aimed to produce “suitable Memorials in the form of Tablets, Oil Paintings, etc. to the Canadian Heroes and Heroines of the War.” Beaverbrook was a particularly fervent imperialist and his initial selection of artists reflects this, the majority being British including Wyndham Lewis, Augustus John, William Roberts, David Bomberg, Alfred Munnings (1878–1959), David Young Cameron (1865–1945), and Charles Sims (1873–1928). His advisors from the National Gallery of Canada, Sir Edmund Walker and Eric Brown, soon insisted that Canadians artists must also be employed, in order to give the collection greater relevance, depth and authenticity. Those eventually selected were mainly drawn from the influential Group of Seven: A.Y. (Alexander Young) Jackson (1882–1974), Arthur Lismer (1885–1969), Frank Johnston (1888–1949), and F.H. (Frederick Horsman) Varley (1881–1969). Others including Lismer, Manly Edward MacDonald (1889–1971) and Albert Henry Robinson (1881–1956) were assigned documentary work on the home front. In addition, Henrietta Mabel May (1877–1971) and local female sculpture duo Florence Wyle (1881–1968) and Frances Loring (1887–1968) were assigned to depict the contribution of Canadian women to the war effort. No French-Canadian artists were ever employed however, and the inclusion of any specifically French-Canadian subjects was somewhat of an afterthought with only one battalion being painted by a Belgian artist.

The Canadian War Memorials Fund accumulated almost 1000 artworks related to the First World War, which Beaverbrook donated to the Canadian nation as “an enduring possession for the people of the Dominion.” It was his intention to house the collection in a purpose built War Memorial structure in the capital city, Ottawa, which he had had designed and was ready to pay for. However, certain authorities did not appreciate his extremely generous gesture and the project was

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146 From the application of the Canadian War Memorials Fund to be granted status as a War Charity by the London Records Office, 7 November 1917. 
Ibid.; Tippett, Art at the Service of War: Canada, art, and the Great War.
147 Viney and Imperial War Museum (Great Britain), Images of Wartime: British art and artists of World War One, 53-54, 58, 59-61, 66-68, 69-71, 108-09; Brandon, Art or Memorial?: The Forgotten History of Canada's War Art, xiv.
148 Brandon, Art or Memorial?: The Forgotten History of Canada's War Art, xiv- xvi.
149 Ibid., xiv.
150 Ibid., 3.
systematically stifled. Beaverbrook had only marginally better success in Britain. Immediately following his appointment to the Ministry of Information he established the British War Memorials Committee that aimed to assemble a collection of modern historical artworks on the subject of the war as “a legacy to posterity.” Some of the artists selected by Beaverbrook and his advisor, P.G. Konody, for the Canadian War Memorials Fund were given further employment with or commissions from the British programme such as Wyndham Lewis, Augustus John and D. Y. Cameron. Others engaged for the task included John Nash (brother of Paul), John Singer Sargent and Henry Tonks (1862–1937). The production of British war art grew substantially under Beaverbrook.

As with his plans for Canada, Beaverbrook intended the collected British official works to be placed in a War Memorial Hall of Remembrance. Unfortunately, this was never built. Beaverbrook struck difficulties over the use of Government funding for his programme. He also came into conflict with the Imperial War Museum. This institution had been established in March 1917 as the British National War Museum. The museum’s purpose was to collate artworks and artefacts representative of every aspect of the war. To better acknowledge the various nations of the Empire who had contributed both to the British war effort and to the Museum’s collection, it was renamed the Imperial War Museum in January 1918.

In a separate operation to Beaverbrook’s programme, the Imperial War Museum also employed British artists to record the war. Authorities at the Museum saw themselves as the natural custodians of the Ministry of Information’s accumulated war art collection (created by both Wellington House and the British War Memorials

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151 Brandon sites the majority of the blame for this on Sir Edmund Walker, Chairman of the Board of Trustees for the National Gallery who had a vested interest in promoting the interests of the Gallery over planned building project for the war art collection and specifically neglected to correctly inform the Minister for the Department of Public Works of Lord Beaverbrook’s intentions in 1922: “At one time he [Beaverbrook] talked vaguely of a building to hold the war paintings to be erected by himself and Lord Rothermere. I do not think that what he had in mind would ever have been possible and I think it is unlikely that he will ever again offer to do this.” 
Ibid., 4.

152 This body was originally called the Imperial Permanent Memorials Committee and later from June 1918 the Pictorial Propaganda Committee but the majority of its work was done under the title of British War Memorials Committee. Malvern, Modern art, Britain and the Great War: witnessing, testimony and remembrance, 69, 71, 75.

Committee). They successfully lobbied against the building of Beaverbrook’s planned War Memorial Hall of Remembrance. Although he attempted to maintain the independence of his Committee, by July 1918 Beaverbrook was forced to relinquish guardianship of the artworks to the Museum. The combined collections were first exhibited as *The Nation’s War Paintings* at the Royal Academy at the end of 1919 and are now part of the Imperial War Museum’s extensive First World War related holdings, housed either at its London premises in the former Bethlehem Hospital (the infamous Bedlam Asylum) or at its subsidiary museum sites throughout the United Kingdom.¹⁵⁴

The most successful war art programme established within the British Empire was, arguably, that run by the Australians. This was the brainchild of Charles Bean. “Not to be outdone, Australia ensured that its involvement with the 1915 Gallipoli campaign was covered on the spot by officially sponsored artists.”¹⁵⁵ While at Gallipoli Bean had instigated a broadsheet called *Dinkum Oil*, produced from material written and drawn by Anzac soldiers during the Gallipoli Campaign. After the evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula in December 1915, Bean had the publication reproduced as a souvenir that he titled *The Anzac Book*. During his time as editor of both these publications, Bean had collaborated with several soldier-artists. Realising the potential of what they had created, he suggested to the Australian Government that these artists could be utilised to produce full-scale artworks of the Australian experiences of the war to date. Bean’s suggestion coincided with the arrival of a letter sent by William Dyson, an Australia artist living in Britain, to the Australian Government which proposed that “it would be of interest to the people of today and in the future to see sketches illustrating the relationship of the Australians to the war and interpreting the feelings and character of the Australian troops in France and the feelings of the French toward them. As this could only be fittingly done by an Australian artist I wish to express my willingness to go to France with this end in view, my work while there to be the property of the Australian Government.”¹⁵⁶

The Australian authorities needed little more convincing than this to approve the project. William Dyson was commissioned as an honorary lieutenant, initially for an unpaid probationary period but soon became their first official (paid) war artist. Later, with Bean, Dyson was involved in organising the growing group of artists being sent to observe and record the Australians in the combat. George Lambert and Arthur Streeton, two already venerable Australian artists, both contributed their own personal responses to the war through the programme as did lesser known figures, some of whom had already served with the Australian Imperial Forces (A.I.F.) including Frank Crozier (1883–1948), George Bell (1878–1966), Harold Septimus Power (1877–1951), and James Fraser Scott (1877–1932) – the latter two both New Zealand born. In total the Australian Government employed eighteen official artists through the Australian Imperial Force during the First World War period. As will be explained in the following chapter, the ease with which the Australian war art programme was officially established stands in stark contrast to the struggle that the New Zealand Expeditionary Force experienced when they submitted a similar proposal.
2) Better Late than Never – the fraught history of New Zealand's first foray into Official War Art

Artists and their friends will be interested to learn that Mr. Nugent Welch, a member of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, an art instructor at the Wellington Technical School, and a constant exhibitor at local art shows, is faring well in the war zone in France. Following upon the decision of the Government that some historical war pictures should be painted descriptive of New Zealand's part in the conflict, Private Welch has been taken from the ranks in the front line and been made "New Zealand Divisional Artist," a sort of honorary title ranking with the "Director of Divisional Entertainments," etc., many of which have been created for the first time in the history of wars. Mr. Welch was, when he last wrote, quartered in a fine old French chateau some distance behind the line, and was at work on two large canvases representing the [New Zealand] battlefields.\textsuperscript{157}

This press release, published in the 'Personal Items' section of the Wellington newspaper the \textit{Dominion} on the 30 July 1918, blithely belies the enormous struggle undertaken to establish New Zealand's first official war art programme. The appointment of Welch as the first artist to serve within this programme could not have been achieved without the perseverance of a small group of individuals who believed passionately in the need for a national art collection to commemorate New Zealand's role in the First World War.

New Zealand's champions of war art came in the form of four influential men associated with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force: Major General Andrew Hamilton Russell (1868–1960), Commander of the New Zealand Division on the Western Front; Brigadier General George Spafford Richardson (1868–1938),

\footnote{The final line of this article reads: “representing the battlefields New Zealanders wot of.” It is unclear what the exact meaning of this last phrase should be – it is perhaps a typographical error – so the sentence has been rephrased slightly to make the meaning clearer. “Personal Items,” \textit{Dominion} 30 July 1918.}
General Officer Commanding the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in the United Kingdom; Sir Thomas Noble Mackenzie (1853–1930), the New Zealand High Commissioner in London; and Honorary Colonel Robert Heaton Rhodes (1861–1956), Commissioner of the New Zealand Red Cross. At the beginning of 1918 these men collectively recognised that the Expeditionary Force's lack of an official war art programme was a serious oversight that required prompt rectification. It was not just a case of keeping the nation in line with the policies of its fellow combatants – to these men it was a matter of great cultural and historical importance. The New Zealand Government, already strained by the logistical and financial burden of the war, was not so readily convinced by their argument. Fortunately however, this group was dedicated to the belief that such a project was indeed worthy of their time and energy. Through persistent lobbying they eventually succeeded in winning over their opposition within the Government administration. By mid 1918 New Zealand had gained a small collection of official military war artists. This chapter will examine the fraught and lengthy process by which the New Zealand Expeditionary Force’s War Artists’ Section came into being.

False Starts – Horace Moore-Jones, New Zealand artist at Gallipoli

In August 1915, the Director of the Dominion Museum, J. Allen Thomson, composed a memorandum for the Minister of Internal Affairs on the subject of war trophies. “It is desirable that the Dominion Museum should obtain a collection illustrating the part that New Zealand is playing in the present European war. Already many objects of

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Thomson’s letter was passed on to New Zealand’s Minister of Defence, James Allen (1855–1942), who consulted the logistics of the matter with the commander of the New Zealanders at Gallipoli, Major General Alexander Godley and Special Commissioner Heaton Rhodes. Godley did arrange for the collection of some articles before the evacuation of Gallipoli. In 1916 Rhodes published a report on their efforts, which stated "Mr Ross undertook to do what he could in the matter of collecting newspapers printed on transports and in camps, and has himself taken numerous photographs at the front." It was decided that Ross should not collect any autographs and that no geological samples would be taken nor any 'utensils,' such as kerosene tins and oil drum cooking stoves but interesting examples of Turkish artillery shells, fuses etc. were picked as trophies. These items were taken back to Egypt once the New Zealanders left Gallipoli but were, regrettably, lost by an aide shortly after.

Despite it being suggested by Thomson, none of these documents indicate that any sketches or other official artistic record was ever produced to accompany Malcolm Ross' photographs of the New Zealand campaign in the Dardanelles. As a result,

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161 Memorandum for the Hon Mr Russell, Department of Internal Affairs, 25.07.1916.
archivist David Colquhoun was perfectly justified in his comment that, “there is nothing of note from Gallipoli” when he was given the task of assessing the content of the New Zealand War Art Collection in the 1980s. A notable group of works was however produced, in an unofficial capacity, by the New Zealand artist Horace Moore-Jones. Moore-Jones' watercolour paintings are virtually the only pre-1918 example of war art made by a New Zealand soldier of the Gallipoli Campaign. They are certainly the most famous works produced by an Anzac who had served on the Peninsula. Prints of his Gallipoli watercolours are represented in the collections of most museums and Returned Services associations across New Zealand and Australia while his painting known as *Simpson and his Donkey* (c.1917) has become an instant classic and is now one of the most widely recognised Anzac images of the First World War.

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162 Colquhoun, "War Art at National Archives."
163 Horace Jones was born in Malvern Wells, Worcestershire, England around 1867/68 to Sarah Ann Garner and David Jones. The family of ten children emigrated to Auckland, New Zealand c. 1885. His father was an engineer by trade, a fact that may have influenced his decision to join the New Zealand Engineers after enlisting in 1914. His mother was a schoolteacher who established and was principal of the Auckland Ladies' College in Remuera where Jones tutored between 1908/9–1912. Horace Jones changed his name to Horace Millichamp Moore-Jones around the turn of the century, perhaps to distinguish himself from other artists or exhibitors with a similar name. Gray, "Moore-Jones, Horace Millichamp (1867/68–1922)," 348-49.
Gallipoli quickly became legendary. Because Moore-Jones was able to publicise his work just a few months after the Campaign ended, his paintings were absorbed into this legend. Moore-Jones' work is therefore of great significance to any discussion of New Zealand's official war art as it essentially created the environment within which the later works were meant to function.

When the war broke out Moore-Jones was working in London as a magazine illustrator, having recently completed a period of study at the Slade School of Fine Art, under William Orpen and Frank Brangwyn. Despite his advanced years, Moore-Jones enlisted in September 1914 with the British Section of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force (removing his moustache and dying his grey hair to avoid

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rejection on the grounds of his age).\textsuperscript{165} By the end of the year he was in Egypt, serving as a Sapper with the 1st Field Company, New Zealand Engineers. In April 1915 he was part of the initial assault of the Gallipoli campaign during which he received minor shrapnel wounds to his hand.\textsuperscript{166} This however did not deter him from sketching whenever such an activity was possible. His superior officers recognised the potential usefulness of his artistic skill and assigned him to the Anzac Printing Section under Lieutenant General Sir William Birdwood. Here he was given the task of making topographical sketches of the landscape and Turkish held territory.\textsuperscript{167} These works, which were often executed under enemy fire, were used to illustrate official dispatches, assist in the planning of military operations and also to aid the triangulation of the artillery batteries and gunnery aboard the Royal Navy battleships.\textsuperscript{168}

\textsuperscript{165} The age restriction for active service overseas in the early period of the war, before conscription was implemented in New Zealand, was between 20-40 years. Moore-Jones, who was approximately 46 in 1914, gave his age when he attested as 35 (stating he was born in 1879). The age limit was increased to 45 in 1916 but by this time Moore-Jones had been discharged (although he still would have been just over the allowable age limit. Details provided through personal correspondence with Mrs Goodley Faith, Library Assistant, Kippenberger Military Archive and Research Library, National Army Museum Te Mata Toa, 02.04.09. Also -


\textsuperscript{166} AABK. 18805. Acc W5537. bx 4. 0030812. Wellington Office: Archives NZ

\textsuperscript{167} Moore Jones describes his role in an interview with Hayden Church: “The maps we had when we landed were practically useless, and it was not until we found one on the body of a dead Turk that we were able to construct anything like an accurate one. Consequently every man who was capable of doing so was set to surveying work, and thus, and by means of sketching, we did the best we could to improvise charts of the country both for ourselves and the Fleet. The gunners on our warships were hampered in assisting us by bombardment by the same lack of reliable maps and the fact that they were practically without targets. Even at the best the results of their fire was practically nil owing to this enforced inaccuracy... No wonder the corpses were piled about!” Hayden Church, “Sapper Moore-Jones, The New Zealand Artist, Late of Australia and Anzac,” \textit{Lone Hand: The Australian Monthly} 1 September 1916: 216.

As valuable as these images were to the combat at Gallipoli, it was not until he was invalided off the Peninsula in November 1915 that Moore-Jones was able to create his major artistic contribution to the war. He had been suffering from exhaustion and was diagnosed with arterial sclerosis (a serious illness caused by the hardening of the arteries). While recuperating on the Greek island of Imbros he made several sketches of the surrounding landscape. He was later transferred to 1st Southern General Military Hospital in Birmingham where he continued to produce watercolour paintings based on his experiences at the Dardanelles. At the arrangement of the New Zealand High Commissioner, Sir Thomas Mackenzie, a collection of around eighty images was exhibited to great acclaim at offices of the High Commission in London (known as New Zealand House). The fame that Moore-Jones received was amplified when King George V requested a private viewing of the paintings at Buckingham Palace for the Royal Family on 19 April 1916.

171 'Casualty Form - Active Service Record' in AABK. 18805. bx 4. 0030812. Wellington Office: Archives NZ
174 Moore-Jones described the event as being "surprisingly informal... The King, who was in morning dress, at once shook hands with me and so did the Queen, who remarked, 'And so you really did all these', pointing to my sketches. I began to explain the things in quite a business-like way and they all..."
Declared unfit for further service, Moore-Jones returned to Auckland and was discharged from the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in November 1916.\textsuperscript{175} The following year he toured the Gallipoli watercolours around the nation and spoke about his war experiences to raise funds for the New Zealand Returned Services Association (R.S.A).\textsuperscript{176} With much vested interest in the human aspect of the campaign, the New Zealand public were eager for any news of the infamous Gallipoli Peninsula and attended the exhibition in their thousands.\textsuperscript{177}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image}
\caption{Figure 21 – Horace Moore-Jones, \textit{The Sapper and his Donkey, 1915} (c.1917) – Auckland Art Gallery version.\textsuperscript{178}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{175} AABK. 18805. Acc W5537. bx 4. 0030812. Wellington Office: Archives NZ
\textsuperscript{176} According to Platts, he also took the works to Australia.
\textsuperscript{177} Una Platts, Nineteenth century New Zealand artists: a guide & handbook (Christchurch, N.Z.: Avon Fine Prints, 1980), 172-3; Moore-Jones, Exhibition of water colour sketches of Imperial and Turkish positions on Gallipoli Peninsula by Sapper Moore-Jones, N.Z. Engineers.
\textsuperscript{178} Horace Moore-Jones, \textit{The Sapper and his Donkey, Gallipoli, 1915, 1917}. Auckland Art Gallery Auckland.
In response to popular demand, Moore-Jones made the Gallipoli watercolours available for sale as prints and also offered to paint original scenes as commissions. One of these commissions, painted in Dunedin from a photograph taken on Gallipoli by Sergeant James G. Jackson, was the painting now commonly referred to as *Simpson and his Donkey*. However, this title is somewhat of a misnomer. The 'Simpson' of the title refers to Private John Simpson Kirkpatrick, who enlisted in the Australian Imperial Forces as a stretcher-bearer with the 3rd Field Ambulance. After landing on Gallipoli on 25 April 1915, Simpson acquired a donkey, colloquially known as Murphy, that he used to carry wounded soldiers and also supplies through areas of enemy fire. Simpson was killed on the 19 May 1915, only 25 days after his arrival on the Peninsula. In this short space of time however, Simpson became a legend amongst the Anzac troops for his acts of heroism. However, the original photograph used for Moore-Jones' painting does not depict Simpson but rather another stretcher-bearer, 3/258 Private Richard Alexander (Dick) Henderson from the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. Henderson survived Gallipoli and went on to serve on the Western Front where he was awarded the Military Medal (MM) for his acts of bravery bringing in wounded soldiers on the Somme in September 1916. He was badly gassed in October 1917 and was eventually invalided back to New Zealand.

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179 Original photograph is held in the following file - James Gardner Jackson Papers, Ref. No. AG-57, Hocken Library, Dunedin
181 Military Medal Citation: "During operations on the Somme on the 15th September, 1916 he went out repeatedly under heavy shellfire and brought in wounded who were exposed to it. He set a fine example to the other bearers."
The listing for his MM was published in *The London Gazette*, Supplement 29854, 9 December 1916, p12058, Rec No 202.
AABK. 18805. AccW5539. bx 110. 0053455. Wellington Office: Archives NZ
The composition of the Moore-Jones' painting is simple but extremely effective and affecting. The six known original versions of the work produced by Moore-Jones' to fulfill various commissions, all place varying degrees of emphasis on the background detail but overall, the focus of the work is on 'Simpson', his donkey and the severely wounded soldier being transported back to the relative safety of Anzac Cove. Because of the confusion over its protagonist, the work has been claimed by both Australia and New Zealand as an icon of their national soldiering prowess. Ironically

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184 It is possible that there are more than six original watercolours of 'Simpson and his Donkey' in existence. During the research for this thesis, one version was found in a private collection. Another work in a private collection was mentioned but never sighted. It is very likely that others were also made as Moore-Jones toured around New Zealand. There is also apparently 'night' version of the work, where the pair is shown walking through the same ravine but the usually peach coloured background landscape is painted in an inky blue. The known versions held by public institutions are as follows: the Aigantighe Art Gallery, Timaru; the Auckland Art Gallery; Canterbury Officer's Club, Christchurch; and the Australian War Memorial, Canberra. Until mid 2015 the Auckland War Memorial Museum also held an original version of the painting on permanent loan from the Auckland Commerical Club. This has since been sold at auction to an undisclosed private collection.
however, as a stretcher-bearer, 'Man with the Donkey' was a non-combatant and not a soldier. The role of the stretcher-bearer was more typically used as a symbol of rescue or salvation rather than of courage. Despite being the antithesis of the conventional warrior persona, 'Simpson' has nevertheless become synonymous with the strength of character and selfless heroism that came to define the Anzac soldiers as a whole while the wounded soldier has come to represent all the men – of both Australian and New Zealand origin – who served in this bloody and ill-managed campaign. Nevertheless, in spite of its fame, the work is a complete anomaly within Moore-Jones' oeuvre of Gallipoli inspired paintings, which all centre on the imposing landscape of the Peninsula rather than on the soldiers who fought in the Campaign.

During his time as a military topographer, Moore-Jones was able to observe the impressive scale of the occupation, where men were pitted against an almost insurmountably rugged terrain of sheer cliffs, seemingly impenetrable gullies and harsh weather conditions. The analytical care that Moore-Jones took in executing his bird’s eye view perspectives of the Gallipoli landscape gave those viewing the works a comprehensive understanding of the imposing natural obstacles that the Anzac soldiers faced. As King George said to the artist in his private viewing of Moore-Jones, The Coast North of Anzac Cove (1915).


Moore-Jones used the compositional technique of the bird's eye view perspective previous to his Gallipoli series in his first known war related subject The Departure of the Ninth Contingent from New Zealand for the South African War, c.1901. This scene was painted from the hills above the harbour; the transport ship itself is barely visible as it sails away into the distance. Instead of capturing this event from the wharf, and including the men themselves, the image gives the impression that although the young men are just beginning their long journey they are already out of reach of the families they left behind. They sail away to fight a war on the other side of the world, perhaps never to return. Moore-Jones, The Departure of the Ninth Contingent from New Zealand for the South African War, c.1901-02. Auckland Art Gallery/ Toi o Tamaki, Auckland.
Jones' London exhibition, the works clearly illustrate that it was “simply madness to ask men who never before had been under fire to storm such a position.”

Yet, despite being meticulously painted and topographically accurate, Moore-Jones’ paintings gave the crowds who viewed them a skewed impression of the realities of the Gallipoli Campaign. The conditions that the Australian and New Zealand soldiers experienced at Gallipoli were some of the most arduous and unhygienic of the entire war. The trench frontlines were extremely close throughout the Anzac Sector and in most cases the Ottoman forces held the higher ground. Their artillery, machine guns and snipers were a constant threat to the Anzac soldiers. No place was safe from bullets or shrapnel. The Ottoman Turks also had the advantage of a constant supply of fresh water, food, ammunition and equipment from Constantinople and the towns that lay along the Peninsula behind their lines. In stark contrast to this, the Anzacs were perpetually short of all these necessities. Despite several attempts to bore wells, the quality of the supply was poor and water had to be shipped in from the surrounding islands and then hauled laboriously, by hand, up to the heights from the beach. "The fatigue work was enormous, colossal... climbing for half a mile up these grades, slipping back, up and on again, the heat of the sun terrible, bullets and shells bursting everywhere." As William Watson remarked in a letter, this precious cargo was frequently lost when the water tins were punctured by shrapnel, resulting in a

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demoralising and perilous return to the beach for fresh supplies. Sanitation in the Anzac lines was also virtually non-existent. There was a lack of proper latrines and the hard ground often made the burial of bodies difficult. These factors, in combination with the extreme summer heat, meant that almost every soldier who served on the Peninsula would eventually be invalided away from the fighting with severely debilitating dysentery.\textsuperscript{189} Moore-Jones experienced all the privations and brutality of Gallipoli first hand, recalling that, “We lived with death all around us. You can imagine what it was like to live, day after day, facing plateaus covered with one’s dead comrades, whose faces had grown black by the time we could reach them, and the over-powering, sickening stench. And what it meant to sit, eating one’s bread and jam surrounded by millions of flies who had been bred on dead bodies”\textsuperscript{190}

In spite of these hardships, the landscape of this battlefield was undeniably impressive. There were few who could disagree with Colonel Arthur Bauchop’s remark that, “This peninsula is beautiful. When we came here ten weeks ago the flat between the Cliffs and the sea was covered with scarlet poppies... The blue sea in front – not 200 yards off – with our destroyers constantly moving up and down (night and day) to watch our flanks – makes it all very charming. From my dug-out on the Cliff-face... I can see from where I lie – Cape Hellas in the distance and all night we can hear the heavy guns of the bombardment from both sides of the case... Fancy seeing the Plains of Troy from Hellas?”\textsuperscript{191} Like Bauchop, many of the officers and men who served with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force had received a classical education. All these men were therefore keenly aware that they fought on the same hallowed ground once trodden by Achilles in Homer’s Iliad and that the poet Lord Byron had swum between the Narrows of the Dardanelles in 1810, just miles up the coast from Anzac Cove.\textsuperscript{192}

The romanticism attached to the Gallipoli landscape is touched upon in the Foreword written by the Commander of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, Lieutenant


\textsuperscript{190} Church, “Sapper Moore-Jones, The New Zealand Artist, Late of Australia and Anzac,” 216.

\textsuperscript{191} McLean, McGibbon and Gentry, The Penguin Book of New Zealanders at War, 129, 475.

\textsuperscript{192} Heinrich Schliemann began the archaeological excavation of the ruins of Troy in 1870. The area is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site - http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/849.
General Sir Alexander John Godley (1867–1957), in the exhibition catalogue that accompanied Moore-Jones' paintings. "Nothing that I have seen or read on the subject of Anzac, brings more vividly to my memory the pleasantest features of our sojourn there." Although these words seems brash, and in complete disregard of the monumental failure of the Campaign as a whole, Godley’s comment is not wholly unjustified.

Moore-Jones’ portrayal of the magnificent sun-drenched Peninsula does, at first glance, appear deceptively benign, serene and quite inviting. His paintings do not depict the gruesome details of the war or show the now legendary actions at Anzac Cove, Baby 700, Hill 60, The Nek and Chunuk Bair. The fierce struggles that took place during these battles are alluded to only as soft plumes of smoke – easily mistaken for cloud – that rise from distant battlefields. Even in his most dramatic sketch of the fateful beach landing, Moore-Jones places his emphasis on the

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194 Moore-Jones, Complete index to the first series of sketches made at Anzac: during the historic occupation of that portion of the Gallipoli Peninsula by the Imperial Forces, 7.
spectacular but formidable natural obstacle of the landscape itself. Only the foreboding names ‘Hell Spit’, ‘Dead Man’s Ridge,’ and ‘Shrapnel Gully’ (also known as the ‘Valley of Death’) referenced in the exhibition catalogue and marked in the map style booklet accompanying the 1916 print collection, give an accurate impression of the violence and death that occurred daily at these locations.

It would be easy to conclude that Moore-Jones was actively trying to avoid the unpleasant realities of his subject. The impression of serenity in his Gallipoli landscapes is, however, cunningly deceptive. Closer inspection reveals that the mountainous terrain depicted is pock marked with shell craters and scarred with

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197 Moore-Jones, Exhibition of water colour sketches of Imperial and Turkish positions on Gallipoli Peninsula by Sapper Moore-Jones, N.Z. Engineers; Moore-Jones, Complete index to the first series of sketches made at Anzac: during the historic occupation of that portion of the Gallipoli Peninsula by the Imperial Forces.
newly cut tracks, shallow trenches and makeshift dugout bomb shelters, where soldiers crouch together to avoid the constant threat of Turkish artillery and snipers. The only inhabitants of Moore-Jones’ paintings are the Anzac ‘diggers’ – the presence of any Turkish soldiers or the bodies of any dead or wounded men are hidden from view. This omission increases the sense of foreboding and apprehension in the images and adds to the authenticity of the works by deliberately simulating the everyday reality of the Anzac experience. Drawing from his unique understanding of the campaign, Moore-Jones has captured a sense of what life must have felt like – living in the midst of this harsh landscape and facing the relentless companionship of death and the oppressive threat of the Turkish artillery and snipers concealed in “ravine after ravine… so well hidden were the Turks… that whereas we, on the heights, could be raked by their fire, all that he [sic. we] could see was an occasional mule as it rounded a bend.”

In opposition to the collective horrors that confronted the Anzacs, Moore-Jones, like many others, felt an intense attachment to the event and publicly declared that he would not have missed those “eight months of hell” for anything in the world. Moore-Jones' interpretation of the Gallipoli landscape encapsulates the immense sense of pride he held in what was achieved by his comrades at Gallipoli – particularly the work accomplished by the men of the New Zealand Engineers with

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whom he had enlisted and fought.\textsuperscript{202} “That men should have made warfare in such places is almost inconceivable…. Besides natural conditions more proper to the realms of fantasy than reality we have to contend with all the devices of modern warfare…. But the situations shown in these sketches were actually stormed, taken and held. This is the fact.”\textsuperscript{203}

Other works were made during the Campaign that captured aspects of the events on the Peninsula. Many of these were sketches and cartoons published in the \textit{Peninsula Press}, a broadsheet newspaper printed by serving soldiers during the fighting. Selected works from this were later reproduced in \textit{The Anzac Book} but the majority of artists represented in this work were Australians. Like the men who contributed to these publications, Moore-Jones was a soldier-artist and his work therefore contains specific insights into the Gallipoli Campaign, gained through his direct participation in the fighting. As the original Editor’s Note in this publication states, \textit{The Anzac Book} was “produced in the lines at Anzac on Gallipoli in the closing weeks of 1915. Practically every word in it was written and every line drawn beneath the shelter of a waterproof sheet or of a roof of sandbags – either in the trenches or, at most, well within the range of the oldest Turkish rifle… Day and night during its composition, the crack of the Mauser bullets overhead never ceased. At least one good soldier that we know of, who was preparing a contribution for these pages, met his death while the work was still unfinished.”\textsuperscript{204}

Several other notable artists, who had not fought at the Peninsula, did produce commemorative paintings of Gallipoli but because of their disconnection from the events, their works place a completely different emphasis on what occurred.

\textsuperscript{202} The New Zealand Engineers that Horace Moore-Jones originally served with on Gallipoli were particularly distinguished for their efforts during this campaign. In 1916 Hayden Church said of them: “It was this force that accomplished the engineering marvels of Gallipoli, building roads up precipices that experienced soldiers said only a fly could negotiate, bridging chasms that looked unbridgeable, generally accomplishing the seeming impossible… They gained more orders of merit than any other in the British army since the war began and which included the [then] only New Zealand V.C. [Victoria Cross], the late Corporal Bassett.” \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{203} Moore-Jones, \textit{Complete index to the first series of sketches made at Anzac: during the historic occupation of that portion of the Gallipoli Peninsula by the Imperial Forces}, 8.

\textsuperscript{204} Australian War Memorial., \textit{The Anzac book}, 3rd ed. (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2010), 11.
One of the most notable interpreters of Gallipoli was Charles Edward Dixon R.I. (1872–1934), a highly regarded British marine artist who painted *The Landing at Anzac* (c. 1915). This dramatic painting is a complete fabrication, reconstructed from reports of the event. Dixon never visited Gallipoli and was never assigned as an official British war artist. He did however have considerable experience at painting naval battle scenes through his work as a specialist marine illustrator for *The Graphic* and *The Illustrated London News* between 1900 and 1910. In spite of this impressive resume, Dixon’s work feels contrived – playing as it does on the loaded mythology surrounded the famous landing of the Australian soldiers on the 25 April 1915.

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206 Dixon’s title ‘R.I.’ denotes his status as a member of the Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolours, a position he was appointed to in 1900.

Figure 29 – Norman Wilkinson, Troops landing at C Beach, Suvla Bay, later in the Day, 7 August 1915 (c.1915).\(^{207}\)

Figure 30 – Norman Wilkinson, *Transports under shellfire, Suvla Bay* (1915).\(^{208}\)


Dixon's interpretation of the Anzac battlefield contrasts starkly with the works made by fellow British artist and specialist marine painter, Norman Wilkinson (1878–1971). Serving with the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, Wilkinson fought at Gallipoli with the British Forces. He made several watercolour sketches of his experiences that focus on the marine aspects of the Campaign, particularly the naval battles. These works have a distant, subdued tone, which shares much in common with Moore-Jones' interpretation of the Peninsula – suggesting that those artists who actually were present at Gallipoli were inclined to downplay the theatricality of their images, focusing instead on the facts of what they witnessed.²⁰⁹

Parallels of this attitude can be seen in the work of other veteran soldier-artists. Although their representational styles are polar opposites, Moore-Jones’ Gallipoli works shares compositional similarities with the British official war artist Paul Nash’s interpretation of the Western Front in works such as The Menin Road (1919). Both

²⁰⁹ Wilkinson eventually gained the rank of as a Lieutenant–Commander in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. Nigel Viney credits Wilkinson as the inventor of ‘Dazzle Painting’ - the camouflage technique used on Allied boats to counter their detection by German U-boat submarines that feature “unintentionally Cubist style” patterns.
Viney and Imperial War Museum (Great Britain), Images of Wartime: British art and artists of World War One, 97-100.
Moore-Jones and Nash had an intimate knowledge of the war from which to draw their artistic interpretation. Both depict the war landscape as a harsh angular environment against which men either appear insignificantly small and fragile or are hidden completely from view – accentuating the alien, otherworldly qualities of the environment. Nonetheless, their war paintings dare to find a sublime beauty in their subject matter that transcends the horrors of modern warfare.²¹¹

George Lambert's *Anzac, The Landing 1915* (1920–22) contains much of the drama and the vast scale captured by Dixon's version of the same subject matter. However, instead of presenting the famous beach scene, Lambert focuses on the Australian soldiers as they advanced up the razor sharp cliffs of Gallipoli in the early hours of assault, after the initial landing. Lambert spent much time conferring with soldiers and written sources to give his work an appropriate level of authenticity. As an official Australian war artist he was also able to visit the location he painted in March 1919, accompanying Charles Bean's Australian Historical Mission. Lambert produced

²¹¹ This work and many others by Paul Nash are part of the Imperial War Museum’s official First World War art collection. The Menin Road, 1919 and We Are Making a New World, 1918. Viney and Imperial War Museum (Great Britain), Images of Wartime: British art and artists of World War One, 44-51.

several works based on his time at Gallipoli, including a large companion piece *The Charge of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade at the Nek, 7 August 1915*, which was commissioned after *The Landing* and completed in 1924. In both works he placed an emphasis on the landscape that is similar to that seen in Moore-Jones' paintings. Lambert described his impression of the Gallipoli environment as "stern, unmoved, [and] callous of the human."²¹³ *The Landing* was completed in time for an exhibition showcasing the collection of the new Australian War Memorial, held in Melbourne on 25 April 1922. Critics of the work remarked that, "there is an uncanny lack of anything individual or personal in the scrambling, crawling, khaki figures scarcely discernible against the rocky precipitous ground."²¹⁴ Lambert responded to those who "complain there is a lack of fire, a lack of action and of the terror of war," stating in rebuttal that, "we must accept that men equipped as these men were, moving upwards on this particular place, without any idea of where the enemy was, what they had to do, would look just like this small swarm of ants climbing, no matter how rapidly, climbing painfully and laboriously upward through the uneven ground and spiky uncomfortable shrubs."²¹⁵ Although Lambert never participated in active service during the First World War, the access he gained through his role as an official war artist gave him a depth of understanding that was comparable to the insights of those who had actually fought at Gallipoli. Regardless of whether the work was completed by a veteran soldier or a civilian, as this study will show, it is the quality of these unique insights that give the work of official war artists a true authenticity.

Despite the immense popularity of his work, Moore-Jones' was never given the status of an official war artist. On the back of his various successful exhibitions, and because the works had received such positive media attention and critical praise, Moore-Jones offered to sell the complete series of his watercolours to the New Zealand Government. Contemporary reports on the deal going ahead were

Also see - http://nga.gov.au/exhibition/lambert/Detail.cfm?IRN=144768
²¹⁵ The quotation is referenced to: ML MSS A1811, p.75
Ibid.
positive. Unfortunately for the nation, the purchase never eventuated. The Government did not see the benefit of owning the paintings. The purchase offer was refused on the grounds that the Government could not justify the expense. It was reluctant to spend money on such 'frivolous' expenses as artwork during the privations of wartime. Those involved in this decision were also, rather short-sightedly, anxious of being seen to support an artist profiteering from the war.

The New Zealand Government's dismissal of Moore-Jones' paintings was typical of their attitude to the use of war art throughout the war. The Government held firm to their stance that war art, in its various forms, was expensive and unnecessary. The citizens of New Zealand were much more open-minded about the potential usefulness of war art. Several letters from members of the public questioned the Dominion's official lack of action on this issue. The common theme in these articles is an offence to New Zealand's 'national pride.' Many saw the Dominion's lack of a decent war art programme as a national embarrassment since, from 1916, Britain, Australia and Canada all had official war art programmes to document their country's historic activities in the Great War. While these countries had all realised the propaganda and publicity value of war art New Zealand still dithered over the petty issue of its cost. A columnist from The Truth newspaper encapsulates the general feelings of the public regarding the Moore-Jones debacle in this diatribe published after the artist's untimely death in 1922.

Gallipoli holds sorrowful associations to many New Zealanders, and relatives of our 'diggers' flocked in their thousands to see the pictures and sketches of places that had become household words. The artist offered the collection to the New Zealand Government, but [Prime Minister] Massey and Co., turned the offer down, despite the strong representations that were made. Apart from the high artistic merit of the works there was their great historic value, and this would have increased with the years. Thus, apart from sentimental reasons the purchase of the pictures would have been 'good business' for the Government. But no. Our severely materialistic Government, not having a

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216 “The artist is in treaty with the New Zealand Government, which is desirous of acquiring, as a permanent collection, the whole of his original Gallipoli sketches.” Church, “Sapper Moore-Jones, The New Zealand Artist, Late of Australia and Anzac,” 215.

Rejected by New Zealand, in February 1918 Moore-Jones decided to offer his work to the Australian Government. He submitted a proposal to the Honourable E.D. Millen, the Minister for Repatriation, who advocated the decision on the grounds that, “pictures by this artist have been purchased by, and are hanging in, the Sydney Art Gallery. He was commissioned to paint the portrait of the recent Governor-General of New Zealand, and one of his pictures was also shown in one of the recognised art exhibitions in Paris.” On Millen’s recommendation, the Australian Cabinet accepted the purchase of the full collection of approximately 100 works for a total price of £1,500 pounds “subject to the pictures being approved by [a] recognised Art Authority and [the] price being reasonable.” However Millen delayed negotiations on the subject, as Moore-Jones was temporarily unable to bring the works in question to Australia “owing to the influenza outbreak which seriously attacked his family.”

By April 1920 Moore-Jones began to pursue the matter again, contacting the Director of the Australian War Museum with a request for assistance to exhibit his Gallipoli landscapes at the Queen’s Hall in Melbourne’s Federal Parliament House. He also made the Museum a direct offer to purchase his original paintings. The

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219 Moore-Jones’ decision to offer the works to Australia was not unwarranted as Moore-Jones and his young family had spent several years living in New South Wales around the turn of the century, where he had been an exhibiting member of the local Royal Art Society. Horace Moore Jones and his first wife Anne Dobson moved to Sydney in 1891. The pair had met when Horace took art classes from Anne, a local painter, sculptor and Associate of the British Royal Academy. They married in Auckland in 1888. Sadly, Anne died in 1901, leaving behind at least three children. In 1905 Horace married again, to a Miss Florence Emma Mitchell of Bellambi (South Coast, N.S.W.). They had three children, two of whom were born in Australia. The family returned to Auckland between 1908-09 (dates found vary). Records suggest that Florence and the children remained in Auckland when Horace went to London around 1912 (from the address given as next of kin when he enlisted). Gray, "Moore-Jones, Horace Millichamp (1867/68?–1922)."; AABK. 18805. Acc W5537. bx 4. 0030812. Wellington Office: Archives NZ; Platts, Nineteenth century New Zealand artists: a guide & handbook, 172-3; Moore-Jones, Hamilton Art Gallery, and Waikato Society of Arts., Paintings & drawings by Horace Moore-Jones: organized by the Waikato Society of Arts in the Hamilton Art Gallery, 13th September-2nd October 1964.
220 See ‘Minute Paper – Subject 1: Paintings of Historical Places at Gallipoli’, Folio no. 3, 11.02.1918. AWM93, 18/2/23 - Mr Moore-Jones (Artist): Sketches, Australian War Memorial
221 See letter from E.D. Millen, Minister for Repatriation to M.L. Shepherd, Secretary to the Prime Minister’s Department, Folio no.4, 31.05.1920.
Ibid.
Museum authorities contacted Charles Bean for his opinion but his response was curtly dismissive, stating that, “Moore J. sketches are not worth it. If they were really accurate or of worth as paintings we might think of it but they are neither. For accuracy we have photos and the sketches are not great works of art nor relics.”

Fortunately, Minister Millen was still very much in support of Moore-Jones and contacted the Prime Minister’s office on his behalf to arrange an exhibition at Queen’s Hall in early June 1920 that would provide an opportunity for a tribunal of art society critics and “a military officer with a thorough knowledge of the Peninsula” to inspect the works and pass judgement on whether the purchase should go ahead as planned. In contrast to Bean’s scathing remarks, this tribunal regarded the works very favourably. The military officer, Lieutenant Colonel Charles Courtney of the Australian Medical Corps, who “knew Gallipoli from end to end,” commented that, “they convey a very accurate idea of the nature and topography of the Anzac territory and surroundings. They will recall to anyone who has been there many incidents that have been almost forgotten and my inspection of them this morning revived many such memories as the one-time familiar hills and gullies came again under review,” while the Art Advisory Board members, drawn from Victorian Artists’ Society, concluded that the works were of reasonable artistic merit given the circumstances of their production and recommended their purchase on the grounds that they “would be of great national value and interest – and serve to perpetuate one of the most notable events of the War.” Following this, the Prime Minister’s Department agreed to take up Moore-Jones’ initial offer on 17 June 1920 but the

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222 See letter from John L. Treloar, (Director), Australian War Museum, Melbourne to C.E.W. Bean, and Bean’s response, 20.04.1920. Note this letter appears to be from the transitional period between directorship of Treloar and Henry Gullett. AWM38, 3DRL 6673/311 - Records of Charles E.W. Bean, Official Historian. Correspondence, 1920, Australian War Memorial
223 See letter from E.D. Millen, Minister for Repatriation to M.L. Shepherd, Secretary to the Prime Minister’s Department, Folio no.4, 31.05.1920. AWM93, 18/2/23 - Mr Moore-Jones (Artist): Sketches, Australian War Memorial
224 See comments, probably by Millen, at the foot of the letter from E.D. Millen, Minister for Repatriation to M.L. Shepherd, Secretary to the Prime Minister’s Department, Folio no.4, 31.05.1920. Ibid.
225 Letter from Lieutenant Colonel Charles Courtney to Secretary M.L. Shepherd, Prime Minister’s Department, Melbourne, Folio no. 10, 10.06.1920. Ibid.
226 Letter from G.V.F. Mann, Chairman, Commonwealth Art Advisory Board to Secretary M.L. Shepherd, Prime Minister’s Department, Melbourne, Folio 11-12, 11.06.1920. Ibid.
Chairman of the War Museum Committee and the Director of the Australian War Museum were extremely unimpressed that this decision was made without their consent. 227 Both were particularly annoyed with the purchase price, which Director Treloar believed to be over generous for an artist “who is not an Australian.” 228 Considering that Moore-Jones did indeed have a close professional and personal association with Australia before the war, the complaints of these men seem unduly short sighted. For the disputed total of £1,500 pounds the Museum eventually received 82 original works, including an early version of ‘Simpson’ and his Donkey (this work may indeed be the first example produced by Moore-Jones in 1917). For the same price the Museum had received just three canvases by George Lambert. 229 The significance and merit of Moore-Jones’ paintings has since been re-evaluated and found to be irrefutable. Bean himself re-examined the full collection of works in 1924 and declared that he was “agreeably surprised” by their quality. 230 Moore-Jones’ work now stands as a treasured possession and worthy complement to the Australian War Memorial’s impressive collection of official war art from the First World War period.

A Beginning – New Zealand's Official Photographers

In the meantime, while Moore-Jones' works were receiving praise in London, the soldiers of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force had left Gallipoli and been

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227 See letter from the Prime Minister’s Department, signed by H.G. Brown, 17.06.1920. NAA: A6006, 1920/12/31, Gallipoli War Sketches, Australian War Memorial
228 See letter from John L. Treloar, Director of the Australian War Museum to the Secretary, Home & Territories Department, Melbourne, Folio no. 17-18, 21.06.1920; and letter from A. Poynton, Chairman of the War Museum Committee to the Prime Minister, W.M. Hughes, Folio no.19-21, 23.06.1920. AWM93, 18/2/23 - Mr Moore-Jones (Artist): Sketches, Australian War Memorial
229 Letter from A. Poynton, Chairman of the War Museum Committee to the Prime Minister, W.M. Hughes, Folio no.19-21, 23.06.1920. Ibid.
Also see extract from the agenda of War Museum Committee, c. June 1920. NAA: A6006, 1920/12/31, Gallipoli War Sketches, Australian War Memorial
230 Letter from A. Poynton (?) or the Director of the Australian War Museum to C.E.W. Bean, Folio no.50, 10.06.1924. AWM93, 18/2/23 - Mr Moore-Jones (Artist): Sketches, Australian War Memorial
transferred to the Western Front. Leaving behind the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade to continue the fight against the Ottoman Turks in Egypt and the Middle East, the remaining New Zealand force, with the exception of a few detached Corps units, became known as the New Zealand Division from 1 March 1916. Their first assignment on arriving in France in April 1916 was to hold the relatively quiet sector of the British frontline around the town of Armentieres. Within a few months however they got to experience the true ferocity of the war when they were called upon to play their part in the massive logistical operation that was Battle of the Somme (or Somme Offensive).^231^  

Isolated by distance, New Zealanders on the Home Front were heavily reliant on Britain’s official photographic unit for images of the war overseas. Even when supplemented by the images provided through the British illustrated newspapers and other international media, New Zealand’s perspective of the war on the Western Front was extremely limited. The public’s first major exposure to moving image content of the New Zealand Division’s campaign in France did not come until October 1916, when the official British film The Battle of the Somme, which claimed to show graphic live footage of the action on the Western Front as well as general scenes of army life, was screened in cinemas across the nation.^232^ As Christopher Pugsley points out in his article Who is Sanders?, this event coincided with the arrival of reports of the horrendous 8000 casualties suffered in less than a month by the New Zealand Division during its participation in the Somme Offensive between 15 September – 4 October 1916.233 Nevertheless, the patriotic local press described the film as an “awe-inspiring reproduction of the terrific events in which our brothers,

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^232^ The film premiered in August 1916 and arrived in New Zealand in mid October. The supposedly real footage shown in the film The Battle of the Somme of the notoriously bloody first day of the Somme Offensive were later revealed as having been faked. The famous ‘over the top’ images were captured away from the frontlines, in relative safety, by two official British cinematographers, Geoffrey Malins and John McDowell, who worked for the British propaganda film unit within the British War Office. Callister, The Face of War: New Zealand’s Great War photography, 57; Pugsley, "Who is Sanders? New Zealand’s Official Cameraman on the Western Front 1917-1919."  
^233^ The New Zealand artillery, as part of the XV Corps of the British Fourth Army, went into action earlier than the Infantry on 12 September 1916. They also remained in the line longer and were not withdrawn from combat until the 25 October 1916. Overall the Battle of the Somme (or Somme Offensive) ran from 1 July until the 18 November 1916. Stewart, The New Zealand Division, 1916-1919: a popular history based on official records; Fenton, Lord, McLean and Shoebridge, New Zealand and the First World War : 1914-1919.
our sons, and fathers are gloriously playing their parts this day. If anything were needed to justify the existence of the cinematograph, it is to be found in the wonderful series of films." The Battle of the Somme was an immediate success in New Zealand. Described as “arousing unusual interest and enthusiasm” the film was so popular that, soon after its release, the Evening Post reported that “there have been crowded houses each evening and afternoon” and even His Excellency the Governor of New Zealand made time to attend a local screening in Wellington.

The Battle of the Somme sharpened the New Zealand public’s desire to view images of their own troops’ activities in the war. However, despite the increasing interest in the subject, the New Zealand Government were reluctant to spend the necessary money to finance such a project or even to share an official war photographer with the Australians. Instead, in December 1916, they requested that High Commissioner Mackenzie negotiate the discounted services of the British war photographers. A few weeks later, when the British War Office notified the High Commission that their photographic unit was overstretched and would be unable to supply the needs of New Zealand, Mackenzie decided to rectify the matter himself.

As well as actively campaigning for higher standards of soldier rights and healthcare Thomas Mackenzie was a keen advocate for the documentation and promotion of the New Zealand war effort. Among his many political and environmental achievements, Mackenzie was notable for being “the patron of Government filmmaking in New Zealand” through his role as New Zealand Minister of Tourist and

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According to Jane Carmichael, at this stage in the war, Britain still had only two official war photographers on the Western Front – Ernest Brooks and John Warwick Brooke – who between them were expected to cover the entirety of the British Expeditionary Force, which by 1917 "numbered over two million men, whereas the colonial photographers could concentrate on their own Corps which usually consisted of some 60,000. The military machine was becoming ever more vast and complex and, besides the battle itself, Brooks and Warwick Brooke were expected, in order to provide variety, to cover the latest peripheral activities such as the arrival of women as ancillaries, the landing of the first American contingent, the work of various exotic labour corps form the more distant parts of the Empire, as well as the usual round of visits from royalty and other distinguished figures. Both Brooks and Warwick Brooke had been in the field almost continuously from mid-1916 and it was not surprising that they both on occasion showed signs of strain."

Carmichael, First World War Photographers, 60-61.
237 David Knight, 'Notes on the official New Zealand war photographers', private correspondence, 12.03.2009.
Health Resorts in Sir Joseph Ward’s Liberal Government between 1909 and 1912. With the support of his colleague Thomas Edward Donne (1860–1945), who later worked with him at the High Commission, this Department administered what was to become the National Film Unit and employed the first official New Zealand cinematographer to document events in the Dominion. In 1912, just following his appointment as High Commissioner, Mackenzie formulated a mutually beneficial arrangement with the London based branch of the French cinematographic company Pathé Frères, granting them the right to reproduce official, nationally based, New Zealand film in the bi-weekly newsreel the Pathé Gazette, in exchange for providing New Zealand with film items of interest from Britain. This relationship would later become of key significance in the gradual acceptance of official New Zealand war artists by the New Zealand Government.

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238 Mackenzie began his political career in 1887 as Minister of the House of Representatives (MHR) for Clutha in opposition to the Liberal Party. He resigned from politics in 1896 but in 1908 was asked to join the Liberals by Prime Minister Sir Joseph Ward and was given the posts of Minister for Agriculture; Industries and Commerce; Tourism and Health Resorts between 1909–1912. Between the 28 March–10 July 1912, Mackenzie stood as New Zealand’s Prime Minister. He was given this position after the resignation of Joseph Ward but quickly handed power over to William Massey and the Reform Party. Soon after Mackenzie’s resignation he was assigned to the post of New Zealand High Commissioner in London where he served as a diplomat between 1912–1920.

Brooking, "Mackenzie, Thomas Noble (1853-1930)," 303-04.

239 Thomas Edward Donne had established the Department of Tourist and Health Resorts in 1901 according to the wishes of Prime Minister Sir Joseph Ward. When Mackenzie moved to the London High Commission he appears to have taken Donne with him as his secretary. As will be discussed later in this chapter, this partnership would become significant to the development of the New Zealand war art programme as both men would serve on the New Zealand War Museum Executive Committee in 1918 and Donne on the Art-Sub Committee that controlled the employment of the New Zealand war artists.

New Zealand Tourist and Publicity Department, 75 Years of Tourism (Wellington: Government Printer, 1977), 3-4; Tony Nightingale, Paul R. Dingwall and New Zealand Department of Conservation Science & Research Unit, Our Picturesque Heritage: 100 years of scenery preservation in New Zealand (Wellington, N.Z.: Science & Research Unit, Department of Conservation, 2003), 22; Pugsley, "Who is Sanders? New Zealand’s Official Cameraman on the Western Front 1917-1919," 20; ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 4. ZWR7/1. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.

Figure 33 – Henry Sanders, Members of the Pioneer Battalion laying a road in Messines, Belgium (1917).241

Figure 34 – Thomas Scales, New Zealand soldiers receiving instruction at a camp in England (c.1918).242

Using his contacts at *Pathé Frères*, in early 1917 Mackenzie decided to acquire the services of two of their leading photographic and cinematography experts. Henry Armytage Sanders was appointed as the official photographer and cameraman attached to the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in France on 8 March 1917. The task of documenting the New Zealand soldiers at training camps and hospitals in the United Kingdom was given to Thomas Frederick Scales, who was employed almost two months after Sanders, on the 26 April. Together these men produced an extremely important and rare collection of visual records documenting the lives of the soldiers who served with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force during the Great War.

Although the British War Office had approved the matter, Mackenzie did not inform the authorities in New Zealand of this development until well after Sanders had been assigned to his duties, presumably to avoid the Government's disapproval. James Allen, the Minister of Defence and then Acting Prime Minister, did not react favourably to the news when he was informed in late March 1917. Allen took some convincing to agree to pay the photographers' salaries, but Mackenzie eventually gained his approval for the scheme on the basis that the New Zealand Government would have “sole rights to all photographs.”

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243 AABK. 18805. AccW5550. bx 112. 0101607. Wellington Office: Archives NZ
244 AABK. 18805. AccW5550. bx 117. 0102103. Wellington Office: Archives NZ
245 Sanders was granted the rank and pay of Lieutenant. This was later increased to Captain. Scales was given the lesser rank of Staff Sergeant but with a substantial pay supplement to match the level of his usual income with *Pathé*.
Once their employment was officially sanctioned in April 1917, Sanders and Scales became New Zealand’s first official war photographers. However, as was the case for the British official photography unit, the New Zealand war photographers did not have free creative control over their production. Their work was constrained by the strict rules of censorship imposed by the jurisdiction of the British War Office. These limitations were most keenly felt by Sanders in his recording of the Western Front. When taking up his position he was informed that he would “not be permitted to develop his own plates or films nor to superintend their development.” Instead his unprocessed work was to be sent directly to the British General Headquarters in France where it would be censored under the authority of M.I.7(a), the department within the War Office’s Military Intelligence Section 7 responsible for the censorship of all British materials. After this was completed, M.I.7(a) passed Sanders’

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material on to the Offices of the High Commissioner in London, which arranged for the delivery of copies to New Zealand and, after an embargo period of a few weeks, passed the images on to the Association of Press Photographic Agencies for distribution to the major news agencies such as the Central News and the Topical Picture Agency. Under this arrangement Sanders’ agreed that, “the photographs when published will be shown as ‘Official Photographs’ and the name of the Official Photographer will not appear.” The restrictions on the work of Thomas Scales would have been less severe as his assignment to record the New Zealanders in England was a subject likely considered of less strategic importance than that given to Sanders. Some of Scales’ images of New Zealand’s training facilities may have been judged to contain sensitive materials but the majority of his work was much lighter in tone than Sanders’ images of the Western Front, focusing as they do on jovial sports days, occupational training classes for demobilised soldiers, and the convivial atmosphere of camp canteens.

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249 See correspondence between High Commissioner Sir Thomas Mackenzie and the Acting Prime Minister of New Zealand, Sir James Allen, between 29.03.1917 – 24.05.1917 and the letter from T.E. Donne, Secretary of the New Zealand High Commission, to the Proprietors’ Association of Press Photographic Agencies, 20.05.1917.

250 See letter titled “Official Photographer to the New Zealand Expeditionary Force” sent from High Commissioner Sir Thomas Mackenzie to Sir James Allen, Acting Prime Minister of New Zealand, 27.03.1917.
Ibid.
Figure 36 – Thomas Scales, *New Zealand soldiers practise entrenching, England* (c.1918).

Figure 37 – Thomas Scales, *A quiet room at Hornchurch convalescent camp* (c.1918).

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As Sue Malvern explains in *Modern Art, Britain and the Great War*, the logic behind the constraints of the British War Office’s censorship were founded on the contemporary perception that photography was “an objective, mechanical transcription of reality.” In stark contrast to the “sensibility and subjectivity of the artist” the regard attached to the perceived sterile impartiality of this medium made it a favoured tool of the “law, scientific enquiry and surveillance.” In the propaganda battlefield of the First World War, photography found its niche. Photographs were presented to the public as touchstones of absolute truth. They were “presumed to be radically innocent images, freed of being coded and constructed” and the believability implied by this innocence gave them the capacity to convey plausibly “authoritative information.” To avoid exposing the public to the wrong version of this authorised truth, official photographs were carefully scrutinised. Censorship was used to control the information contained within a frame. Limiting an official photographer’s access to problematic sights was also used as a method to curtail the likelihood of this material reaching the wrong eyes. However, as Malvern points out, this measure was not taken “because the photographer’s loyalty was suspect but because the power of photography to reveal evidence depended on assuming its mechanical promiscuity, innocently revealing what other methods of representation could choose to leave out.”

In this worldview, the impassive eye of the camera could capture forbidden horror or military secrets indiscriminately. The editorial power of the photographer to manipulate an image during its production process was virtually disregarded and any artistic influence they could have over the camera’s slavishly truthful reportage was dismissed. As has been demonstrated in the previous chapter, this perception was the exact opposite of the reality. Although the medium was still in its juvenile stages of development, a First World War official photographer could exert complete control over his compositions and, even when working in a documentary capacity, could create a version of the ‘truth’ that would be unrecognisable when compared to the actuality of an event.

The complex perception of photography in the First World War period caused many problems for both official and unofficial photographers attempting to document the Western Front. Any independent professional press photographers working to supply British news agencies in an unofficial capacity were viewed with great suspicion by the military and were typically granted only limited access to active combat areas in France and Belgium. These private-sector cameramen were essentially cut out of the image market after Wellington House established of the Pictorial Propaganda Department in February 1916 and appointed Brooks and Brooke in March and July 1916 respectively. Jane Carmichael explains that, “As the most important theatre of the war the Western Front saw the strictest control of information both written and visual. It was here that the greatest number of official appointments of correspondents, photographers, cinematographers, and war artists was made and the ordinary press-man most rigorously excluded.”

To help ensure an increased supply of official photography coming out of the Western Front, British General Headquarters required that all official photographers should be given officers’ commissions and access to a personal vehicle – giving them a relatively privileged degree of freedom to move themselves and their equipment throughout the lines. In practice this system was less than adequately managed, as all the British official photographers received the honorary rank and pay of the Lieutenants, while the main Dominion photographers were promoted to the higher rank of Captain, including New Zealand’s Henry Sanders. However, like their unofficial colleagues from the press, the official photographers still faced the same dismissal of their status in the eyes of many of their military superiors. When the head of the Pictorial Propaganda Department, Ivor Nicholson, visited the Western Front in October 1917 he complained to Charles Masterman that the official photographers under his control were “not treated with the same respect as the correspondents, nor even as officers.” According to Malvern, the problem seems to have arisen in part because these men may have lacked the usual social standing

255 Henry Sanders was originally employed as a Lieutenant in March 1917 but was promoted to a Captain’s rank by October 1917. AABK. 18805. AccW5550. bx 112. 0101607. Wellington Office: Archives NZ
256 Malvern, Modern art, Britain and the Great War: witnessing, testimony and remembrance, 49.
required to gain an officer’s position but primarily it was due to the strongly held perception that classed all photographers together as “craftsmen providing a service, rather than distinguished as individuals as artists were.”

Contrary to this perception of status, the British official war artists were certainly not all high-ranking individuals. Artists like William Orpen, John Lavery, John Singer Sargent and Augustus John did move in high society circles but they were essentially self-made men who had carved out considerable reputations for themselves within this world in order to practice their trade as portraitists. While on the Western Front, Orpen in particular continued to live his lavish lifestyle as much as possible, hiring out comfortable accommodation, dining with generals and “shamelessly exploiting his highly placed connections [to] become more or less a law unto himself.”

In their civilian lives, these artists were celebrated individuals whose status was confirmed through their association with distinguished institutions like the Royal Academy of Arts, which brought them financial success and a clientele of wealthy patrons. By contrast, at this point in history, there were very few professional photographers who could claim the same degree of fame or level of social standing as ‘artists’ in their own right. The potential exceptions to this rule, could possibly be found in two of the Australian official photographers, Frank Hurley and George Hubert Wilkins (1888–1958) who had both found a degree of artistic credibility through their participation in pioneering polar expeditions prior to the war: Hurley with Douglas Mawson (1911–1914) and Ernest Shackleton in Antarctica (1914–1917); and Wilkins in the Canadian Arctic with Vihjalmur Stefansson (1913). However, the majority of the British and Dominion official photographers were selected

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257 Ibid.
258 John Singer Sargent was the son of a surgeon making him essentially middle class from a relatively well off family but his status as an American still made him an outsider within British high society.
Viney and Imperial War Museum (Great Britain), Images of Wartime: British art and artists of World War One, 25-36, 53-56.
259 Quotation from: ibid., 27.
because of their talents as professionals working for the illustrated press – an industry where their production, however well crafted, was not judged for its own artistic merits but as a vehicle to enhance journalistic reportage.\textsuperscript{261}

Later in the war the status of the official photographers did slowly begin to change. The establishment of the Imperial War Museum in 1917 saw the focus of official photography shift from documentation for the purpose of propagandist publicity for publication in the illustrated press to documentation for the purpose of posterity. The Museum sought to collect artefacts with which to commemorate the war and photographs were considered an important part of this national record. During the war, Britain’s official photographers, including those working for New Zealand, were made aware of the Museum’s intentions and were requested to adjust their output accordingly.\textsuperscript{262} By January 1919, the Imperial War Museum took over the entire archive of official photographs accumulated over the course of the war by Wellington House’s Pictorial Propaganda Department and its successor the Ministry of Information’s Photographic Bureau.\textsuperscript{263}

Throughout 1918 Lord Beaverbrook, who had a keen understanding of the value of positive public promotion, did much to enhance the artistic stature of photography by ensuring that the work produced for the British Ministry of Information and the Canadian official photography unit was frequently exhibited to the public in art galleries throughout London.\textsuperscript{264} The Imperial War Museum also recognised the need to showcase their accumulating collection during the war to increase public morale and promote confidence in the imminent success of the Allied campaign. Not long after the appointment of Sanders and Scales had been officially approved, the British War Cabinet informed the authorities at Government House in Wellington that they were called upon to supply the Imperial War Museum in London with suitable materials “illustrating New Zealand’s activities in connection with the war.”\textsuperscript{265} Keen to

\textsuperscript{261} “The photographer was accustomed to his work being incorporated as part of a general layout for publication and his role remained that of a craftsman providing a service rather than an individual achievement. The names of the official war correspondents and artists became well known but the official photographers remained more or less anonymous.” Carmichael, \textit{First World War Photographers}, 147-48.
\textsuperscript{262} ACGO, IA. 8333, 1. bx 2842. 124/52/8. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
\textsuperscript{263} Carmichael, \textit{First World War Photographers}, 21, 148-49.
\textsuperscript{264} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{265} Point no. 1 of the 1968 analysis of the establishment of the New Zealand War Paintings Collection.
demonstrate New Zealand’s unswerving support of the Empire’s ambitious plan, Prime Minister William Massey (1856–1925) advised Britain that the Dominion was considering the creation of a complementary War Section in its own national museum. Although little appears to have been done to develop this project further at this point, Massey did initiate the provision of items for the London Museum. High Commissioner Mackenzie was assigned to the task and appointed as New Zealand’s representative on the National War Museum’s organisational committee. A year later, in January 1918, New Zealand’s official war photographs were included in the Imperial War Exhibition held at the Royal Academy premises at Burlington House, London. The opening of the exhibition by Lord French was reported in the major regional New Zealand newspapers, which all noted that New Zealand’s contribution to the war was well represented through the featured photographs. The London correspondent for The Otago Daily Times commented that the works, “illustrate every side of the life of the division, and include many fine views of different aspects of the operations at Messines.”

In spite of the praise they received in the press, the circumstances surrounding the production of New Zealand official photographs limited the ability of Sanders and Scales to claim the status of New Zealand’s first official war artists. Therefore, in spite of the indisputably admirable work produced by these men, this thesis will maintain the division between the photographic work created by Sanders and Scales and the drawings, paintings and sketches made by the other official war artists employed by New Zealand in the First World War. The following analysis will not examine the artistic merits of their output in greater detail and the work of Sanders and Scales will henceforth be only be discussed as points of comparison for their historical content when appropriate.

ACGO, IA. 8333, 1. bx 2842. 124/52/8. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.

Letter to the High Commissioner regarding the Imperial War Museum’s War Trophies committee and Captain Gambill, 11.01.1918


“Untitled [War News from London],” Otago Daily Times Saturday 23 March 1918.
Although the exhibition of Sanders and Scales’ photographs did much to promote the Dominion’s war effort to the British public, the New Zealand Government still resisted the growing number of calls to assign official artists to the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. On 24 January 1918, Mr T.C. Gotch, the President of the Royal British Society of Colonial Artists, wrote to the High Commissioner Mackenzie in London, enquiring “if anything is being contemplated in the way of War Memorial pictures recording the part which the Dominion of New Zealand has taken in the War, similar to the effort now being made on behalf of the Dominion of Canada. Should anything be in contemplation the Council of the Society… would be pleased to act in an advisory capacity, if desired, and would do anything in its power to forward the matter.”

The High Commissioner’s Secretary replied that “this Office has not been advised of any intention on the part of the Government of New Zealand to have memorial paintings in connection with the war, but the establishment of a War Relic Museum is in hand, and memorial pictures may be arranged for later on.” Mr Gotch’s offer was sent to the Prime Minister and then forwarded to the Department of Internal Affairs, which, in turn, sent it onto the Director of the Dominion Museum, J. Allan Thomson, to give his opinion. This, however, was a slow process and it was not until 14 May 1918 that Thomson sent back his response to Internal Affairs, stating that, “Any helpful suggestions received from Mr Gotch should be welcomed” but that “There should be no need, however, to go beyond our shores for the artists to do this class of work.” Thomson’s recommendation was approved in mid May by the Honourable George Russell (1854–1937), Minister of Internal Affairs. High Commissioner Mackenzie subsequently advised the Royal Society that

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271 T.E. Donne, Secretary of the Department, NZ High Commission, London to T. C. Gotch, President of the Royal British Colonial Society of Artists, Penzance, Cornwall, 28.01.1918. Ibid.
272 A similar report of this conversation was also published in the Evening Post on the 29 May 1918, p.8.
Memorandum from J. Allan Thomson, Director of the Dominion Museum to J. Hislop, Under Secretary, Department of Internal Affairs, 14.5.1918. Ibid.
their generous offer would be gladly availed of, if necessary.273 Although the assistance of this institution would certainly have been a boon to any war art programme, the bureaucratic delay involved in obtaining it was considerable. Frustrated by the lack of progress being made by the Government, several important officials within the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in London decided to take matters into their own hands and secured the services of New Zealand's first official war artist, Nugent Welch.

Better Late than Never – Nugent Welch, New Zealand's Divisional Artist

NZEF Order 529 – 'Artists in NZEF'
O.C.'s (Officers Commanding) in all formations, Units and Depots etc., will render through the proper channels a return of artists (if any) upon their strength, such return to be rendered to Headquarters NZEF by 31 March 1918. Particulars are required of those skilled in oils or watercolours and of black and white artists. Names submitted should be those of artists of some standing in New Zealand and particulars of the class of work done, exhibitions at which their canvases have been hung, or of the papers to which they have contributed will, be supplied.274

On 28 February 1918, NZEF Order 529 was issued throughout the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. Sent at the bequest of the New Zealand Division's Commanding Officer, Major General Russell, this initiative prompted a thorough search within the ranks for suitable artists who could be charged with the role of recording the events of the First World War from a New Zealand perspective.

273 J. Hislop Under Secretary, Department of Internal Affairs on behalf of Hon. Minister Mr Russell, 16.5.1918, written on memorandum (above) from the Director of the Dominion Museum to the Department of Internal Affairs (14.5.1918).
Ibid.
Russell’s Order marked the first attempt by the New Zealand Expeditionary Force to simulate the achievements of the large-scale war artist programmes produced by the other major nations participating in the war. Correspondence from this period suggests that Russell and his associates in the Expeditionary Force were keenly aware that their Government’s disinterest in art meant that the nation was lagging embarrassingly behind Britain, Canada and Australia in the area of war commemorations. Only a month before Russell issued NZEF Order 529, an exhibition of works by the first official Australian war artist, Lieutenant William Dyson, promoting the Australian war effort, had been held in London to great critical success.275 The New Zealanders were also aware that the British were planning their *British Artists at the Front* series of London exhibitions across 1918 to promote the work of official artists C.R.W. Nevinson, Sir John Lavery, Paul Nash and Eric Kennington and that each exhibit would be accompanied by sales of a high quality souvenir monograph, complete with impressive full colour plates of the artists’ work.276

Once the decision was made to create a New Zealand war art programme within the Expeditionary Force, Russell assigned the task of organising the employment of any artists to Captain Reginald Frank Gambrill (1891–c.1976) who was based at the New Zealand War Records Section in Bloomsbury Square, London. To establish the best methodology to manage a unit of artists, the New Zealanders consulted the Canadian and Australian war art programmes and officials from the British Expeditionary Force. It was eventually decided that the New Zealand programme would use the Australian Imperial Forces’ system of artist recruitment and organisation. Any appropriately qualified soldier or civilian artist could be selected for

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official duties though they would first be employed on probation for three months. The New Zealand War Records Section would provide all necessary equipment and materials. When completed, the artworks produced would become the property of the New Zealand Government.277

Russell and the Expeditionary Force’s General Commanding Officer in the United Kingdom, Brigadier General George Richardson had ultimate control over the project.278 They determined that the main objective of the programme would be that the artists create “artistic work of an historical nature” to record New Zealand’s contribution to the First World War. This was to involve the recording of “sketches and plans of depots, hospitals, and camps, special appliances” in the United Kingdom and “caricatures and portrait work of personnel of NZEF.”279 A note with recommendations to the Section from Mr Charles Bean, who had been the driving force behind the establishment of the Australian War Records Section and the appointment of Will Dyson, also suggested that all the New Zealand war artists should be given training in the production of effective camouflage design and painting techniques – skills that they could then pass on to other soldiers. Although this aspect of the New Zealand war artists’ job description was drafted in the original proposal created on the subject, it does not appear to have been implemented.280

Through Order 529 the Expeditionary Force endeavoured to harness the creativity already encouraged within the New Zealand ranks by their two semi-official periodicals – the bi-monthly Chronicles of the N.Z.E.F., and the annual New Zealand at the Front (1917, 1918).281 The Chronicles had been running since 30 August

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277 Extract from A.I.F Orders, 22nd February 1918 - "Vacancies for Artists and NZEF War Records Section War Artist Programme Regulations Draft." ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/1. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
279 Extracts from NZEF War Records Section War Artist Programme Regulations Draft in - Undated note in - Ibid.; AWM25, 1013/35, Correspondence regarding War Artists, Australian Headquarters, Egypt, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.
280 Written and illustrated by men of the New Zealand Division, New Zealand at the Front (London: Cassell, 1917); Written and illustrated by men of the New Zealand Division, New Zealand at the Front, 1918 (London: Cassell, 1918).
1916. It had been founded by the son of High Commissioner Mackenzie, Clutha Nantes Mackenzie (1895–1966), who also edited the magazine despite having been blinded while on active service at Gallipoli. New Zealanders also contributed to a large number of unofficial publications including the Gallipoli broadsheets *Dinkum Oil* and the *Peninsula Press*; *Kia ora Coo-ee* in the Middle East and a variety of souvenir troopship magazines. Each of these publications featured an amalgamation of soldier stories, poetry, cartoons, illustrations and paintings produced by amateur enthusiasts through to professional artists.

![New Zealand at the Front, 1918](image)

*Figure 38 – New Zealand at the Front, 1918 – featuring a cover image by Nugent Welch.*

The response to Order 529 returned a relatively short list of potential soldier-artists. The document compiled by the officers of the New Zealand Division gave the basic information of these men, their unit, rank and artistic qualifications. On the original

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282 Written and illustrated by men of the New Zealand Division, *New Zealand at the Front, 1918.*
document, the entry for 13835 Lance Corporal Nugent Herrmann Welch from the 2nd Battalion of the New Zealand Rifle Brigade was singled out from the group as a viable candidate. On 18 April 1918, Captain Gambrill wrote to the Expeditionary Force Headquarters in London to suggest the employment of Welch as the New Zealand's first official war artist. “From the return of artists rendered and enquiries made locally this N.C.O. [Non-Commissioned Officer] seems to be the most suitable man for the position.... He is a specialist in landscape work.... The Division does not state for what purpose the artist is required but could easily satisfy itself if Lance Corporal Welch is capable of meeting its requirements.” Gambrill suggests that Welch be seconded from his current duties for the agreed three-month probationary period after which time his full official appointment would be considered. Welch's appointment was formalised by the end of the month and he was attached to the New Zealand forces serving on the Western Front as their 'Divisional Artist'.

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283 Welch’s second or middle name is spelt differently in different publications. His middle name is spelt Herrmann in his war records. Platts and his Obituary spell it 'Herman.' This thesis will adopt the spelling Herrman used in the official publications.


284 Indicated by a bold green pencil mark and question mark beside his name in the file. Welch’s qualifications entry was also the largest of those returned.

ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/1. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.

285 Letter from Captain Gambrill of War Records to the HQ NZEF, London, 18.04.18 in -Ibid.
Welch was indeed an excellent candidate for this role. Born in Akaroa on 30 July 1881,287 his father, Joseph Sandell Welch, was as an assistant land surveyor and an amateur watercolour artist who, along with John Barr Clarke Hoyte and William Matthew Hodgkins, had been one of the founders of Dunedin’s Otago Society of Arts in 1876. From his father, Nugent learnt his love of the New Zealand landscape. In 1893 the family moved to Wellington where Nugent would remain based for the

Figure 39 – Nugent Welch, *Summer* (1916).286

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287 Welch’s birthdate is recorded as being 30 July 1882 throughout his records with the New Zealand Defence Force, making him 34 and 6 months when he enlisted on 3 March 1916 instead of his actual 35. As mentioned previously, the age restriction for active service overseas was between 18 and 40 years. (Personal Correspondence, Mrs Goodley Faith, Library Assistant, Kippenberger Military Archive and Research Library, National Army Museum Te Mata Toa, 02.04.09.) Therefore there does not appear to be any particular reason for his discrepancy. All other biographical details found have referred to his birthdate as 1881, including his entry in the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* and his obituary in the *Evening Post*, where he is referred to as being 88 at the time of his death. He died almost two weeks before his 89th birthday.

majority of his life. He took evening art classes and completed first and second level drawing qualifications at the Wellington Technical School in the 1890s under the direction of Arthur Dewhurst Riley (1860–1929), Mary Elizabeth Richardson Tripe (1870–1939), and James Nairn. Although Welch was essentially self-taught, in her history of New Zealand artists from this period, Una Platts also mentions that Welch attended the Canterbury School of Fine Art for a short period.\textsuperscript{288} This is probably where he first met an elderly Petrus Van der Velden (1837–1913), an artist whose influence would guide Welch’s passion for landscape painting as did the published instructional texts of another artist mentor, the famous British artist and President of the Royal Society of British Artists, Sir Alfred East (1844–1913).\textsuperscript{289} In 1904 he began exhibiting his work at the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts in Wellington. After the death of Nairn, Welch was influential in reviving the Wellington Art Club (temporarily renamed the Wellington Sketching Club) in 1906 and reinstated its \textit{en plein air} sketching excursions to Pumpkin Cottage, Nairn's rural retreat at Silverstream in the Hutt Valley.\textsuperscript{290} Welch worked at the Wellington Harbour Board until 1907 when he abandoned this position to become a full-time professional artist – his passion for art trumping his dissatisfaction with the structure of his life as an accounts clerk.\textsuperscript{291}

\textsuperscript{288} This part of his training is not mentioned in any other resources used. Platts, Nineteenth century New Zealand artists: a guide & handbook, 251.
\textsuperscript{289} Hall, "The Art of Nugent Welch."; Alfred East, \textit{The art of landscape painting in oil colour} (London: Cassell, 1906); Alfred East, \textit{Brush and pencil notes in landscape} (London: Cassell, 1914).
\textsuperscript{290} Between 1902 and 1910 the Club appears to have moved in and out of recess and changed its name and emphasis. After Nairn's death in 1904 the Club went into hiatus. Early in 1906 the Art Club was revived as the Wellington Sketching Club due to the lack of any other art club in Wellington. By 1910 the Wellington Art Club was reformed under its original name. Wellington Art Club, \textit{Seventy Colourful Years: a history of the Wellington Art Club}, 10-17.
Welch’s credentials in his military personnel records note that after this decisive move, he enjoyed a successful career in New Zealand, exhibiting paintings in oil and watercolours at all the main regional art societies before enlisting with the armed forces in March 1916. His artworks had been purchased for the collections of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts and Christchurch’s Canterbury Society of Arts (in 1915 and 1916 respectively). Welch was particularly well regarded for his landscape and marine scenes, which were given favourable mention in a 1917 issue of the British art magazine *The Studio* and again in their special issue publication *Art of the British Empire Overseas*. The magazine’s New Zealand correspondent, E.A.S. Killick, praised Welch’s watercolours for their “undiluted expression of his artistic self” and reported that, of the many young talents in the Dominion, “the work

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294 Entry on N.Welch from responses to NZEF Order 529 in - ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/1. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
of Welch calls for particular attention." In April 1918 the 'Bookman' section of Wellington's *Evening Post* made special comment of Welch's work in its review of *New Zealand at the Front.* "Welch, the Wellington artist, has a black and white drawing, also a watercolour drawing of a battered dwelling and smashed trees, a common scene of somewhere in France, entitled 'Man's Inhumanity.' Some of the unofficial war paintings he made while on active service in France were also shown at this time at the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts' sketch-exhibition. The *Dominion* critic commented, "Mr Welch's two sketches represent French farmhouse scenes. They are quiet but picturesque bits of colour."
Welch’s artistic capabilities had already been brought to the attention of the authorities in the New Zealand War Records Section a few months before he gained his secondment. On the 11 February, 22739 Corporal Thomas Donald Horne Hall (1885–1970), a former comrade of Welch’s from the B. Company of the Rifle Brigade’s 2nd Battalion, had written to Captain Gambrill suggesting that the records the Expeditionary Force were compiling of New Zealand’s contribution to the war would be greatly enhanced by the addition of a war artist. The enthusiastic Corporal Hall was at this time working for the New Zealand War Records Section. He had been transferred to this Section in August 1917, and would remain in its service until his discharge in July 1919, eventually rising to the rank of Staff Quartermaster Sergeant.299

In his letter of appeal to Captain Gambrill, Corporal Hall dismissed the use of photography and film as war documentation, suggesting that these media could not comparably achieve the same level of vitality and arresting engagement with the viewer as was possible in a painting. He suggested that the war provided “a unique opportunity for securing war pictures of a realism not obtainable by those who have not experienced the incidents of battle.” This could be achieved by utilising the skills of the well-qualified artists within the ranks who already contributed their work to the publications New Zealand at the Front and Chronicles of the N.Z.E.F. He specifically included the name of Lance Corporal Welch, who in collaboration with other well-known New Zealand artists could create a valuable war art collection for the Dominion.300 This is the earliest reference to the need for war artists that appears in the War Records Section’s file ‘Formation of a Branch for obtaining a record in art of the doings of the NZEF – Scope of Work.’ It is unclear whether this letter ever reached the eyes of Brigadier General Richardson or Major General Russell but

299 Before the war Hall had been a public servant with the Department of Agriculture and his personnel records with the New Zealand Defence Force indicate that his knowledge of this area may have been briefly put to use from the beginning of 1917 when he was transferred from the New Zealand Rifle Brigade to the 2nd Anzac Topographical Section, based at the Australian General Headquarters where he worked for several months with the 42 Squadron of the Royal Flying Corps. It is unclear exactly what he was doing with the Squadron but it was from here that he was transferred to his work with the New Zealand War Records Section around the 17 August 1917.


300 Letter from Corporal T.D.H. Hall to the O.C. of the War Records Section, 11.02.18.

ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/1. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
Corporal Hall’s words were aptly timed and may have encouraged the Expeditionary Force authorities into action. It certainly would have alerted them to the presence of Welch within the ranks serving on the Western Front.

Figure 42 – Nugent Welch, *Shell-wrecked YMCA Hut* (c.1918).\(^{301}\)

Figure 43 – Nugent Welch, *Ruined Church, Flemincourt* (c.1918).\(^{302}\)

\(^{301}\) Nugent Welch, *Shell-wrecked YMCA Hut*, c.1918. Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, Wellington Office.
By the beginning of May 1918, Welch had been furnished with art materials and despatched to his new duties. Welch appears to have very much enjoyed his official posting and the War Records Section were pleased with the quality of his work. Later that year the *Otago Daily Times* reported that when "Writing to friends in Wellington, Mr Nugent Welch, the Wellington military artist, who is painting war pictures in France for the New Zealand Government, states that he has already had two of his canvases accepted by the authorities." However Welch was not given a promotion to match his circumstances. He retained his lowly rank of Lance Corporal until August 1918 when he was finally given the temporary rank of Sergeant but even this was not officially conferred until December. This issue complicated Welch’s ability to move freely around the frontlines – without an officer's commission he could be restricted from visiting certain areas purely because his rank did not give him the authority to be there. The rigid confines of the military hierarchical system were bypassed by Britain, Canada and Australia by giving their official war artists honorary commissions. As Gavin Fry explains, “The granting of officer rank, without the power but with all the privileges, meant that the war artists were an integral part of the units to which they were attached and easily identified as such.” After the initial probationary period the Australians assigned their artists to the rank of Lieutenant (unless they already held a higher rank). When negotiations were finalised, the New Zealand war artist programme had agreed to attribute their artists to the rank of Captain (which stood above Lieutenant). This also translated to a marginally higher rate of pay than that given to the Australian artists, which was unusual considering the funding issues that beset the New Zealand programme. The difference may have been due to the lesser number of artists employed for New Zealand but this assumption cannot be substantiated. In practice however, the New Zealand War Records Section only ever gave the honorary rank of Captain to their civilian war artists. Welch was never given a commission despite having served the longest

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303 "News In Brief," *Otago Daily Times* 20 December 1918.
304 Notes in his NZDF Personnel File show the temporary rank of Sergeant was given on 10 August 1918 and the full promotion granted on 19 December 1918. He remained on the role of the New Zealand Rifle Brigade.
AABK. 18805. Acc W5550. bx 10. 0091470. Wellington Office: Archives NZ
305 Fry, "Australian official war art and artists," 24-25.
period as an official artist. In later life, Welch would recall in an interview that he had actually dismissed the prospect of and increase in his status. “I had to interview [with] General Richardson when this thing cropped up and he was hinting there was a commission attached to it. See I had expenses and that sort of thing. However that was no good to me. I didn’t want to be a lieutenant or anything. I cried off that one and he said, oh well, you’ll need extra when your doing your work over in London so they made me a sergeant at 7-and-six a day instead of 5 bob.” However, this issue would, nonetheless, later cause considerable tension when other artists were given promotions above Welch.

In July 1918, J. McDonald, a civilian friend of Welch, wrote to the Director of the Dominion Museum to express concerns about the terms of Welch’s employment. “So far Mr Welch has given no indication in his letters whether he is to receive any more than the regulation private’s pay for the special work on which he is now engaged, but in view of the fact that both the official war correspondent and the official photographer have been given honorary military rank with the pay attached to the same, it is to be hoped that the Government will raise his status and grant him the pay to which his special qualifications fully entitle him.” This letter prompted a series of enquiries by the Departments of Defence and Internal Affairs with the Base Records Branch in Wellington about Welch’s appointment. It was quickly realised that none of these organisations had ever been officially informed about the terms under which the New Zealand Expeditionary Force had employed Welch as their official war artist. When questioned, J. McDonald also could not provide any clear information about the details of who had approved the decision. It was not until 26 October 1918 that the Commandant of the New Zealand Military Forces in New Zealand, Major General Alfred William Robin, informed the Minister of Defence, James Allen, that Welch had been appointed to the “Art Branch” under commission

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306 Nugent Welch. “[Interview with Nugent Welch, New Zealand war artist, WWI].” (Wellington Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision – Radio New Zealand Collection, c. late 1960s).
307 Letter from J. McDonald, Art Assistant to Mr Thomson, Director of the Dominion Museum, 17.07.1918
308 Ibid.
309 Series of letters in August 1918 - Ibid.
“to paint pictures in connection with the work of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. Details in connection with this branch have not yet reached New Zealand.”

Missed Opportunities & Rejections – Wright, Bowring, Kennington and Stuart-Hill

Several prominent New Zealand artists are now at the front, including Messrs Johnston and McCracken of Auckland and Mr Nugent Welch of Wellington and several younger men, and there is now in Wellington Mr A.F. Nicoll, who served in Egypt and France and lost a leg at the front. Mr Nicoll made numerous sketches, and could use these to paint larger pictures, and doubtless other New Zealand artists are doing the same.

While the miscommunication between the War Records Section and the Government authorities in New Zealand had been helpful in allowing the Expeditionary Force to push through their official war artist programme, it also led to several missed opportunities for further artist appointments. When Director Thompson of the Dominion Museum wrote the above recommendations to the Department of Internal Affairs on the 14 May 1918, he was obviously unaware of Welch’s recent ratification as a Divisional Artist. Thompson knew Welch well through the Wellington art community and had a great respect for his talents. Aside from Welch, each of the servicemen suggested by Thompson would also have made excellent candidates for official war artist positions.

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Ibid.
311 A similar report of this conversation was also published in the Evening Post on the 29 May 1918, p.8.
Memorandum from J. Allan Thomson, Director of the Dominion Museum to J. Hislop, Under Secretary, Department of Internal Affairs, 14.5.1918.
When the war broke out, Francis McCracken (1879–1959) and William Robert Johnson (1890–1964) were both still living in Auckland where, just a few years earlier, they had each studied at the Elam School of Art under Archibald Frank Nicoll (1886–1953). Nicoll had moved to the United Kingdom in 1910 to continue his own studies at the Westminster School of Art and the Scottish Academy of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. He also studied and later taught at the Edinburgh College of Art until mid-1914 when he returned to New Zealand for a visit.\textsuperscript{313} War was declared during his voyage home and not long after his return to the Dominion, Nicoll decided to enlist. Arriving with the 5\textsuperscript{th} Reinforcements in Egypt, he served with the New Zealand Field Artillery’s Divisional Ammunition Column (D.A.C.) in the latter half of the Gallipoli Campaign and was then sent to France but his experience of the Western Front was limited. Within a few months he was severely wounded, eventually losing most of his right leg to his injuries and a serious gangrene infection.\textsuperscript{314}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{note} Archibald Frank Nicoll, \textit{The Old Curiosity Shop, Cairo}, c.1915. Private Collection.
\bibitem{note} AABK. 18805. AccW5549. bx 81. 0086582. Wellington Office: Archives NZ
\end{thebibliography}
Figure 45 – *New Zealand at the Front, 1917* – featuring a cover image by William Robert Johnson.\(^{315}\)

McCracken also lost a leg as a result of his service with the Auckland Regiment. Like Nicoll, his experience of the European frontlines was brief – lasting only a few weeks between the end of 1917 and the start of February 1918.\(^{316}\) Of the three men, Johnson spent the longest time on the Western Front. From September 1916 to the end of the war, he was attached first to the Artillery’s D.A.C. and then to a Trench Mortar Battery, and managed to make it through this period of service without sustaining any major injuries.\(^{317}\) Johnson was however, completely overlooked for a war artist role. His skills were certainly known to the War Records Section, as his name was put forward following NZEF Order 259. It was particularly noted that his work had graced the cover of the 1917 issue of *New Zealand at the Front* but the report mentioned no other specifics about his career, making his candidacy seem weak in comparison to the achievements listed for Lance Corporal Welch in this

\(^{315}\) Written and illustrated by men of the New Zealand Division, *New Zealand at the Front*.

\(^{316}\) AABK. 18805. AccW5544. bx 57. 0072181. Wellington Office: Archives NZ

\(^{317}\) AABK. 18805. AccW5541. bx 66. 0061037. Wellington Office: Archives NZ
same document. Of the group suggested by Thompson, Johnson was probably the least well established, working as a sign writer before the war while both McCracken and Nicoll could cite their occupations as ‘artists’ at the time of their enlistment. Nicoll was certainly the most qualified of all the four men. Unfortunately though it is likely that both he and McCracken were eliminated as candidates because their new disabilities would have severely limited their ability to travel with the New Zealand Division. Instead, McCracken and Nicoll would later be offered opportunities to paint official portraits of New Zealand’s Victoria Cross winners but, as will be explained in the final chapter, even this process did not run altogether smoothly.

After the successful appointment of Welch, the War Records Section began searching for civilian artists of significant reputation with which they would further develop the quality of the New Zealand war artist programme – bringing it up to a similar standard to the official art units of Britain, Canada and Australia. Unfortunately however, the Expeditionary Forces' initial attempts to create a well-funded programme met a bureaucratic blockade in Wellington. The main point of contention was the interpretation of the reference in NZEF Order 529, which stipulated that the “names submitted should be those of artists of some standing in New Zealand.” In their initial search for artists, the War Records Section did not consider this to be a specific mandate to locate only artists from New Zealand but rather any artist of significant reputation whose name would be recognised in the Dominion. At a time when New Zealand still took its cultural lead from the United Kingdom, an artist of notable calibre within the British art community was particularly preferable in the minds of those in charge of the selection process.

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318 From the document titled: ‘Return of Artists with the New Zealand Division – called for in NZEF Order 529.’ ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/1. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
319 Ibid.
320 Point no. 2 of the 1968 analysis of the establishment of the New Zealand War Paintings Collection in - ACGO, IA. 8333, 1. bx 2842. 124/52/8. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
Following this logic, at the beginning of March 1918, Brigadier General Richardson visited the London studio of the British artist Henry Charles Seppings Wright (1849–1937) to view some of his recent works, including a painting depicting the Canadian action at Vimy Ridge that Wright was working on at the time. It is likely that Wright came to Richardson's attention through the exhibition of his painting *New Zealanders at Messines Ridge* (1917) that was part of an Imperial War Exhibition in April 1918 alongside New Zealand's official photographs. Richardson noted, in a memo to Captain Gambrill, his appreciation of Wright's talents and recommended him for the position of war artist for New Zealand. Wright accepted this offer in April following correspondence with Captain Gambrill, on the condition that he be paid to the rank of Major, which, as mentioned earlier, was above the pay rate of Captain that the War Records Section had agreed to offer their official artists.

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321 This is a poor quality image taken for personal record at the Imperial War Museum. The painting has yet to be digitised by the Museum. Henry Charles Seppings Wright, *New Zealanders at Messines Ridge, 1917*, 1917. Imperial War Museum, London.

322 The work was exhibited in Room III in the section 'Portraits and Pictures: British Photographs, Pictures' and is listed in the catalogue as item no.1232. *Catalogue of the Imperial War Exhibition - held at Burlington House under the auspices of the Imperial War Museum*, Royal Academy of Fine Arts and the Imperial War Museum, (London: A.A. Sudamore, Rosebury Press, April 1918), 46; ACGO, IA. 8333, 1. Bx 1651. 29/119. *Battle Pictures*. Wellington Office: Archives NZ

323 Correspondence between Captain Gambrill, New Zealand War Records Section, London and Henry Charles Seppings Wright, April 1918 in - ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/6. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
Wright was a highly respected war artist whose qualifications meant he could command a generous wage for his services. He had worked as a special war correspondent for *The Illustrated London News* from 1870, providing them with illustrated reports on conflicts in Ashanti (Ghana), Dongola (Sudan), Benin, Greece, Cuba and the Balkans. He spent time recording the diamond fields of South Africa in the 1870s and in 1899 was on his way back to report on the second Anglo-Boer conflict (now referred to as the South African War, 1899–1902) with other war correspondents, including a young Winston Churchill, when he was ordered off the ship and had to return to England. While based in London he did, however, produce a series of around 80 illustrations of this war based on the reported coverage. He also worked for Armstrong, Whitworth and Company in the Russo–Japanese War (1904); the *Central News Agency* in Tripoli in 1911; was in France when Antwerp was taken in the early stages of the First World War; and was present at the fall of

Also, memo between Brigadier General Richardson and Captain Gambrill, 02.03.18 in - ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/1. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.


325 Many of these were published in the London Illustrated News and the Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News.
Przemysl on the Russian Front (1915–1916). Before taking up his position as a war reporter, he had himself been a serviceman in the British Royal Navy, giving him a sound understanding of the situations he was depicting. He was particularly noted for his naval scenes and seascapes, one of which he exhibited at the British Royal Academy in 1901.

A telegram was sent to the New Zealand Defence Headquarters in Wellington, requesting approval for Wright’s appointment on 29 April 1918. This emphasised that the inclusion of artworks by Wright would be of significant benefit to the collection of the Dominion Museum. Unfortunately this request was declined by the Minister of Internal Affairs, George Russell on 25 May 1918 on the grounds that “so far as this Department is concerned it is considered there is no need to go beyond our own shores for work of this class, as there are several prominent New Zealand artists.

327 Collection of Ryno Greenwall - Auction Catalogue (with tribute by Mervyn Shear), (Rosebank, Johannesburg: Stephan Welz & Company, in association with Sotheby’s, 2007). [Link]
328 Henry Charles Seppings Wright, Roumania's Magnificent Cavalery - Troopers of renown in the army of our new ally, 9 September 1916. Wikimedia Commons.
329 Telegram from 'Vanquisher' (appears to be the code name for the NZEF Headquarters in London) to the Defence Headquarters in Wellington, 29.04.18 in ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/6. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
now at the front and several have returned, and later, if considered necessary, arrangements can be made for some of these to paint suitable pictures.”330 This letter illustrates the lack of priority that was given to the subject of war art in New Zealand in contrast to the sense of urgency and responsibility for the sake of posterity felt by those working on the project in London. It also highlights the fundamental problem of distance that inhibited the Dominion’s comprehension of this war. Although a telegram could be sent and received within the day, the vivid actuality of the conflict experienced daily by those in Europe and England could not be so easily conveyed to the men wielding their authority on the other side of the world.

Although it is not stipulated, it is also possible that Wright’s proposed employment may have been less favourably received owing to the fact that the pay rate he requested was above what the Wellington authorities believed was reasonable for the position, particularly when considering their previous negative reaction to purchasing the work of Moore-Jones.331

Conscious that in adhering to this decision, New Zealand would lose its opportunity to employ one of the top war artist correspondents in the British Empire, Brigadier General Richardson expressed his profound disappointment about the situation in a telegram to Wright, informing him that his recommendation had not been successfully approved.332 When news of Wright’s rejection reached Colonel Heaton Rhodes, he too was extremely disappointment at the lack of insight shown by the authorities in New Zealand. “Regret to hear you have not approved appointment Battle Artist for NZEF. Canada has 14, Australia 6, for France and Palestine. New Zealand after the War will have to be dependent on artists of other countries for pictures historical battle scenes. Strongly of opinion artist should be out with men associated. So essential do I consider this that I am prepared to pay artist at rate of pay of Major for 6 months, if N.Z. Government cannot see its way to appoint Official

331 Telegram from the Defence Headquarters in Wellington to ‘Vanquisher’ (NZEF Headquarters in London), 15.05.18 in - ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/6. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
332 Letter from Brigadier General Richardson to H.C. Seppings Wright, 16.05.18 in - Ibid.
Rhodes had been working in London as the Special Commissioner of the New Zealand Branch of the British Red Cross Society since early 1918. He was a former Cabinet Minister in William Massey’s Government and a highly regarded member of New Zealand society. However, even his substantial support of the war art programme appears to have had no influence on the New Zealand Defence Headquarters’ final decision on the subject.

In mid June 1918 the Minister of Internal Affairs, George Russell, made a statement to a representative from The New Zealand Times regarding the Government’s recent decision to reject Wright as a war artist. This was reported in several New Zealand newspapers including the Dominion and the Otago Daily Times. “The offer was considered, and the decision of the Government at the time was that if this work was to be done at all it should be done by New Zealand artists, of whom there were several in the forces, and some already returned to New Zealand.”

“My opinion (said the Minister, in conclusion) is that when the time arrives all the necessary painting can be done for New Zealand by New Zealanders; and I hope that those of our men who are competent will be employed by the Government in preparing suitable pictures for the National Collection.” These articles go on to praise the Government for its recent recruitment of Welch to the role of official New Zealand war artist, comparing ‘their’ decision to appoint this New Zealand artist to the Canadian Government’s commissioning of “thirty artists from their own country to paint war pictures.” It is difficult to dismiss Russell’s apparently staunch stance on this matter. His position of advocacy favouring of the rights of New Zealand artists to depict the New Zealanders at war is certainly commendable. As will be discussed later in this study, this formula did indeed produce the most successful results of the New Zealand war art programme. However, a wider examination of the Government’s overall treatment of New Zealand’s actual and potential war artists

333 Telegram from Colonel H. Rhodes at Vanquisher to Defence Headquarters Wellington, 21.05.18 in Ibid.
335 No response to Colonel H. Rhodes telegram from the New Zealand Defence Headquarters was present in the file.
ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/6. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
338 “War Pictures - Chance for New Zealand Artists.”
suggests that Russell may have just been playing the role of the consummate public servant in this scenario – campaigning for New Zealand jobs for New Zealanders while keeping the costs of this programme to a manageable minimum. There is no adequate way to judge whether Wright’s British perspective of New Zealand would have produced disappointing results but the loss of such a noted and experienced professional war artist should be considered a missed opportunity.

After seeing the articles regarding Wright’s recruitment in the press, Walter Armiger Bowring (1874–1931), a well respected, New Zealand based, artist and illustrator, took it upon himself to write to the Minister of Internal Affairs offering his artistic services to the New Zealand Government. His proposal was politely declined. Not to be put off, on 9 July 1918, Bowring wrote to the Honourable James Allen, Minister of Defence and Acting Prime Minister.

I am taking the liberty of writing to you on the matter also, wishing you will feel, as I do, that [the matter] is of much importance, and worthy of very earnest consideration. Firstly, sir, I would respectfully urge, that if the Government decides to carry out the project that no time should be lost in sending the artist (or artists) to the front, that the fighting may be actually seen and the real conditions and materials of warfare studied first hand, and where sketches and studies necessary to the finished pictures could be made. That the artist should be on the battlefield before the summer closes, I consider of great importance, as no doubt historic battles will be fought in which our soldiers will take part, furnishing perhaps more than one great subject for his brush. To leave the matter until the war is over and give the artist the task of painting imaginary historical pictures from descriptions by correspondents and others will merely bring disappointment to all concerned, for the battle scenes have been described by soldiers and correspondents alike, as being beyond ones imagination.339

Bowring continues, pointing out to Allen that “practically every country engaged in the present struggle, has its artists at work at the battle front, while Canada have

quite recently sent out her artists to painting the deeds of her soldiers, and priceless records of the part she is playing." He hoped Allen would be convinced that New Zealand should follow the lead of Canada. Bowring again put himself forward for the position, offering Allen any assistance necessary to get the project underway. "With so noble a task in front of him, the artist should be given every advantage to enable him to worthily produce faithful and stirring records of the great deeds of our boys."340

Bowring certainly had all the necessary credentials and standing to prompt his serious consideration for a position as an official war artist. Originally from Auckland, Bowring began his career working as an illustrator and cartoonist for several major New Zealand illustrated papers including New Zealand Observer, the Spectator and Christchurch's Weekly Press. As Art in New Zealand noted in a tribute to the artist after his death, "Mr Bowring's work in oils of that period of his studentship was precise and the sense of labour was oftentimes in evidence. Not so his caricatures, however, which were marked by good draughtsmanship, economy of line and spontaneity, which placed them in the forefront of pen and ink drawings in New Zealand."341 In 1905 he went to London to study with prestigious society artists William Orpen and Augustus John. Under their tutelage his painting greatly improved. While abroad he began contributing illustrations to the popular magazine Punch, a relationship he continued to foster for many years.342 Bowring returned to New Zealand around 1906 and began exhibiting widely throughout the local art societies, particularly with the Canterbury Society of Arts and the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts. He was especially noted for his excellent portraits and made a handsome living producing work for public and private individuals.343

343 Platts, Nineteenth century New Zealand artists: a guide & handbook, 49; Guy H. Scholefield, Who's who in New Zealand and the Western Pacific, 1925 (Masterton: [Printed by G.W. Venables], 1924), 27; Obituary, "Death of Mr. W.A. Bowring," The Evening Post 4 November 1931.
During the South African War, Bowring made a series of illustrations based on reports of New Zealand’s role in this conflict. Executed in black and white with a coloured wash, the works display Bowring’s noted economy of line and sense of the dramatic – the qualities which made him such an excellent illustrator. These simple paintings are somewhat crude in their representation of landscape and figure – their emphasis is instead placed on capturing the bravado and heroics performed by the New Zealand ‘troopers’ on the Veldt. Created in an era before the widespread use of photography in New Zealand’s print media, the role of newspaper illustrators such as Bowring became strategic to the maintenance of pro-war nationalist sentiment within the colony.  

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345 Walter Bowring produced a series of sketches c.1900 now in the collection the Hawke's Bay Museum and Art Gallery. Also in the collection are works by E.F. Hiscocks c.1902. These were reproduced in the 1953 *Bulletin of the First New Zealand Mounted Rifles Association*, no.73. These artworks are referenced in - Martin and Manawatu Art Gallery., *New Zealand Images of War*, 26-27.
Bowring was also one of the only New Zealand artists to paint the events of the First World War from the perspective of the Home Front. *The Departure of the Maheno* (1915) and *Homecoming from Gallipoli* (1916) record events during the Gallipoli Campaign as it was understood by the civilian population of New Zealand who, like the artist, never fought in the war but had to come to terms with the horrific impact it caused on a generation of their young men, who either lay dead in distant foreign countries or returned home injured and often psychologically scarred.

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It is unclear whether Bowring witnessed the scene depicted in *Homecoming* – the composition of his image is remarkably similar to a contemporary photograph documenting the arrival of SS *Willochra* at Wellington wharf on 15 July 1915 with the first load of wounded New Zealand men returning from Gallipoli.\(^{348}\) Nonetheless the


\(^{348}\) Despite much effort searching I have been unable to locate a digital copy of this image. This photograph was reproduced in an online article on the RSA website which I located in May 2011. This references the photograph as coming from the Alexander Turnbull Library Collection at the National
event obviously had a profound affect on Bowring. The painting is dominated by a seemingly unending line of khaki and bandages that zigzags down from the ship into a jostling throng of anxious civilians. The composition is closely cropped, mimicking the look of photography. This gives the impression that the sea of people extends far beyond the picture frame. There is a sense of relief in the scene – soldiers are shown kissing their sweethearts and embracing their children on the waterside while one man raises a hand in jovial greeting to a loved one as he descends the gangway from the ship. Newspaper reports of the event confirm the crowd's consolation rather than concern at the sight of the disembarking men.

The first impression obtained on viewing the men as a whole was that for sick and wounded men they all looked fairly well. There was little display of bandages or any other signs of wounds, but when one mixed with the men and questioned them they were far from being backward in proclaiming and showing them. They were the scars of war, and rightly were very proud of them. Generally speaking, the men were all glad to get back home again, but there were not a few who stated their intention of returning to the firing line as soon as they were fit. ³⁴⁹

Despite the generally upbeat tone, there was a lingering disquiet to this event that was reflected in the opening lines of this article, which states that, "Today opened a fresh chapter in the Dominion's history." The civilian public were well aware of the casualty figures being reported back from Gallipoli – the return of this contingent of 273 sick and wounded men was just the first of many. Bowring's painting subtly touches on this sense of uneasiness through the reserved but anxious expression of the wife, in white muff and scarf, who supports her wounded husband on his crutches and by his careful but prominent placement of the Union Jack flags as hood ornament on the motorcar in the foreground. These do not unfurl or flutter proudly in the Wellington breeze as would be expected but instead hang limply in front of a blinded soldier being carefully tended by a nurse.

To the credit of the Department of Internal Affairs, the case for Bowring’s employment as a war artist was given proper consideration after his initial application. J. Hislop, Under Secretary in the Department, did refer Bowring’s request to the Director of the Dominion Museum, J. Allen Thomson, who replied that

I am of opinion that, if the Government wished to send an artist to the front, Mr Bowring is specially well qualified for the position. He has lately been very successful as a landscape artist, and had also attained a considerable degree of success as a portrait artist. Probably few other artists in New Zealand have the same combination of qualifications. At the same time I must say that it seems to me that such an appointment would not be altogether fair to those New Zealand artists who are already risking life and limb in the Empire’s cause, unless it can be shown that Mr Bowring’s qualifications are greater than any of these. Of course, if the Government contemplates a large programme, it would be possible to employ Mr Bowring, and the other artists available as well.\(^{350}\)

In his report to the Minister of Internal Affairs, Hislop seconded Thomson’s views, adding that, “If the Government decides to send an artist to the front for the purpose of painting war pictures, I know of no one more fitted for this than this gentleman.” However Hislop and Thompson both qualified their endorsement by pointing out the costs that would be involved in sending Bowring and other potential artists from New Zealand to the Western Front or Middle East. To Hislop “the question is one of policy. At the same time unless the Government contemplates a large programme necessitating the expenditure of a considerable sum of money, it does seem to me that the suggestion recently made that advantage be taken of the New Zealand artists who are at the front to have sketches made which could be done at a reasonable rate is one that deserves consideration.” In other words it was a more economical solution, in terms of finances and manpower, for the Government to employ the easiest option – namely artists already within the Expeditionary Force – rather than the best and most suitable artist for the position who could supply the greatest quality work.

\(^{350}\) Letter from the Director of the Dominion Museum, J. Allen Thomson, to J. Hislop, Under Secretary, Department of Internal Affairs, 11 July 1918.
A memorandum put before Cabinet and the Minister of Defence on this subject in late July confirmed the Government's miserly intentions. Bowring was informed by the Minister of Internal Affairs on 24 July 1918 that “It was resolved that no action should be taken with respect thereto in the meantime.” Russell added “that Cabinet was quite appreciative of your ability as an artist, but felt that with the heavy financial strain caused by the War, it was not desirable at the present time to increase expenditure in the direction indicated.” This statement repeats the same reasoning as that given to Moore-Jones when his proposal was rejected just a few years earlier. Considering the clear stance taken by the New Zealand Government in its objections to the recruitment of Henry Charles Seppings Wright, it is ironic that, when presented with a candidate who exactly fitted their requirements, they still found grounds to refuse their official endorsement. This obvious backtracking tactic reveals much about the Government’s lack of genuine interest in pursuing the establishment of a high quality official artist programme.

Figure 52 – Eric Kennington, Ready for Service – left; and Into the Trenches – right (1917), from ‘Britain’s Efforts and Ideals’ lithograph series.

351 Letter from G.W. Russell, Minister of Internal Affairs to W.A. Bowring, 24 July 1918 in - Ibid.
Reference to letter sent by Bowring to the Minister of Internal Affairs, 09.07.18 in - AÇGO, IA. 8333, 1. bx 2842. 124/52/8. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
352 Eric Kennington, Ready for Service, from ‘Britain’s Effort and Ideals’, 1917. Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, Wellington Office; Eric Kennington, Into the trenches,
After the failure of the War Records Section to employ Wright, an unsuccessful attempt was made by Major General Russell to enlist the services of the highly regarded English artist Eric Kennington (1888–1960). Unfortunately Kennington declined the offer on the grounds that he was already employed with the British as an official war artist. Kennington did however suggest that the Section should purchase two of his paintings, *Lying Wounded* and *Gas Cases* to add to the New Zealand war art collection. This does not appear to have been carried out – again perhaps for financial reasons – but six lithographic works by Kennington from his *Making Soldiers* series, part of his contribution to *Britain’s Efforts and Ideals* (1917), are now present in the National Collection of War Art thanks to a donation in 1920.\(^{353}\)

Also at the same time as negotiations were underway with Wright, Captain Gambrill was in contact with another British artist, Alexander Stuart-Hill (1889–1948) who had been recommended to the War Records Section by a Captain from the New Zealand Medical Corps.\(^{354}\) It is obvious from Captain Gambrill’s comments to Stuart-Hill that he and Richardson were increasingly passionate about the need to find a suitable war artist to represent the New Zealand war campaign. “The matter is one of importance to our young country whose history is now rapidly being made, and I shall be glad if you would let me have your reply to put before the General at an early date, as it is important that no further time be lost.”\(^{355}\) They must have been heartened when Stuart-Hill confirmed his interest, not only in the position but also in the subject matter it offered.\(^{356}\) However, subsequent checks on Stuart-Hill’s

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\(^{353}\) *from ‘Britain’s Effort and Ideals’, 1917. Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, Wellington Office.*


\(^{355}\) *Correspondence between Captain Duncan New Zealand Medical Corp and Captain R. Gambrill, War Records Section, 13.04.18 in - ACID, WA. 10/1, bx 2. ZWR5/5. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.*

\(^{356}\) *Letter to A. Stuart Hill from Captain Gambrill, on behalf of Brigadier General Richardson, 19.04.18 in - Ibid.*

\(^{356}\) “I think the type your country presents would interest me as subjects.”- A. Stuart Hill in letter to Captain Gambrill, 07.04.18 in - Ibid.
qualifications gave a less than adequate picture of his reputation\textsuperscript{357} and Stuart-Hill himself made it clear that he was mainly dedicated to portrait painting whereas the Section was looking to find an artist “able to undertake the painting of landscapes depicting fields of operations in which our troops have been engaged.”\textsuperscript{358} Stuart-Hill’s name was nonetheless still put forward as a potential candidate for the role. However, for unexplained reasons, the formal confirmation of his appointment to the New Zealand Government was delayed for several months, by which point significant new developments had occurred within the war art programme.

From Documentation to Commemoration – a New Zealand War Museum is proposed

As the war years dragged on, public debate was beginning to grow in the media around the role of the Dominion Museum in New Zealand with forceful journalistic statements declaring, “We need a National Gallery as well as a Museum, and so far we have neither worthy of a country which justly considers itself ‘some place.’” The War Records Section had noted this article with interest in early March 1918.\textsuperscript{359} After the setbacks of the previous months and sensing that the public was behind their campaign, Richardson drafted a proposal to Prime Minister Massey, requesting permission to initiate the establishment of a New Zealand War Museum and related war exhibition in London to commemorate the Dominion’s contribution to the war. As the details of the content of this proposed exhibition are unclear, it is presumed that Richardson meant an exhibition of New Zealand war art, emulating the successful

\textsuperscript{357} [He is] quite unknown in art circles and his name is not recorded in any publications of reference.” Letter to Captain Gambrill from the Assistant Immigration Officer in response to Gambrill’s enquiry about A.S. Hill, 14.05.18 in -
\textsuperscript{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{358} Letter to A. Stuart Hill from Captain Gambrill, on behalf of Brigadier General Richardson, 19.04.18 in -
\textsuperscript{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{359} Newspaper clipping with no relevant details of provenance, attached to a memo between Brigadier General Richardson and Captain Gambrill, 02.03.18 in -
ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/1. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
exhibitions of work by official war artists that had already been held in London by Britain and Australia.

Placing particular emphasis on the telegram sent by Colonel Rhodes regarding the rejection of Wright, Richardson’s letter outlined the thwarted measures already undertaken to employ an official war artist for the purposes of such a museum project by members of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. “In my opinion, it is difficult for the Government in New Zealand to fully appreciate the effect of their action, which will result in the Dominion being in a very unfavourable position as compared with other Dominions in regard to establishing a War Museum after the War. Canada and Australia have each appointed a number of artists, and have realised large profits from the exhibition and of reproductions of their work, in addition to which they have gained considerable advertisement for their respective countries by the display of war pictures in London. We could, I feel sure, follow their example with great advantage.”

The War Museum project, he suggested, would aim both to function as a profitable business venture and to publicly promote the achievements of New Zealand. Profits would be put towards establishing additional war museums in New Zealand and used to maintain the War Records Section’s collection.

Richardson named Rhodes, Russell and High Commissioner Mackenzie as his supporters and then forwarded the document to the General Officer Commanding the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, Lieutenant General Godley who sent it on to Wellington with his strong recommendation. Faced with the joint persuasive force of such an eminent collection of men, Prime Minister Massey was obliged to

360 Extract from the letter sent to Prime Minister, the Honourable William Massey from Brigadier General Richardson, drafted 24.06.18.
ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 4. ZWR7/1. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
361 Details included in the Minutes recording the proceeding of the first meeting held of the New Zealand War Museums Committee, Monday 15.07.18, 3.30 p.m.
Ibid.
362 Lieutenant General Godley was at that point the top-ranking official for New Zealand. His credentials from the war also included the command of the New Zealand and Australian Division at Gallipoli, then on Western Front, command of the II ANZAC Corps and later the XXII Corps.
Grover, “Godley, Alexander John (1867-1957).”
363 ACGO, IA. 8333, 1. bx 2842. 124/52/8. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
accept the proposal. On 28 June 1918, Richardson was notified that the New Zealand Government had sanctioned his tactical *coup d'état*.

The first meeting of the Executive Committee for the New Zealand War Museum was held on Monday 15 July 1918. With Mackenzie as Chairman and Captain Gambrill as Secretary, the elected military and civilian members of the Committee ratified the terms of Richardson’s letter. They all agreed that for the Museum to adequately commemorate New Zealand’s participation in the Great War, it would require the creation of suitable artwork, including photography and the collection of a variety of war related memorabilia. Sub-Committees were established to seek out the necessary materials and personnel required.

Under the chairmanship of Brigadier General Richardson and with the assistance of Colonel Rhodes and Thomas Edward Donne, (as a representative from the New Zealand High Commissioner’s Office), the War Museum’s Art Sub-Committee was given the authority to appoint official war artists as necessary. Following the methodology already established in February around the recruitment of Lance Corporal Welch, the administration of the war art programme was again assigned to Captain Gambrill and the New Zealand War Records Section.

Following the model created by the British, Australian and Canadian war art programmes, the Museum Committee wanted their war museum and art exhibition to showcase the unique, individual experiences and achievements of the Dominion of New Zealand and the Expeditionary Force in the war. The content of the proposed Museum's exhibits were deliberately selected to create an image of New Zealand

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364 ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 4. ZWR7/1. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
365 The Executive Committee membership included: Sir Thomas MacKenzie, New Zealand High Commissioner (Chairman); Lieutenant General Sir A.J. Godley, K.C.B., K.C.M.G.; Major General Sir Andrew Russell, K.C.B., K.C.M.G.; Brigadier General G.S. Richardson, C.B., C.M.G.; Colonel The Honourable R. Heaton Rhodes; Colonel H.W. Parkes C.M.G, NZMC; Lt Colonel Hall, C.M.G. NZASC; Lt Colonel J. Hutchen, C.M.G.; Lt Colonel Pilkington, RNZA.; T.E. Donne, Esq, (High Commissioner’s Office); Captain R.F. Gambrill, Wellington Regiment (Secretary). Ibid.
366 This category included: captured war trophies; Allied arms, uniforms, equipment etc.; medical items and facilities used for disabled soldiers rehabilitation; models of New Zealand sanitary facilities in the field, trench, hospitals; currency collected; medals; and items regarding the Home Front in New Zealand. Ibid.
367 List of the New Zealand War Museum committees in - Ibid.
that would be distinct and separate from the New Zealand war related memorabilia being collected by the Imperial War Museum as part of their documentation of the whole British Empire’s contribution to the Great War. Aside from the artworks created by the War Artists’ Section, the New Zealand War Museum was to include displays of photographs and cinematography made by the official New Zealand photographic unit, as well as a wide variety of other exhibits.\textsuperscript{368}

The proposed New Zealand War Museum displays placed a strategic emphasis on two key themes: innovation (both military and scientific) and professionalism – traits that marked the major accomplishments of the New Zealanders in the war and which earned the predominantly volunteer Expeditionary Force distinction and the admiration of its peers. In doing this the Executive Committee was attempting to align itself with the intense sentiments of national pride that emerged following New Zealand’s fateful participation in the Gallipoli Campaign and which grew during the first Anzac Day commemorations held in New Zealand on 25 April 1916. In \textit{A Destiny Apart}, Keith Sinclair describes how “the First World War was a powerful stimulus to national feeling. It encouraged nationalism in many ways, especially among the men in the army. They lived close together and shared danger – both experiences encouraging a sense of community.” Sinclair references a questionnaire taken by a small representative group from the ranks of the Expeditionary Force that suggests, “that most New Zealanders were indifferent to imperial federation, to imperialism. The Empire belonged to an official rhetoric... ‘The Empire’ was for most people no more than an abstraction.” The successes achieved overseas by the men of the Expeditionary Force are often said to have fostered a new sense of patriotism in New Zealand that focused not on the British Empire but in the nation itself.\textsuperscript{369} In his 1935 publication \textit{The Silent Division} Ormond Burton summarised this phenomenon. “For about a hundred years we had been slowly laying the foundations of a national

\textsuperscript{368} Aside from the war art and photography the proposed museum would also feature: “captured war trophies;” a miscellaneous collection of “paper currency, medals, and co., from different countries;” and a Home Service Section with “exhibits of various Home service organisations in the United Kingdom during war.” An Allied Section would present the “British Army arms, ammunition, equipment” used by the NZEF and the “arms, clothing and equipment on models of all allied troops,” specifically those that were worn by the New Zealand soldiers. A Medical Section would display equipment for “medical, orthopaedic, jaw surgery, limbs, etc; Models of sanitary arrangements in field, trenches, hospitals” while a related section would be dedicated to illustrating the methods used by New Zealand to rehabilitate its disabled soldiers.

\textsuperscript{369} Sinclair, \textit{A Destiny Apart: New Zealand’s search for National Identity}, 170-73.
character of strongly marked individuality. The incidence of the war completed and intensified the process. We emerged from the conflict a nation, and a proud one at that, with traditions of courtesy, patience, endurance, steadfastness and valour.”

Over the course of time, the belief that this new nationalism developed as a direct result of New Zealand's participation in the First World War has been constantly repeated in exhibitions, memorials and commemorative events. It informs much of the commentary on the conflict by cultural and military historians like Christopher Pugsley, Michael King and Jock Phillips – becoming what Sinclair calls an “accepted wisdom” engrained into New Zealand’s collective understanding of its contribution to the Great War. Whether or not this theory has any true validity is becoming a matter of contention amongst contemporary scholars. What is certain is that, had the Executive Committee's vision for the New Zealand War Museum been allowed to come to fruition, it would have been one of the first, officially sanctioned creative projects to consciously illustrate how the traumatic events of the First World War transformed New Zealand’s understanding of its national identity and cultural difference.

While the disintegration of the proposed National War Museum will be examined in the final chapters of this study, in 1918 the plans for this museum were still intact and thriving. Under Captain Gambrill's supervision, New Zealand's war art programme began to expand in volume and stature – gaining enough critical mass by the end of 1918 to earn itself the administrative title of an Artists' Section. Those artists employed into the ranks of this Section fell into two distinct categories designed to fulfil two discrete functions. The first group were, like Welch, all soldier-artists – selected because of their technical abilities and temporarily seconded from the ranks of the Expeditionary Force to complete specific documentary commissions, mainly based in England. In addition, the War Records Section recruited a select group of

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reputable civilian-artists. These men had no prior military service in this war, but were chosen rather because their artistic talents were perceived to be the most suitable to commemorate the achievements and sacrifices of the New Zealand Division on the Western Front.

The Soldier-Artists of the New Zealand War Artists' Section

When the terms of Welch's appointment were being finalised in April 1918 Captain Gambrill proposed that additional artists could be recruited from "men convalescing in England [who] might be used without inconvenience, and the question of man power in France would not be seriously affected if one or two men were detailed from the Division. Should a man's work be not satisfactory he could be immediately returned to duty, and if a specially good man were found his position could then be defined."³⁷³ NZEF Order 529 had returned the names of several prospective artists then recovering in New Zealand hospitals from injuries or illnesses sustained during combat on the Western Front.³⁷⁴ From these lists Gambrill acquired the talents of a small group of well-qualified artists who he tasked with documenting the camps and hospitals used by the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in England.

³⁷⁴ ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/7. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
Private Frederick Herbert Cumberworth (1881–1977) enlisted in late August 1916 and was sent with the 21st Reinforcements to the Western Front at the beginning of 1917. He served with the New Zealand Machine Gun Corps until the end of 1917 when he became sick and was sent to a military hospital in London. After being initially diagnosed with influenza it was eventually realised he had contracted malaria while in France. Cumberworth spent the first half of 1918 at the New Zealand Convalescent Hospital at Grey Towers, Hornchurch.


376 Although Cumberworth’s birth date is registered throughout his NZDF Personnel File as being 22 May 1880 and in his duplicate file (containing his medical records) as 1882, his actual birth was registered in Rangiora, New Zealand in 1881 to his parents Jane Brice and Frederick John Cumberworth.

Before he enlisted, Frederick Cumberworth worked as a cartoonist and illustrator for the *Lyttelton Times*. In 1915 he had contributed work to a Belgium Relief fundraiser, printed in association with another former employer the *Christchurch Press*. Prior to this, around the turn of the century, he had worked in Sydney, Australia for the *Sydney Bulletin* and *Steele Rudd's Magazine*. In May 1918 the War Records Section assigned Cumberworth to document the camp, surrounding village and personalities of the New Zealand Command Depot, Codford. By the end of the month he had completed several watercolours, which he sent to Captain Gambrill to review. These were positively received and Cumberworth continued his work at Codford, but was also asked to make similar studies of the New Zealand Machine Gun Depot at Grantham. He delivered another body of work at the end of September, informing Captain Gambrill that “they are the best of several I have

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379 ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/1. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
executed and give I think a comprehensive idea of the camp [Grantham]. I am also carrying out several sketches of the more notable officers and N.C.O’s connected with this depot.”

Cumberworth excelled in portraiture. His ability to capture the unique character of his subjects can be seen in Captain Mewett, OC, Auckland Company, which aside from being elegantly executed, is a keen study of the stern but authoritative demeanour of this officer, who was charged with the Command of the A Company at Codford.

12/2034 James Edward Hedley Mewett, had served with the Auckland Infantry Battalion at Gallipoli and on the Western Front until February 1917 when he lost his right arm during a raid on the German lines, an event described in the official history of the Auckland Regiment. “Captain Mewett, though his arm was broken, shot three of the enemy, and refused to go back until time was up.” Mewett’s gallantry and stubborn devotion to duty in this action won him the Military Cross.

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380 Letter from Frederick Cumberworth to Captain Gambrill, NZ War Records Section, 30.09.1918. ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/3. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
381 Frederick Herbert Cumberworth, New Zealand lines, Belton Park Machine Gun Corps, 1918. Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, Wellington Office; Frederick Herbert Cumberworth, New Zealanders graves in Codford Churchyard, c.1918. Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, Wellington Office.
382 O. E. Burton, The Auckland Regiment: being an account of the doings on active service of the first, second and third battalions of the Auckland Regiment (Auckland: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1922),
While Cumberworth’s portraits of the officers and N.C.O’s he encountered give perceptive insights into the individual personalities who inhabited the New Zealand camps, his sketches of the camp buildings themselves were generally less successful. These appear to be executed relatively quickly and lack the finesse and attention to detail seen in his portrait studies or in works such as *The Cookhouse* or *Soldiers Marching*. Although this suggests a lack of competence in the rendering of architectural elements, records surrounding the employment of Cumberworth indicate that he was hampered in the creation of these outdoor works by consistently poor weather and that he only ever considered these watercolours as studies. In a letter to Captain Gambrill, Cumberworth states that, “all the small sketches that I have done should be regarded as preliminary sketches the best to be worked up later into larger pictures” and that he would leave it up to Gambrill “to decide which

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would be of most use to you.” Unfortunately, as was the case with so many other aspects of the New Zealand war art programme, this offer appears never to have been followed through, as the National Collection of War Art contains only a small selection of 13 works by Cumberworth, all of which are relatively diminutive in size, measuring an average of 250 x 360mm.

37199 Private Herbert Robert Cole (1889/90–1962) was also convalescing at Hornchurch when he and Cumberworth were brought to the attention of the War Records Section in April 1918. Cole had initially served in New Zealand’s Motor Boat Patrol Royal, part of the Naval Volunteer Reserve from December 1916. With the temporary rank of a Sub-Lieutenant he had travelled to England to undergo an officers’ training course at the Royal Naval College in Greenwich but failed his examinations and decided to transfer to the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in April 1917. He was eventually assigned to the Medical Corps, and sent to France with the No.4 Field Ambulance at the end of the year. He lasted only a few weeks on the Western Front before becoming ill with debilitating myalgia (muscle pain) and being sent back to England to convalesce.

Under the pseudonym Rix Carlton, Herbert Cole worked in New Zealand as a professional artist and was a frequent exhibitor, in oil and watercolour, at the Otago, Auckland and Christchurch art societies. During the war he had work shown at the New Forests Art Club in June 1917, had drawings included in *New Zealand at the Front* and assisted in the painting of scenery backdrops for the theatrical performances held for the troops when they were behind the lines in reserve.

Herbert Cole was sent to work under Lieutenant Colonel Pickerill, the famous New...
Zealand surgeon, then working on ground breaking facial reconstruction and plastic surgery techniques at Queen's Hospital, Sidcup. At this specialist jaw facility Cole was assigned to document “work of a surgical nature. He is giving a certain amount of satisfaction but his work does not equal that of the other artists there. He will be given a further trial however.”\textsuperscript{389} As Cole’s colleagues at Sidcup included the eminent British artist Henry Tonks, this slightly dismissive assessment of Cole’s work should be taken more as praise than criticism.

Tonks had trained as a surgeon before abandoning this profession to become an extremely successful artist, known, in particular, for his influential tutorship of many of the leading British artists of the early twentieth century while employed at the Slade School of Art in London. At the outbreak of the war Tonks resumed his medical career. By 1916 he was enlisted with the Royal Army Medical Corps and working at Sidcup documenting the pioneering surgeries of Pickerill’s colleague Harold Gillies. Tonks was later sent to the Western Front with John Singer Sargent to act as an official war artist for the British War Memorials Committee where he completed several works including \textit{An Advanced Dressing Station in France} (1918).\textsuperscript{390}

\textsuperscript{390} Viney and Imperial War Museum (Great Britain), \textit{Images of Wartime: British art and artists of World War One}, 57-58.
Figure 57 – Henry Tonks, *Images of facial reconstruction* (c.1916–1918).  

Figure 58 – Herbert Cole, Surgical images documenting the facial reconstruction of Private Skurr at Queen’s Hospital, Sidcup (c.1918).

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Henry Tonks’ images of the facial reconstructive surgery conducted at Sidcup are both intensely poignant and horrifyingly grotesque. While his medical knowledge ensured that the works were anatomically accurate surgical records, under Tonks’ highly skilled handling these pastel studies also manage to stand as complex works of art in their own right that turn the unimaginable suffering of these soldiers into images of sublime beauty. Although Herbert Cole’s paintings of the same subject matter do not bear close comparison with Tonks’ masterful production, Cole’s works are nonetheless finely handled examples of this difficult genre. His watercolour and pencil sketches show Cole’s carefully observed attention to the detail of the surgical processes undergone by his subjects. Photographs were also taken as records of this process but these were limited, by the standards of the era, to simple black and white. Cole and Tonks’ skills were used in addition to these images in order to document the visceral colour of the patients’ flesh and open wounds. Cole’s compositions are much simpler and more clinical than Tonks’ broadly executed pastels but the production of both artists were both still deeply emotive. It would be difficult not to be moved by the strong sense of pathos present in Cole’s series of paintings as they monitor the transformation of individual patients from their initial, wretched state through the many surgeries that eventually returned their scarred visages back into recognisably human faces. Major Pickerill was certainly appreciative of Cole’s work, endorsing his promotion to the rank of Sergeant in November 1918.393

392 Herbert Robert Cole, Dr Henry Percival Pickerill Papers. Facial reconstruction of Private Skurr - early stage surgical image, c.1918. Hocken Library, University of Otago, Dunedin; Robert Herbert Cole, Dr Henry Percival Pickerill Papers. Facial reconstruction of Private Skurr - late stage surgical image, c.1918. Hocken Library, University of Otago, Dunedin.
393 ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 4. ZWR9/46. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
Private George Ernest Woolley (1877–1952) was in his late 30s when he enlisted with the Expeditionary Force in April 1918. He was sent to England in July with the 41st Reinforcements aboard HMNZT 108 *Ulimaroa* – one of the last troopships to leave New Zealand. Although he was assigned to 3rd Reserve Battalion of the Otago Regiment upon his arrival in October, Woolley never saw combat on the Western Front as he contracted influenza either aboard ship or shortly after disembarking. He was sent for treatment to the British Military Hospital at Tidworth then was transferred to recuperate at Hornchurch where he came to the attention of the War Records Section.\(^{395}\)

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\(^{395}\) AABK. 18805. AccW5557. bx 109. 0125322. Wellington Office: Archives NZ
Figure 60 – George Woolley, *Brockenhurst Hospital No.1 HQ* (1919).\footnote{George Ernest Woolley, *Brockenhurst Hospital No.1 HQ*, 1919.}

Figure 61 – George Woolley, *Walton on Thames Hospital* (1918).\footnote{George Ernest Woolley, *Walton on Thames Hospital*, 1918. Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, Wellington Office.}
Woolley's Defence Force personnel files record his profession as an accountant but he also had a reputation in New Zealand as a talented amateur landscape painter and photographer, who exhibited regularly with the Auckland Society of Arts while based in Hamilton (till 1907) and then from Whangarei. In November 1918, while he was still recovering, Woolley made his first sketches for the War Artists' Section – documenting his surroundings within the grounds of Grey Towers, Hornchurch. Gambrill, now a Major, was very pleased with these works and, with the permission of Brigadier General Richardson, sent Woolley to paint all of the major New Zealand's medical facilities in England. It is unclear how many of these locations Woolley managed to visit before he was sent back to New Zealand for demobilisation on 15 August 1919. The National Collection of War Art contains only six finished oil paintings by Woolley and no sketches. All of these works are relatively small canvases, measuring an average of just 600 x 900mm. It is known that he travelled to Walton-on-Thames the No.2 New Zealand General Hospital in December. Woolley's picturesque painting of this facility is a perfect visual accompaniment to the description by Lieutenant-Colonel Myers in the official history of The War Effort of New Zealand.

The grounds at Walton were delightful with beautiful walks, flower beds, and green fields. The garden was well kept, and the fine old English cedars and other trees lent a peculiar charm to the surroundings. On one side of the ground the banks were swept by the Thames, and the delight of our lads in watching the river with the numerous boats constantly passing up and down never dwindled. Boating on the river, and swimming, became favourite pastimes. But the New Zealand atmosphere of the institution, perhaps after all, appealed to the lads more than anything else, and they were very sorry when, cured of their complaints, it became necessary for them to be transferred.

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398 In 1892 he won the model drawing competition held by the Auckland Society of Arts. Platts, Nineteenth century New Zealand artists: a guide & handbook, 260.
399 This quotation is from the section of this book titled “The New Zealand Hospitals in the United Kingdom” written by Lieutenant-Colonel Myers. H. T. B. Drew, ed., The War Effort of New Zealand: a popular history of (a) minor campaigns in which New Zealanders took part: (b) services not fully dealt with in the campaign volumes: (c) the work at the bases (Auckland: Printed and published under the authority of the New Zealand Government by Whitcombe and Tombs, 1923), 117-18.
After this Woolley went on to Brockenhurst, the No.1 New Zealand General Hospital where he painted the main hospital complex, including nearby Forest Park Hotel, designated for the treatment of officers, and the Balmer Lawn Hotel – a specialist facility established to treat New Zealand neurological cases (or 'shell-shock' patients). Although it was part of his initial prospectus he does not appear to have visited Oatlands Park, the private hotel set up near Walton-on-Thames converted into a hospital specifically for New Zealand limbless and tuberculosis patients, however, he may just have not had time to work up his sketches of this facility before his tenure with the War Records Section ended.

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401 ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 3. ZWR5/27. Wellington Office: Archives NZ; Drew, ed., *The War Effort of New Zealand : a popular history of (a) minor campaigns in which New Zealanders took part : (b) services not fully dealt with in the campaign volumes : (c) the work at the bases*, 115-23.
Although the figurative elements of Woolley’s works are slightly crudely observed, this quality adds an agreeable quaintness to his paintings that does not detract from his genuine talent for capturing the atmosphere of his subjects. Woolley is most comfortable representing landscape scenes although his 1919 painting the *New Zealand Military Headquarters, Bloomsbury Square, London* is an elegant study of the hazy winter streetscape outside the New Zealand offices, where a few rays of sun break through the heavy clouds to catch on the puddles and tyre-marks of a road slicked wet by a shower of rain.

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Figure 63 – Percy Gower Reid, *N.Z.F.A in France and In Blighty* (c.1918).\(^{403}\)

Figure 64 – Percy Gower Reid, *A Man of Picardy* (c.1918).\(^{404}\)

\(^{403}\) Written and illustrated by men of the New Zealand Division, *New Zealand at the Front*, 1918, 22.

\(^{404}\) Ibid., 48.
Alongside Cumberworth, Cole and Woolley, a group of three artists were given the task of creating cartoons and satirical caricatures of men serving within the Expeditionary Force. 41625 Gunner Percy Gower Reid (1890–1975) produced *Dial Sights*, a satirical look across the ranks of the New Zealand Field Artillery.\(^{405}\) Reid was a successful professional artist, cartoonist and illustrator before the war. At the time of his enlistment in January 1917 he was living in Wellington and working for the advertising agent J. Lott. Before this he had been based in the South Island, where he published collections of his work as *The Timaru Sketcher* (1913), *The Christchurch Sketcher* (1914) and *The Rag* (1910).\(^{406}\) After completing his training in New Zealand and England, he was sent to France, where he served with the Artillery Headquarters from the beginning of 1918 until July when he was called upon to take on this special project for the War Records Section.\(^{407}\)

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Another soldier-artist, 5/509 Driver George Edmond Finey (b.1895), a professional lithographic artist from Auckland, was employed to assist Reid in the publication of this work. Finey had been convalescing at No.3 General Hospital, Codford for several months after contracting a debilitating skin infection shortly after serving with the Army Service Corps at the Battle of Passchendaele in late October 1917 (a condition possibly obtained as a result of the extreme wet weather and muddy conditions that had plagued this action). With his recovery almost complete, Finey’s secondment to the War Records Section saved him from being sent back into the lines.\footnote{Written and illustrated by men of the New Zealand Division, \textit{New Zealand at the Front, 1918}, 34, 45.} Reid was very appreciative of Finey’s help on his project and requested that his secondment be extended through September. Captain Gambrill fully endorsed this application writing to his superiors to recommend an extension on the grounds that Finey’s services would “expedite completion [of \textit{Dial Sights}] by at least one...”\footnote{AABK. 18805. Acc W5537. bx 95. 0039935. Wellington Office: Archives NZ}
month. I have no special recommendation to make beyond that expedition of the work will help the sales considerably.\footnote{Letter from Captain Gambrill to the NZEF HQ, London, 26.08.18 ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 4. ZWR9/2. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.}

Figure 66 – Percy Gower Reid, 1st Battery – left; and 4th Howitzer Battery – right (1918).\footnote{Reid and New Zealand War Records, \textit{Dial Sights : sketches of the New Zealand Field Artillery by an Artillery Digger} 27, 30.}

Together these artists compiled a detailed record of many of the officers and a selection of the men serving with the New Zealand Field Artillery in mid–1918. In combination with the historical account of the Artillery’s role in the war from Gallipoli to the Western Front that runs through the booklet, the work offers a poignant and often humorous insight into the lives of the ‘Dial Sights’ (slang for artillerymen) who fought within this unit. The publication’s ‘Foreword,’ written by the New Zealand Division’s Brigadier General G.M. Johnston, plaintively outlines the value of such a project in creating lasting records of those men whose service in the war would otherwise have remained undocumented. The sketches by Reid, he says, “recall to memory the faces and forms of old friends, some of whom, are now at rest on the
battlefields they so bravely assisted to win. My only regret is that the caricaturist was not available at an earlier stage of the war to perpetuate the faces of other well-known gunners who fell in the years between 1914 and 1917.... [The artworks] are the more valuable in that photography, forbidden to the soldier, was but little indulged in by the official photographer, at any rate, so far as the New Zealand Artillery was concerned.”412

Figure 67 – Ernest Heber Thompson, *Summer time* – left (1916); *Colonel Dawson* – right (1918).413

Another excellent illustrator and caricaturist, 25/1208 Sergeant Ernest Heber Thompson (1892–1971) was selected by the War Records Section to create a publication that would promote humour in the face of the often traumatic and

412 Ibid., 2.
413 Ernest Heber Thompson, *Colonel Dawson*, 1918. Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, Wellington Office; Ernest Heber Thompson, *Summer time* - “Gee Bill, these trenches won't be cosy in winter”, 1916. Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, Wellington Office.
unsettling realities of the war. The ‘Introduction’ by Major General Richardson to Thompson’s *Light Diet: 150 Caricatures and Sketches Perpetrated by a New Zealand Artist in and out of Hospital* summarises the altruistic intentions of the work. “ Anything to lighten the dull burden of war’s tragedy is contributing its little share towards maintaining a healthy morale. A good laugh is worth a great deal at all times, but particularly to men whose existence is bounded by a perpetual horizon of khaki. It is hoped this excellent collection of caricatures of faces and forms, familiar to every New Zealand soldier who has been through our hospitals, and to many who have not, will serve its purpose in that respect.”

Thompson produced many of the studies in *Light Diet* while convalescing in England after being severely wounded during the Battle of Messines in June 1917. Before enlisting with 3rd Battalion, New Zealand Rifle Brigade, Thompson was studying at the Dunedin School of Art under the tutelage of talented local artist Alfred Henry

415 Written and illustrated by men of the New Zealand Division, *New Zealand at the Front, 1918*, 46, 56.
416 AABK. 18805. Acc W5553. bx 112. 0113682. Wellington Office: Archives NZ
O’Keeffe (1858–1941). He came to the attention of the War Records Section through the light-hearted cartoons he had had published in New Zealand at the Front and The Chronicles of the N.Z.E.F. The sharp wit and cheeky humour of Thompson’s skilful cartoons are easily comparable with Bruce Bairnsfather’s famous Old Bill series, which were wildly popular with both soldiers and civilians during the war. Thompson’s work was highly praised by the War Records Section. After completing Light Diet he was kept on by Captain Gambrill to assist in the coordination of War Artists’ Section.

Figure 69 – Ernest Heber Thompson, The Spirit of Competition (c.1918).

Percy Reid and Ernest Thompson’s comical depictions of New Zealand soldiers, officers and convalescents perfectly complement Frederick Cumberworth’s thoughtful camp studies and George Woolley’s picturesque hospital paintings. Collectively these works provide a sound but unassuming record of New Zealand’s military and medical presence in the United Kingdom during the war that is both commemorative and celebratory.

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Sales of Reid and Thompson's publications were put towards the purchase of *Fleurbaix, Christmas 1916*, also known as *Observation Post, Winter* (1919) – a grand historical painting by British artist William Barnes Wollen (1857–1936). When the work was completed the pair donated it to New Zealand. As both men had been working directly for the cause of establishing a New Zealand War Memorial Museum, this gesture was presumably made with the intention that the supplement of such painting by a leading British artist would add much needed respectability to New Zealand’s small collection of war related artworks.\(^\text{419}\)


Although the majority of the artists working for the War Artists' Section were assigned to duties in England, there were others tasked with recording the various combat areas overseas. After completing his work with on *Dial Sights*, George Finey was sent to the Western Front in late October 1918 where he was again attached to the Army Service Corps. A talented artist and caricaturist in his own right, Finey was a regular contributor to the *Chronicles of the N.Z.E.F* and his works feature prominently in both issues of *New Zealand at the Front*. Recognising his talents, Captain Gambrill put Finey’s name forward to work as an official war artist with an assignment to produce “sketches of prisoners in addition to characteristic sketches of men at work in the line.” Seeing an opportunity for positive publicity from this artist's work, Gambrill later suggested that Finey submit his preliminary sketches for publication in the popular British illustrated magazines covering the war. It remains unclear whether or not this ever went ahead, and Gambrill does not stipulate to which papers exactly he was referring but it is obvious from his words that he had a

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420 Bookman, ““New Zealand at the Front.” Published by Cassell and Co., London,” 67.
421 AABK. 18805. Acc W5537. bx 95. 0039935. Wellington Office: Archives NZ
422 Letter from Captain Gambrill to The Officer i/c War Trophies c/o D.A.D.O.S. N.Z. Division B.E.F. France, 31.09.18.
ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 4. ZWR9/2. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
great amount of faith in Finey’s abilities and was keen to support the young artist’s career. “These sketches... need not be finished but should contain plenty of action... [and] should be sufficient to enable the finished article to be drawn by the artists retained by these papers for the work. He will probably understand the nature of things required... Incidentally it may provide an opening for him in this line should his work be of a sufficiently high standard.”

Figure 72 – George Finey (?), New Zealand transport in stables (1918).

Although Finey does appear to have been an active member of the War Artists’ Section, there are no works by him in the National Collection of War Art. However, the angular style applied to the figurative elements in the cartoons and caricatures Finey published in New Zealand at the Front and the Chronicles are very similar to those used in a pastel study entitled New Zealand Transport in Stables (c.1918)

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423 Letter from Captain Gambrill to The Officer i/c War Trophies c/o D.A.D.O.S. N.Z. Division B.E.F. France, 31.09.18.
Ibid.
424 George Edmond Finey, New Zealand transport in stables, 1918. Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, Wellington Office.
which has been attributed to either George Edmund Butler or Dutch artist Louis Raemaekers. A comparison with other sketches of similar subject matter by Butler shows his drawing technique was typically much rounder when dealing with the figure and was executed in a much more fluid and assured manner. Raemaekers’s style is equally dissimilar from that used in *New Zealand Transport in Stables*, suggesting that the work has been erroneously attributed and is probably by Finey. The work is a fairly simple study and was presumably made only as a sketch for a larger work that was planned but never eventuated.

![Figure 73 – Cecil Trevithick, *Chateau Sogard, Belgium* (27 November 1917).]({#})

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3/2472 Private Cecil Trevithick (1880–1967) of the New Zealand Medical Corps, Sanitary Section, was a practising architect before the war and was known to have kept a diary of primarily architectural sketches recording his experiences in France and Flanders.\textsuperscript{427} In late May 1918 Major General Russell contacted Trevithick with a request to produce a body of work for publication in the 1918 edition of \textit{New Zealand at the Front}. However Trevithick declined, stating that he lacked the time and resources to create the required artwork “as we are almost constantly on the move.”\textsuperscript{428} Although arrangements were made to reproduce some of his older images, it appears that someone in authority was keen to utilise Trevithick’s artistic skills to a greater extent. Trevithick was promoted to the rank of Corporal at the end of July and attached to the Medical Corps’ No.3 Field Ambulance to work as a war artist under the supervision of the Assistant Director of Medical Services.\textsuperscript{429} By the

\textsuperscript{426} Cecil Trevithick, \textit{Nissen Huts}, 15 December 1917. Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, Wellington Office.

\textsuperscript{427} Refers to Trevithick as “Architect FIA NZ, ARIBA.” Entry on C. Trevithick from responses to NZEF Order 529 in - ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/1. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.

\textsuperscript{428} Letter from C. Trevithick to the New Zealand War Records Section, 01.06.18 - Agency ACID, WA. Series 10/1. Box 2. Item Number ZWR5/4

\textsuperscript{429} Trevithick’s military personnel file does not show this promotion to Corporal but other records suggest that this did occur. He was definitely promoted to the temporary rank of Sergeant in October 1918. This rank was officially confirmed in December 1918. See correspondence 19 - 24.07.18 in - ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 5. ZWR9/8. Wellington Office: Archives NZ; AABK. 18805. Acc W5557. bx 13. 0115722. Wellington Office: Archives NZ
end of October Captain Gambrill could report that Trevithick had been sent to London where was tasked with “working up some very fine sketches and scale plans showing the channels of medical communication.” It is unclear what became of these works, particularly the plans. What remains in the National Collection of War Art of Trevithick’s production includes just a series of small, black ink drawings of bomb shelters, dugouts and other frontline facilities used by the New Zealand Medical Corps in France and Belgium, as well as architectural studies of nearby ruined buildings and villages. While these are carefully observed and highly detailed it seems unlikely that were the only works Trevithick produced during his two-month secondment.

Figure 75 – Francis McFarlane, *With the Anzac Wireless Squadron in Persia* (c.1918).

The War Records Section was also keen to record aspects of New Zealand’s campaign as part of the Anzac Division in the Middle East and Egypt. This task was assigned to a soldier-artist from the New Zealand Engineers, 4/2198 Sapper Francis Ledingham McFarlane (1886–1947), who had been serving with the Signal Department, New Zealand Wireless Troop since 1916. McFarlane was an unusual choice for this role as his service in the war had been quite separate from the rest of the New Zealand Mounted Rifles who had fought in Sinai and Palestine, while the

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430 Letter from Captain Gambrill to Captain Gordon L. McClure, the Officer in Charge of Collecting War Trophies for the NZ War Records Section on the Western Front, 31.10.18. This letter is found in multiple War Records Section files - ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/11. Wellington Office: Archives NZ; ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 4. ZWR9/2. Wellington Office: Archives NZ; ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 3. ZWR6/15. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.


432 Birth and death dates for McFarlane are also referenced as 1888–1948.
Wireless Troop had been mainly based in Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq) and Persia (modern-day Iran) where they maintained communications between the British forces using first generation portable radio equipment. ⁴³³

By trade McFarlane was a telegraphist but his artistic talent is revealed through the series of notebooks he produced between 1916 and 1918. These contain a fascinating mix of carefully executed landscape sketches and character studies in pencil, ink or watercolour; a variety of amusing cartoons and caricatures; topographical maps of the locations he visited and the camps where he was assigned, all accompanied by detailed notes of his experiences and ideas for further works. The quality of these images is superb. They are certainly the equal of anything produced by any of the professional artists working for the War Records Section. ⁴³⁵

McFarlane enlisted at the beginning of 1916 and because of his specialised profession, he was immediately assigned to the Wireless Troop and sent to Basrah by June. In November he became very sick and was eventually diagnosed with typhoid. He was sent to New Zealand’s ‘Aotea’ Convalescent Hospital at Heliopolis,

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⁴³⁴ Francis Ledingham McFarlane, Diaries and Notebook, MS-Papers-2409-1, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington
⁴³⁵ Ibid.
Egypt to convalesce for several months before being assigned to duties with the Headquarters of the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade in Moascar Camp. It was November 1917 before he rejoined his unit in Baghdad. From here he spent the next few months in northeastern Persia, supporting the British campaign into the Caucasus. The Wireless Troop were eventually recalled and sent to the Western Front. McFarlane arrived in France in September 1918 but he lasted just a month before his facility as an artist was noticed and he was seconded to London for special duties with the War Artists’ Section.\footnote{Additional information about the movements of the Wireless Troop provided by military historian Damien Fenton. ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 5. ZWR9/48. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.}

Figure 77 – Francis McFarlane, \textit{Panoramic sketch of Waddi-el-Guzze, near Shellal (c.1918)}.\footnote{Francis Ledingham McFarlane, \textit{Panoramic sketch of Waddi-el-Guzze, near Shellal showing site of Shellal Mosaic (discovered and preserved by the Anzac Division), Palestine, 1917}. Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, Wellington Office.}

Figure 78 – Francis McFarlane, \textit{Sketches of the Shellah and the Waddi-el-Guzze (c.1917)}.\footnote{Francis Ledingham McFarlane, Diaries and Notebook, MS-Papers-2409-1, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington}

Only two works by McFarlane are preserved in the National Collection of War Art. Both are elegant watercolour landscapes, the first of which documents one of the
many locations he visited while serving *With the Anzac Wireless Squadron in Persia* (c.1918). The second painting, *Panoramic sketch of Waddi-el-Guzze*, records the site of the ancient Shellal Mosaic that was discovered and preserved by the Anzac Division when they were in Palestine. This relatively large work, measuring 310 x 1120mm, appears to have been produced by McFarlane from memory with the assistance of the extremely detailed topographical sketches that he had made in his notebook while serving at this location. The remaining records of McFarlane’s service with the War Records Section are frustratingly vague. It is highly likely that he completed several works in addition to these two paintings but these have either been lost or sold within the intervening years. Although he was assigned to the War Artists’ Section for almost a year, there is no clear record of exactly to what he was tasked before being shipped back to New Zealand in September 1919 for his demobilisation.

A Misguided Decision? The employment of civilian war artist Alfred Pearse

To complement the good work being carried out by this group of soldier-artists, in August 1918 the War Museum Executive Committee decided that a small group of civilian artists should be incorporated into New Zealand War Artists' Section. After consulting the recruitment processes used by the Australians and Canadians, it was decided that these new artists would be employed under the same conditions as those set out earlier in the year for artists from the ranks. As previously stated, it was agreed that the civilian artists were to be given temporary officer commissions to the honorary rank of Captain and employed for approximately three months (although this appears to have been flexible depending on the circumstances). Commissions for museum quality enlargements from sketches would be negotiated with the artist and all work would become the property of the New Zealand Government.\(^{439}\)

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\(^{439}\) ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 4. ZWR7/6. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
With the exception of Alexander Stuart-Hill, all the War Records Section's previous negotiations with eligible civilian artists had fallen through by this time. While deliberations surrounding the employment of Stuart-Hill continued without success, the War Museum Executive Committee managed to secure commissions for two other, equally talented civilian artists: Alfred Pearse and George Edmund Butler. Once these positions had been confirmed, the New Zealand Government put a cap on the number of civilian artists that it would agree to fund. As a result Stuart-Hill’s appointment was ultimately rejected.\footnote{After several months of correspondence Brigadier General Richardson wrote to A. Stuart-Hill, 25.11.08: “Unfortunately I am not able to obtain the necessary authority and I regret that we must treat the matter as completely off. No further artists can be employed by us other than those who are already members of the NZEF.”} However, of the two successful applicants, only the tenure of Butler proved to be productive – with Butler completing almost one hundred known sketches and finished paintings during his official service with the New Zealand War Artists’ Section. In sharp contrast to this impressive effort, the employment of Pearse resulted in no artworks whatsoever. Pearse’s apparent inability to fulfil the primary requirement of his duties is the great mystery of New Zealand’s First World War official art programme. A lack of relevant records on the subject has hindered the ability of this study to discover the exact reasons behind this unusual situation however; examination of the remaining evidence can offer possible explanations.

When Butler was first approached by Captain Gambrill about becoming a war artist, he was specifically told that “a committee has been formed for the purpose of providing a War Museum for New Zealand, and an artistic record, preferably executed by New Zealanders, of the work of our forces is regarded as one of the most important features of such a museum.”\footnote{Letter to G.E. Butler (No.3 Beaufort Buildings, Clifton, Bristol), from Captain Gambrill, on behalf of Brigadier General Richardson, 12.08.18.} As will be discussed at greater length in the following chapter, Butler had grown up in New Zealand and, like Welch, he had learnt much of his craft from James Nairn. Butler was well known throughout the colony for his artistic skill and had been a frequent exhibitor at all the major regional art societies until 1906 when he departed New Zealand to make a name for himself in England. As a proud expatriate Butler had readily agreed to the terms offered by the committee.
the War Records Section stating that he was "able and should be glad to undertake" the creation of an official documentary record of the war for the New Zealand Expeditionary Force.\footnote{Letter from G.E. Butler to Captain Gambrill, 15.08.1918 in - Ibid.}

By contrast, the Englishman Pearse had only tenuous connections to New Zealand. Although he was a well-respected graphic artist and illustrator of books, advertisements and periodicals, Pearse appears to have been granted his official war artist role, less on his artistic merits than because of his assertive self-promotion and claims of intimate connections with the British Royal Family. His only real knowledge of New Zealand came through his visit to the colony as the special artist correspondent for \textit{The Sphere} following the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York on their Royal Colonial Tour (1901–1903). Later, when the couple were crowned as King George V and Queen Mary, he was commissioned to record the coronation.\footnote{The coronation was on 11 June 1911. King George V reigned from 6 May 1910–20 January 1936. Pearse mentions in a letter to Captain E.F. Gambrill, 10.08.18, that some of his sketches were in the possession of the Royal Family at the outbreak of the war. He sent images of these works to Brigadier General Richardson to assist his application for the New Zealand war artist position. ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/11. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.}

Pearse also submitted an extremely flattering resume that contained much praise of his skills from the various international publications for whom he had worked, including the \textit{Christchurch Press, The Sphere} and \textit{The Throne} which said of him, "There is probably no black and white artist to-day whose work commands greater attention than that of Mr. Pearse. His fame is world-wide."\footnote{See Alfred Pearse resume in - Ibid.}

At the beginning of September Pearse and Butler were sent to Sling Camp, Bulford – the New Zealand Expeditionary Force’s main infantry training facility in England, where they were to be "instructed in anti-gas measures, and fitted with respirator and steel helmet."\footnote{Letter from Captain Gambrill to G.E. Butler, 06.09.18 in - ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/12. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.} After this they were attested – making them both officially members of the Expeditionary Force – and given their honorary commissions to the officer’s rank of Captain.\footnote{Interestingly, the personnel numbers that the NZEF assigned Pearse and Butler were only 2 numerals apart: Pearse being 87054 and Butler 87056.} Pearse was assigned to the New Zealand Rifle Brigade\footnote{Letter from G.E. Butler to Captain Gambrill, 15.08.1918 in - Ibid.} and
Butler to the Wellington Regiment (1st Battalion). With their training completed the artists could now proceed on to France. On the morning of 27 September, Pearse and Butler were given orders to travel by train to Folkestone, the embarkation point for the Western Front. Upon arriving in Boulogne they received special White Passes permitting them to travel forward to the New Zealand Division Headquarters and begin their duties.

As stipulated in his official contract, Pearse only remained on the Western Front for one month. At the end of October 1918 he returned to his studio in London to work up the sketches he had made while accompanying the New Zealand Division. While in London, Pearse was given every assistance by the War Records Section to give his work credible authenticity. As he had not been allowed too near to the actual fighting, Pearse created his official paintings from ‘reconstructed scenes’ using accounts of the action, maps, photographs and even getting New Zealand soldiers

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448 Alfred Pearse’s recruitment details are listed in his Defence Force Personnel File and also in the *New Zealand Gazette*, under the activities of the New Zealand Rifle Brigade: “Mr Alfred Pearse is taken on strength in the rank of Honorary Captain, and is seconded for duty as War Artist. Dated 11 September 1918.” A copy of this is in the original paper version of his Defence Force Personnel file.

449 Letter from No.3 Camp Sling to Captain Gambrill advising that Pearse and Butler had completed their gas procedures training for officers, 20.09.18. Letter from Captain Gambrill to G.E. Butler and Alfred Pearse regarding travel orders, 26.09.18.

450 Official contract terms sent to Alfred Pearse by Brigadier General Richardson, c/o Captain Gambrill, at the War Records Section, 22.08.1918.

451 Pearse was 61 years old when he was made a war artist and in the medical assessment for his attestation on the 11.09.1918, the doctor recorded that he was “unfit for strenuous work and active service” noting that his teeth were in poor condition, that he wore glasses and that he had recently suffered a dislocated shoulder. The one-month limit to Pearse’s war duties was written in his contract. However, it is known that George Butler was offered a longer tenure but although he must have been aware of this situation Pearse did not try to negotiate a matching tenure. Perhaps, given the circumstances of his health and age, he prudently accepted these terms, as he was aware that the harsh climate of the oncoming autumn on the Western Front would not be agreeable.
on leave in London to pose for him in their full uniform and battle kit.\footnote{Letter from Alfred Pearse to Captain Gambrill, 30.09.18; Letter from Captain Gambrill to Captain McClure, 31.10.18; ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/11. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.} Although he obviously went to great lengths to establish a sense of authenticity in his paintings, Pearse’s final works may have lacked a certain level of immediacy, a factor that could possibly have lessened their claim to truthfulness and contributed to their eventual removal from the New Zealand War Art Collection. Without access to the original works or to any sketches that were used in their construction this theory is impossible to prove.

It is known that between February and May 1919 Pearse completed a series of three large canvases of *The Battle of Prayelle*, *The Capture of Fontaine* and *The Battle of La Signy Farm*. These paintings and a group of preliminary sketches were delivered to the offices of the War Records Section but whether or not they were transported back to New Zealand from there and stored at the Dominion Museum in Wellington is uncertain.\footnote{Series of letters between A. Pearse and Major Westmacott, NZ War Records Section between 20 February and 12 May 1919.} At some point it appears that the works disappeared. Their fate remains enigmatic. It is possible that Pearse lost favour with the War Records Section and his works were eventually discarded or destroyed. The paintings do not appear to have been formally de-accessioned or sold from the National War Art Collection as, presumably, some record of this would have remained. The file on Pearse’s employment with the War Artist Section ends just before his work was sent to the War Records Section for review. No reaction to the works is recorded in the file so it is difficult to know exactly when or why Pearse’s works went missing.\footnote{Ibid.}

Pearse’s relationship with the New Zealand War Records Section was initially positive. When taking up his position Pearse had written to Brigadier General Richardson to expressly thank him “for giving me the opportunity to perpetuate the gallant deeds of the New Zealand Forces… to paint some pictures that will please you and New Zealand.”\footnote{Letter from Alfred Pearse to Brigadier General G.S. Richardson, 14.09.18 in - ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/11. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.} The correspondence between Pearse and the War Records Section shows that he was extremely eager to please and impress those in
charge of his employment. However, some of Pearse’s letters include ambiguous statements that indicate he harboured a disgruntled attitude towards his duties, “I have joined as a Captain now and will abide by the rules, but it will run me close.”

Indeed within days of arriving on the Western Front, Pearse began to baulk at the restrictions imposed on him by the British military. In a letter to Captain Gambrill dated 30 September, Pearse expresses his frustration at not being allowed to sketch in the midst of the fighting, arguing that his work would be much better quality as a result. Although these measures were made for his own safety, Pearse believed his inability to get near enough to the battles being fought would unfairly hinder his ability to represent the Western Front in the manner that he thought appropriate.

As Tony Martin discusses in *New Zealand Images of War*, “there is an implication in this letter that Pearse and his superiors in the field may have had different agendas as to exactly what the artists should be drawing.” Martin suggests that, “the authorities may have preferred the artists to reconstruct paintings of the front rather than draw the realities directly. As far as censorship goes, this method would have had the potential for greater control by the military authorities in that the artists would have been more reliant on reports of events from which to construct their, or rather the military's images.” He cites as evidence of this interference, the second clause in the official agreement sent to Pearse by Brigadier General Richardson, which states that, once he had completed his month on the Western Front Pearse would return to England and spend two months "completing pictures to my order from the sketches made by you." However, the final clause seems to negate any potential 'nefarious' manipulative intention implied by Martin's theory, as Richardson specifically stated that although "all sketches and completed pictures made by you during the period aforesaid become the property of New Zealand, including the copyright of any completed pictures, but that you have full permission to use the sketches not made into completed pictures as you desire.”

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456 Letter from Alfred Pearse to Captain Gambrill, 23.09.18 in -
457 Ibid.
458 Martin and Manawatu Art Gallery., *New Zealand Images of War*, 52.
459 Ibid., 51-53.
460 Official contract terms sent to Alfred Pearse by Brigadier General Richardson, c/o Captain Gambrill, at the War Records Section, 22.08.1918.
ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/11. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
It is known that Pearse took full advantage of this clause in this contract. In December 1918 he informed the War Records Section that *The Sphere* newspaper “want me to make a large drawing of the capture of Le Quesnoy so can you let me have the photos you were good enough to promise as soon as possible because they are waiting for it.”

Before he had even left for France, Pearse wrote to *The Illustrated London News* to request that they publish his war pictures of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. On 26 September 1918, Pearse notified Captain Gambrill of his agreement with this newspaper, noting that, “it is understood that the amount received for any sketches I make in France that are paid for by the *Illustrated London News* is divided between the N.Z.E.F. funds and myself.”

However, no other documentation remains to show that Pearse was authorised to arrange such a deal and his actions could be seen as undermining or going against the authority of the War Records Section that controlled his employment. Indeed, Pearse’s arrangement with the *Illustrated London News* runs close to violating the copyright terms of his employment agreement, which states that the reproduction rights for his works belonged exclusively to the New Zealand Government.

Fortunately for Pearse, Captain Gambrill was enthusiastic about this arrangement, stating in an October report on the progress of the war artists that Pearse's "sketches have been very useful from a publicity point of view" and that alongside his work for *Illustrated London News*, he had received word from Pearse that "Her Majesty the Queen has commanded him to paint a picture of the Prince of Wales during his inspection of the [New Zealand] Division."
Works by Pearse have been located in issues of the *Illustrated London News*. These black and white studies give a fair indication of the type of paintings he would have created. They are highly detailed, as befitting an artist who regularly worked for the news media, and show his talent for finding the drama in the everyday scenarios he witnessed while serving on the Western Front. In spite of the excellent exposure the reproduction of war works in this magazine provided, it appears that Pearse was ultimately disgruntled with the level of censorship required to publish his works in the illustrated press. As the letter sent to him from the Acting Editor of *The Illustrated London News* illustrates, artworks made in the combat areas were subject to several levels of scrutiny before they could be approved for publication. "We shall be most pleased to consider, with a view to publication, any sketches you may be able to send us from the Western Front. Needless to say, all such sketches must be passed by the 'Censor in the Field,' and further, we shall submit them to the Censor here.

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Please put on each sketch as full particulars as you are permitted.” Pearse’s passionately independent nature seems to have rebelled against the amount of processing his works underwent. In January 1919 he published an article under his official title ‘Capt. A. Pearse, N.Z.R.B.,’ in which he voiced his strong opposition to the military censorship he had experienced in the process of getting his works published, which he believed placed an oppressive level of control over his artistic integrity.

Why may not the real horrors of battle be illustrated? Every time I have painted the reality I have been requested to alter it. Why? Nothing would prevent wars so much as for the masses to see the torn and mangled forms. Heads and limbs blown away from their bodies and other terrible mutilation of horses and men I have had the sorrow of seeing. It is the false picturing of battles that fans the cursed war fever because only the glorious side of it is shown or realised except by those who have lost their dear ones or those who have been mutilated.  

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466 Letter from Ernest Hope Godding, Acting Editor of The Illustrated London News, to Alfred Pearse, 26.09.1918.
ACiD, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/11. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.

467 The article is titled ‘Art and the War’ and it features in a ‘Drawing and Design’ section of the publication. The name of the newspaper or magazine that printed this article is not marked on the copy of the article.
Martin and Manawatu Art Gallery., New Zealand Images of War, 52, 128; ACiD, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/11. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
Pearse’s vitriol against censorship appears to be aimed squarely at the processing required to have his work printed in the illustrated papers rather than an attack on his experience as an official artist as no written evidence in any of the artist files viewed

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indicate that the work of the New Zealand war artists was subjected to overt manipulation or vigorous censorship. Although their battlefield sketches should theoretically have been subject to the scrutiny of the British military censor, Major (later Colonel) Arthur N. Lee, there is no specific evidence that this ever took place.

The standard protocol around this process was that all visitors to the Western Front, whether they be press, politicians, dignitaries or artists, came under jurisdiction of the Military Intelligence branch known as Military Press Control. Major Lee’s duties within this authority included logistician and organiser as well as censor. As Paul Gough explains Lee “tended to agree with his superior, Colonel Hutton-Wilson, that artists had the habit of being troublesome, though he befriended a number of them and by the end of the war had acquired a collection of pictures they have given him.” Although his judgements were usually fair, Lee’s disagreements over the content of a small group of works made by the British war artist Christopher Nevinson proved to be a battle of wills that he did not entirely win. Aside from this incident, Major Lee’s power was absolute within the warzone between mid 1917 and the spring of 1919 when the requirement for military censorship of artwork lapsed with the conclusion of the war (presumably taken as the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in June).^469^ However it is unclear whether Lee’s authority extended beyond the Western Front after the Armistice. If so, regulations would require that the works that Butler and Pearse created from their battlefield sketches in England were required to be inspected by the censor. Again, there are no obvious records that this occurred.^470^

It would therefore appear that Pearse’s attitude of outrage was done in the interest of arousing public interest in his work. War Records Section files suggest that Pearse accepted his official position not only for the honour of representing New Zealand but also for the prestige and business opportunities it would offer him. In February 1918, Pearse had attempted to sell to his painting, *Tank in Action*, to the Imperial War Museum. Produced in October 1916 from sketches made by one of his students serving at the Front, Pearse claimed that the work was the first image created by a British artist of the prototype tanks (or Landships) that were introduced during the

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^469^ Gough, A Terrible Beauty: British Artists in the First World War, 36.

^470^ In researching this thesis I was unable to locate concrete evidence to disprove the theory that the sketches or final paintings made by Butler or Pearse’s did not pass before the British military censor. This, of course, should not be taken as a categorical denial of their censorship but as an assumption based on the records viewed.
Battle of the Somme from mid-September 1916.\textsuperscript{471} The Imperial War Museum Committee however, were unimpressed and refused to purchase the work on the grounds that “no Pictures can be purchased… unless they have been painted by Artists who have been at either of the Fronts.”\textsuperscript{472} Undeterred, Pearse offered them his services as a war artist, “I should be pleased to go to the Front and paint any subjects desired, right in the fighting line – for I have been a ‘Special Artist’ and am therefore used to sketching in danger and turmoil.”\textsuperscript{473} Pearse’s lack of success pursuing the British war art programme evidently fuelled his desire to achieve credibility for his work through his employment with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force.\textsuperscript{474} However Pearse constantly pushed at the boundaries of regulations that governed his position. In January 1919, after the departure of Major Gambrill back to New Zealand, Pearse objected to the War Records Section’s definition of his employment and had tried to have the terms of his contract re-negotiated.\textsuperscript{475} A few weeks later, the new officer in charge of the Section, Major Herbert Horatio Spencer Westmacott (1885–1960) refers in his correspondence to not wanting a repeat of “the Pearse episode” – apparently referring to Pearse’s erroneous expectations that he would be given several post-war commissions by the War Records Section to paint up his sketches and complete portraits of New Zealand Victoria Cross winners.\textsuperscript{476} Pearse’s attitude to his position seemed to have grated on Major Westmacott who had to manage the repercussions of several incidents involving the wayward war artist. Westmacott appears to have been quite surprised at Pearse’s

\textsuperscript{471} The painting was actually one of two painted around the same time. The original version of the painting had been produced for King George V. The version he was attempting to sell was a slightly different composition. See letters from A. Pearse to the Imperial War Museum, 05 and 07.02.18. ART/WA1/149. File no.127/4. A Pearse, Offer to sell 'Tank in Action' 1918-1919. Imperial War Museum, London
\textsuperscript{472} Letter to A. Pearse from the Curator and Secretary of the Imperial War Museum, 15.02.18. Ibid.
\textsuperscript{473} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{474} Alfred Pearse worked with The Sphere during the South African War. Despite what he claims in the letter, his work for this publication were based on photographs and were executed whilst he was in Britain. It is unclear from the research conducted whether or not Pearse worked with any other publication as a ‘Special Artist’ war correspondent in a more active capacity. Collection of Ryno Greenwall - Auction Catalogue (with tribute by Mervyn Shear), 26.
\textsuperscript{475} Correspondence between Alfred Pearse and Major Westmacott, O.C. War Records Section from 1919, January 1919. ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/11. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
\textsuperscript{476}The letter states, “From Mr Butler’s letters he seems to have been led to expect a number of commissions, portraits of V.C.’s etc. Who is attending to this? It would be well to avoid a repetition of the Pearse episode and have the matter in writing.” Correspondence between Major S. Westmacott and unknown person, 10.02.19 in - ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/12. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
decision to publish his ‘Art and the War’ article from the perspective of a Captain in the New Zealand Rifle Brigade without any specific authorisation. When Pearse later requested permission “to speak at political meetings in favour of Coalition candidates” while wearing his New Zealand military uniform Major Westmacott curtly informed him that the “Kings Regulations forbid a soldier taking part in any political meeting. You will therefore not appear in uniform at any such meeting please.”

In many ways, Pearse’s attitude to his position was similar to that of Nevinson, who created a notorious controversy in 1918 over the censorship of his painting Paths of Glory when it was put on display as part of an exhibition of official war art in London. The work, which depicts two anonymous dead British soldiers lying face down amid the wire and debris of No Man’s Land, was banned from public display.

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477 Letter from Major Westmacott to Captain A. Pearse, 05.12.18 in - ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/11. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
479 Malvern, Modern art, Britain and the Great War: witnessing, testimony and remembrance, 37-38.
because Major Lee deemed its content would undermine civilian morale. This prohibition created a national scandal but as Malvern points out, the act of its censorship ironically made the painting much more famous and its ‘restricted’ content was widely known, discussed and debated, producing a myriad of different interpretations, many of which ignored the original circumstances of the matter. “The fact of its having once been censored caused some wartime and most post-war audiences to ascribe protest and anti-war sentiment to *Paths of Glory* as its intrinsic meaning, a meaning at odds with the intention of the censor, and at odds with the intention of the artist.”

Nevinson, like Pearse, made a public cry of appeal against the censor’s decision. “My picture happened to be a work of art (but unlike the other, not actual portraits) therefore I cannot see how it comes into this photographic category, especially as civilians, at any rate, know that war causes casualties, even if soldiers do not.”

However, he was well aware of his role as a ‘propagandist’ working for Wellington House and was also attuned to the opportunities this furore offered for the publicity of his work. “The artist enhances his standing as an avant-gardist by appearing to be persecuted and misunderstood. The credibility of his work was strengthened and censorship and the State apparatus for censorship were discredited.”

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480 Ibid., 53.
481 Nevinson to Masterman, 03.12.1917.
Ibid., 54, 209 n.80.
482 Ibid., 54.
As previously mentioned, Britain’s Wellington House and the Department and Ministry of Information treated their official artists with a respectful ‘hands off’ approach. Their artists were encouraged to use their individual creativity to guide their production but were kept subtly in check by their own sense of patriotism and duty to Britain. Even those artists who were could be considered non-traditional in their artistic practice, such as Paul Nash, John Nash, Nevinson and the vocal anti-establishmentarian Wyndham Lewis, had all served with the British armed forces before receiving their official commissions and were therefore unlikely to betray their former comrades in arms by producing images that went strongly against Britain’s position in the war. Masterman upheld the belief that interference in the making of official art was unnecessary and that any such practice would be detrimental.

“Nevinson and Kennington have continually asked me for instructions as to what they should draw; but I have always taken the view that it is not for a Government Department to attempt to regulate artists in their work, art being so largely individual in expression.”\(^{484}\) When Nevinson’s painting *A Group of Soldiers* (1917) was also banned by the Major Lee for its supposedly un-British content, Masterman even stepped in on behalf of artistic liberty, stating that, “We ought not to censor any ‘work of art’ except for purely military reasons. If we judge of its ugliness or beauty as censors we are ‘in the soup’ at once!”\(^{485}\) The seemingly uninhibited quality of the works produced by the official artists working for Wellington House made them extremely effective tools at engaging their audience. By comparison, when the Department of Information later tried to push a strong propagandist message with the 1917 lithographic series *Britain’s Efforts and Ideals*, the public rejected the results.\(^{486}\)

It would appear that the official New Zealand war artists were treated with a similarly hands-off approach by their superiors at the War Records Section, as their work does not display any obvious signs of their content being manipulated, in spite of the calculated aims surrounding the creation of the New Zealand War Museum. Like their British counterparts, the members of the New Zealand War Artists’ Section were instead made pointedly aware, by those in charge of the War Museum project, that their work was of great national importance. They were each required to produce images that could be used to appeal to the commemorative needs of the New Zealand public and promote New Zealand’s war effort internationally.

Tony Martin goes further, implying that Butler and Pearse were each given a ‘briefing’ interview where the requirements of their position were impressed upon


\(^{485}\) Quotation from a handwritten note to a letter from Masterman to the military censor, Lieutenant Colonel A.N. Lee at Intelligence, GHQ. London, 27.11.1917.

Lee had refused to pass the work in question because, he believed: “the type of men represented is not worthy of the British army.”

Ibid., 52.

\(^{486}\) As mentioned previously, the lithograph series was separated into series of ‘Ideals’ (large colour images based on abstract idealised concepts and allegorical scenarios such as F.E. Jackson’s *United Defence Against Aggression*) and ‘Efforts’ (monotone realistic illustrations of realities on the home and war fronts including the *Making Soldiers* works by Eric Kennington). The Ideals were rejected by the media and critics, particularly in Britain for being too blatantly propagandist but the Efforts were a relative success.

Ibid., 41-44, 72.
them, specifically “the need for discretion in depicting logistical and locational details” while working on the Western Front. Both artists were certainly interviewed by Captain Gambrill at the War Record’s Section’s offices in London before commencing their duties, however, the minutes of these interviews do not appear to have been recorded and Martin does not cite any specific references. Although the inference of his statement insinuates that this briefing was used to deliberately guide the artists in a certain direction, the circumstances surrounding the deployment of civilians into a warzone meant that these meetings were more likely used as an opportunity for Gambrill to thoroughly vet his new artists and to help prepare them for the challenges of working within the strict confines of a military controlled area.

In late September 1918 when Pearse and Butler were added to the strength of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force’s War Artists’ Section, the official objectives of this programme were still consistent with those established in February 1918 for Major General Russell’s original war art initiative. The stipulation requiring Welch to produce “artistic work of an historical nature” to document the New Zealand Division on the Western Front remained in place for Butler and the other official artists. The wording of this direction indicates that the central focus of the War Artists’ Section was to record New Zealand’s contribution to the war for the purpose of posterity. This intention is consistently reiterated in statements made by others regarding the future role of the war art collection that was then being created. When plans for the War Museum were approved, the focus of the War Artists’ Section adjusted slightly from historical documentation to memorialisation and remembrance. So that the Section’s production would remain in keeping with the aims of the War Museum, the war artists were all made aware that their work was intended to be housed in the exhibition space of a war memorial museum/s and that their production should therefore be composed to suit the commemorative atmosphere of such an environment.

487 Martin and Manawatu Art Gallery., New Zealand Images of War, 52.
488 Extracts from NZEF War Records Section War Artist Programme Regulations Draft in - ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/1. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
489 From the Motions Carried in the Minutes of the first meeting held of the New Zealand War Museums Committee, Monday 15.07.18, 3.30 p.m. Ibid.
As no written documentation remains of the orders given to the war artists while they were in the field, it is assumed that the selection of appropriate historical subject matter was left to the discretion of the individual artists employed.\textsuperscript{490} The historical nature of the subject matter required included not only the documentation of the sites of previous significant events and battles involving New Zealand but also the recording of the mundane, everyday activities of the Expeditionary Force and the “depots, hospitals, and camps, [and] special appliances” that this force used throughout the war. The official artists working in the field were also required to pay close attention to the circumstances unfolding around them so that they could evaluate and select which events would be of the most historical, cultural and social interest to New Zealanders then and in the future. A successful New Zealand war artist therefore needed to possess a sound mind and good judgment to complement their artistic ability.

The only formal censorship exercised by the New Zealand War Records Section and the War Museum Executive Committee on the content of New Zealand’s official war art appears to have been a form of editorial control. These agencies had always intended to control how New Zealand’s war effort would be portrayed through their selection of which sketches would be worked up into large-scale paintings. This editorial aspect of their authority was clearly stipulated in the agreements they made with the official war artists on their recruitment, the terms of which stated “the position as follows: 1) That he makes completed sketches in the nature of small finished pictures (24” x 18” or thereabouts) while working in France. 2) That should we desire larger pictures same may be painted from the sketches in England at a price to be mutually agreed upon.”\textsuperscript{491} These works were intended to be the centrepieces at the War Museums and London art exhibition and would be viewed by an international audience and, eventually, by the public in New Zealand. Butler at least was complicit in this process and even offered the War Records Section detailed plans of how the museum display should look.

\textsuperscript{490} To date no files on this subject have been found in the Archives New Zealand collection of War Archives relating to the War Artists’ Section. This does not necessarily mean that such do not still exist but they have not yet been located by this researcher.

\textsuperscript{491} From a memo between Captain Gambril and Brigadier General Richardson regarding George Edmund Butler’s appointment.

ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/12. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
The size of the rooms would be decided by the quality and variety of the Trophies but I suppose in any case there would be one big central hall for which the ideal mural decoration would be a frieze or series of long panels dealing with the army on the March. It ought to be not less than four feet in height (deeper if placed high) there is plenty of material to fill almost any hall. Infantry, battle rider and full kit Pioneers, Artillery Lorries and cars etc., etc. It would make a fine setting for a collection of trophies as well as a dignified background for the war pictures, which ought to hang there.\footnote{ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 3. ZWR5/28. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.}

The artists of the New Zealand War Artists’ Section were keenly aware that the works they made for the New Zealand War Museum and London art exhibition had to function successful in a commercial and promotional sense while incorporating ideological, nationalistic and patriotic themes. Although the work created by this Section was never used specifically as political propaganda for recruitment purposes or to strengthen New Zealand’s involvement in the war etc., it is likely, given the framework around which the artworks were being made, that the War Museum would have used the images in this manner had the war continued past 1918. Of course, it could be argued that the patriotic emphasis placed on the proposed London War Museum and art exhibition itself verged towards pro-imperialist and nationalistic propaganda.

It is unclear how much Pearse brought into the nationalism of the War Museum project. His uneasy attitude to his official role can possibly be vindicated by his pronounced lack of a personal attachment to New Zealand. His only real knowledge of the country came through his brief journey there as part of the official retinue following the Royal Colonial Tour. In comparison, Butler and all of the other official artists working for the New Zealand War Artists’ Section were all either born in New Zealand or had grown up in the colony. Each therefore possessed strong emotional and family connections to the Dominion. Taking this into consideration, Pearse’s apparent detachment from his duties is more readily understandable.

Unlike many official war artists who were greatly honoured to receive their commissions and often offered to work for free or at a drastically reduced rate,
Pearse's correspondence file suggests that he was preoccupied with the financial side of his employment. Several letters in Pearse's file refer to his negotiations regarding his rate of pay and pension stipulations for injury or death. He appears to have been particularly concerned about the remuneration he would receive for his duties and whether his taking up of this role would be a financially viable option, particularly as he would lose other commissions while working for the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. To give him the benefit of circumstance, his enquires about the terms of his employment may have been made in reaction to the news that his son had recently received minor wounds in battle.

By comparison, when Butler was asked to outline his terms of employment, his response indicated that he was then earning a relatively successful living as a professional artist in Britain. "It is difficult to state definite terms until I know something of the size and importance of the work required. If it be any guide to you, I might say that I received £450 pounds for the last picture I sold from the Royal Academy. This year I had one brought for the Bristol Art Gallery and that I have painted portraits at prices ranging from £100 to 250 pounds." The War Records Section offered Butler the same terms of employment as they had already negotiated with Pearse. Each artist was to be commissioned with "the Honorary rank and pay of Captain in the New Zealand Expeditionary Force (pay with allowances being 21/- per day)" and the Section would supply all the artists' materials required to make "completed sketches in the nature of small finished pictures (24" x 18" or thereabouts) while working in France." Gambrill suggested that Butler should remain in France observing activities around the Western Front for at least two months, after which time he would return to England and remain on the payroll until his field sketches were completed to exhibition standard. These works would then become the property of the Expeditionary Force and the New Zealand Government and Butler would relinquish the copyright for their publication but not for their copying...
by other artists. If any further, and specifically, larger paintings were required for the war art collection it was stated that these would be commissioned and purchased separately “at a price to be mutually agreed upon.” On 22 August, Butler wrote to accept these conditions and offered to paint portraits of New Zealand Victoria Cross recipients at his studio in Bristol at a reduced rate of £15 pounds as opposed to his standard fee for such portrait work of £25 to 50 pounds. A few days after confirming these terms, Butler arrived in London to meet with Brigadier General Richardson.

In *New Zealand Images of War*, Tony Martin asserts that during the negotiations of his employment contract, Butler requested that the amount he would charge the New Zealand Government through the War Records Section would not be disclosed publicly. This arrangement ensured that Butler was able to fulfil his patriotic duty and assist the Section by offering them his services at a reduced rate but that this drop in his usual prices would not undercut the standard fees for his work in the future. Other well-established artists, such as John Lavery and Ambrose McEvoy (1878–1927), also decreased their usual fees when they agreed to produce work for Lord Beaverbrook’s Canadian War Memorials Fund, the British Pictorial Propaganda Committee and the Imperial War Museum. In *Art at the Service of War* Maria Tippett quotes from Alfred Munnings whose attitude summarises the general feeling of the artists who contributed to these programmes. “The amount was small, but I would have been prepared, had they so wished, to present them [the works] to the Canadian Government, for no artist had been given a better chance to paint in such unforeseen circumstances.” Butler’s actions confirm that he, like Munnings, believed that the inconvenience of lowering his prices was a small sacrifice compared to the enormous personal and professional benefits that this official position would bring him. Becoming a war artist offered Butler a unique and valuable opportunity to serve his country, challenge himself artistically, and receive a Governmental commission that would boost his standing within the British art

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497 Internal memo from Captain Gambrill to Brigadier General Richardson explaining the terms that Butler had agreed to sign on to as an artist for the NZEF after a meeting with Butler, 26.08.09. Ibid.
498 Martin and Manawatu Art Gallery., *New Zealand Images of War*, 34-35.
499 Malvern refers to the British War Memorials Committee not the British Pictorial Propaganda Committee in her listings on this subject. Malvern, *Modern art, Britain and the Great War: witnessing, testimony and remembrance*, 85, 96, 185.
market. In 1920 Butler donated his painting of *Polygon Wood* to the New Zealand Government.\(^{501}\) William Orpen also donated the works he had produced for the Canadian war art programme, declaring that “the last thing I want is to make money out of the sights I have seen out there.”\(^{502}\)

Although, in the end, the employment of Pearse did not prove completely successful, the War Records Section’s selection of an artist such as Pearse, without a significant personal connection to New Zealand, was not without precedent. Although Lord Beaverbrook’s Canadian War Memorials Fund was set up to record Canada’s contribution to the war, well-known British artists, including Augustus John, David Cameron, Wyndham Lewis and Nevinson, dominated the scheme. As mentioned in the previous chapter, a notable faction of Canadian artists was added to this group only after the Ontario Society of Artists, the Royal Canadian Academy and other Canadian art authorities raised several complaints about the inappropriate and insensitive nature of this arrangement. The main source of this problem was that Beaverbrook and his main art advisor, British based art critic, Paul G. Konody, were unfamiliar with the work of the leading Canadian artists of this era. While the Fund wanted to acquire the best artists available to record the war, Beaverbrook and the authorities working under him were quick to recognise that alienating the Canadian artists from the programme set up to document Canada was counterintuitive and would decrease the popularity and significance of the art collection in Canada itself. Unlike the situation in New Zealand, the Canadian programme managed to find an adequate balance between appeasing nationalistic concerns and acquiring the right level of talent to fill the positions. The images of the Western Front produced by

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\(^{502}\) Tippett, *Art at the Service of War: Canada, art, and the Great War*, 16.

William Orpen also gifted the official war artwork he had produced for Britain to the British nation, a gesture which produced a major controversy between the Ministry of Information (in charge of the British War Memorials Committee) and the Imperial War Museum who were both saw themselves as the natural custodians of the official war art produced for Britain and were each attempting to take control of these collected works. “Early on the Ministry decided it was the proper recipient of William Orpen’s proposed gift of all his war paintings to the nation. Orpen was fairly indiscriminate about the offers he made to both the Imperial War Museum and the Ministry but the matter was pre-empted when Beaverbrook made arrangements to appropriate the entire collection at the opening of Orpen’s exhibition held at Agnew’s in May 1918. Hostility from the museum, which was employing its own war artists, was guaranteed.”

Canadian artists A.Y. Jackson and F.H. Varley became some of the most widely praised work produced by this large art programme. The documentation by Canadian artists of the Canadian Home Front commissioned by the War Memorials Fund also proved to be an important historical document of the diverse activities undertaken within that country during the war. It also stands as a culturally significant collection illustrating some of the diversity of Canadian artistic practice at this time.\textsuperscript{503}

Unfortunately, this situation was not repeated in the case of New Zealand. The joint civilian perspective that could have been offered by the Englishman Pearse and expatriate New Zealander Butler has now been permanently lost. Due to a lack of available material any examination of Pearse's contribution to the New Zealand War Artists' Section will be singularly limited. Thus, by process of elimination, the work of George Edmund Butler will henceforth form the central analytical focus of this thesis.

\textsuperscript{503} Tippett, \textit{Art at the Service of War: Canada, art, and the Great War}, 28-30, 40-42, 47-50.
3) George Edmund Butler – the Making of a War Artist

Other British artists were approached but the War Records Section and the Museum Committee do seem to have favoured appointing a New Zealander if one of sufficient standing could be found. They found the New Zealander they were looking for in George Butler. Butler was an expatriate; he had achieved little fame while working in Wellington but had made a career for himself in England since 1905… He is an artist who deserves more attention from New Zealand art historians.504

As the artist who generated the largest contribution to the New Zealand war art programme, the following analysis will centre round the work of George Edmund Butler. Almost a third of the over 300 works in the National Collection of First World War Art were produced by Butler during his service as an official artist. Material relating to his official employment, particularly correspondence between Butler and the New Zealand Expeditionary Force’s War Records Section, also makes up much of the archival resources related to New Zealand’s use of war artists in the First World War. This chapter will explain the reasoning behind the selection of Butler as an official war artist in 1918. Butler’s career will be examined in comparison with his contemporaries within New Zealand and overseas, with particular emphasis on those artists who were also involved in the creation of war related artwork.

Although Butler produced a large body of work throughout his career he, unfortunately, left behind only a few letters and no known diaries that could help to reveal his thoughts on his own artistic practice. However, his work was often mentioned by critics and social commentators in the New Zealand press and the major events of his career can be pieced together through archival and family records. It is through these contextual sources, in combination with a close analysis of Butler’s many and varied works, that a full picture of this artist’s creative influences and aesthetic sensibilities can be gleaned.

504 Colquhoun, "War Art at National Archives," 59.
Like many young New Zealand artists, Butler struggled to carve out a stable existence for himself and his family as a professional painter in the Dominion. He eventually succumbed to the lure of the Home Country and became another expatriate. As he worked to make a name for himself in Britain, his artistic sensibilities began to change, adapting to suit the circumstances of his new surroundings. By the time he was recruited as an official war artist in August 1918 Butler had already explored many aspects of the war in his civilian works. Together with the excellent reputation he had established for himself, Butler was the ideal candidate to commemorate New Zealand’s war effort for the War Records Section. This chapter will effectively set the scene for the following analysis of the official war art that Butler produced both at the Western Front and after the war. It is also intended that the analysis of Butler’s practice in this and the following chapter will help to re-establish the significance of this relatively overlooked artist in the early history of New Zealand art.

Who was George Edmund Butler?

Although his work has been virtually forgotten in New Zealand today, at the time of the First World War, Butler was a highly regarded figure within New Zealand’s art community and an artist of notable reputation in Britain from 1904 until his death in 1936. In spite of this, accounts of Butler’s career have been almost completely omitted from the main art historical publications that document New Zealand art of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Neither Michael Dunn’s *A Concise History of New Zealand Painting*, Gil Docking’s *Two Hundred Years of New Zealand Painting* or David Eggleton’s *Towards Aotearoa* make any reference to

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506 Contains a listing of Nugent Welch’s name and birth and death dates only. Gil Docking, *Two hundred years of New Zealand painting* (Wellington: Reed, 1971), 160.
Butler. The only major publications that mention his existence are Gordon H. Brown and Hamish Keith’s An Introduction to New Zealand Painting where Butler is listed as a participant in the Wellington Art Club’s inaugural exhibition of 1893 and in Brown’s New Zealand Painting 1900–1920: Traditions and Departures, a highly detailed account of the period that mentions Butler alongside the activities of his contemporaries such as Charles Frederick Goldie (1870–1947), Frances Hodgkins (1869–1947), Margaret Stoddart (1865–1934) and Sydney Lough Thompson (1877–1973), names that are now more readily associated with this era. In contrast to the lacklustre impression this gives of Butler’s success as an artist, in his lifetime Butler’s work was widely praised for its quality and he was regularly represented in all the major regional art society exhibitions during the years that he lived in New Zealand.

Although Butler was one of the most successful New Zealand artists of his era, in comparison with the status of the artists working for the British and Canadian war art programmes, many of whom were British Royal Academians and most of whom were knighted, either before or after the war, for their service to art and the community, Butler’s artistic pedigree could appear rather modest. Butler’s career is more favourably likened to that of the Australian official war artists Arthur Streeton and other notable exceptions are:

Other notable exceptions are:


Brown, Hocken Library and Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand, New Zealand painting, 1900-1920: traditions and departures, 22, 34-35.


Artists Francis Dodd, John Lavery, William Orpen, George Clauson, Augustus John, Frank Brangwyn, John Singer Sargent, Eric Kennington, C.R.W. Nevinson, David Y. Cameron and Henry Lamb were all made either Royal Academians (R.A.) or Associate Royal Academians (A.R.A) during their careers. And, as previously mentioned, Muirhead Bone, John Lavery, William Orpen, William Rothenstein, Frank Brangwyn, George Clausen and David Y. Cameron were all given British knighthoods at various stages in their careers.

Malvern, Modern art, Britain and the Great War: witnessing, testimony and remembrance, 181-85.
and George Lambeth who, like Butler, took up their official war posts when they were well respected mature artists who had achieved national as well as international recognition for their work. However, whereas Streeton and Lambeth, who both spent their later lives in Australia, continue to be considered locally as prominent and influential artists of their generation, Butler was not so lucky. Unfortunately for Butler, his decision to remain in England after the war until his death in 1936 meant that his career accomplishments were eventually forgotten in New Zealand.513

Importantly, there was a small but significant resurgence of interest in Butler’s career in New Zealand during the 1990s. Butler’s contribution to the New Zealand War Artists’ Section has been remembered as part of the larger group of artists working in the First World War in two major New Zealand touring exhibitions: Tony Martin’s New Zealand Images of War and Christopher Pugsley’s The Honorary Rank of Captain: Artists of the Great War 1914–1918.514 Pugsley also wrote Butler’s entry in the 1996 edition of the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography.515 As a military and social historian, Christopher Pugsley’s research on the subject of war art occurred as part of his wider investigations into New Zealand’s involvement in the First World War and are, as such, not strictly art historical in nature. Because of the large scale of Tony Martin’s exhibition from the New Zealand Wars to the late 1980s, there was only scope for a small but important analysis of Butler’s work in the exhibition catalogue.

Outside New Zealand, summaries of Butler’s career are included in several surveys of British art of the early twentieth century. Butler receives an informative and relatively substantial listing in Alan Windsor’s publication Handbook of Modern British Painting 1900–1980. Of Butler’s New Zealand contemporaries only Frances Hodgkins is also represented in this book.516 Furthermore, Butler’s successful career

514 Martin and Manawatu Art Gallery., New Zealand Images of War; Pugsley and National Archives of New Zealand., The Honorary Rank of Captain: Artists of the Great War, 1914-1918.
in Britain has been acknowledged by listings of his major exhibitions in standard British publications, *The Dictionary of British artists, 1880–1940* produced by the Antique Collectors’ Club;\(^{517}\) Algernon Graves’ *The Royal Academy of Arts: a complete dictionary of contributors and their work from its foundation in 1769 to 1904*;\(^{518}\) the *Dictionary of British artists working 1900–1950* compiled by Grant Waters;\(^{519}\) and in the *Royal Academy Exhibitors, 1905–1970: a dictionary of artists and their work in the Summer Exhibitions of the Royal Academy of Arts.*\(^{520}\) However there has been no substantial art historical account produced in Britain or New Zealand of Butler’s career and his contribution to the New Zealand War Artists’ Section.

Nevertheless, the lack of detailed scholarly interest in Butler does not diminish the fact that, in 1918, he was selected by a group of prominent New Zealand citizens to represent the New Zealand Expeditionary Forces’ exploits on the Western Front. In response to this, it is interesting to consider that Frances Hodgkins, Raymond McIntyre (1879–1933) and Edith Collier (1865–1964) were all residing in Britain during the Great War and Sydney Lough Thompson was teaching art in Brittany. These artists are now considered to have been extremely influential figures in the development of New Zealand’s national artistic culture. In the New Zealand publications cited above that omit Butler, the careers of Hodgkins, McIntyre, Collier and Thompson are all assigned ample discussion. However, when the authorities from the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in Britain were searching for locally based professional New Zealand artists to recruit for the War Artists’ Section, none from this group were considered as viable candidates above Butler’s admirable qualifications.

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\(^{518}\) Algernon Graves, *The Royal Academy of Arts: a complete dictionary of contributors and their work from its foundation in 1769 to 1904*, vol. 1 comprising volumes 1 and 2 of the original edition (London: Henry Graves and George Bell and Sons, 1905), 363.


In 1917, Butler’s name was listed as one of New Zealand’s most successful expatriate artists alongside Hodgkins, Owen Merton (1887–1931) and Archibald Nicoll in The Studio’s review of colonial art. As a mark of respect, examples of his work were shown at the opening exhibition of the New Zealand National Art Gallery in 1932 and his 1906 painting Homeward was included in the National Centennial Exhibition of New Zealand Art that was held in Wellington in 1940. Butler’s 1936 obituary in Wellington’s Evening Post also mentions that “a fine example [of his work] is hanging in the Retrospective Collection of New Zealand Painting” at the National Gallery.

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524 Two works by Nugent Welch, *The Coming Storm* and *Shandon Landscape*, were also shown in this exhibition.
525 The work referenced is probably *Alone amidst/in Cloisters Dim* (1898) that was donated by the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts to the National Art Gallery and is now in the Te Papa Collection. Obituary, “Mr George E. Butler: A Well-Known Artist.”
It is likely that Butler’s suitability for this position was recognized as a result of the subject matter of the two paintings he had exhibited at the British Royal Academy annual summer exhibition in 1917 – *Dawn, For we have seen His Star in the East* (1917) and *The Supreme Sacrifice* (1917). Of these, *Dawn* was an appropriately well-timed image of hope made in response to some of the darkest events of the war. On the cliffs above the English coastline, a man in his middle-years, dressed in a great coat, stands with one hand resting on a walking stick and the other arm wrapped supportively around the shoulders of a woman. They both stare out across the Channel towards the conflict on the Western Front where sunlight breaks through the clouded sky. The man could be a wounded soldier contemplating the fate of his comrades or the couple may be the parents of a young man fighting for Britain.

526 George Edmund Butler, *Dawn, For we have seen His Star in the East*, 1917. Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery, Bristol.
528 The Battle of the Somme, fought between 1 July and 18 November 1916, cost around 1.1 million casualties across the all armies involved. It was one of the most devastating military battles ever fought. William James Philpott, *Bloody Victory: the sacrifice on the Somme and the making of the twentieth century* (London: Little Brown, 2009).
overseas. Either possibility makes little difference to the overarching sentiments that the painting is deliberately aiming to arouse in the viewer.

Although the scene had become a somewhat cliché representation of the Home Front during the war, the simplicity of the image is nonetheless extremely effective in communicating the optimistic Christian message implied by the title’s quotation from the New Testament Gospel of Matthew (2:1–15). The passage refers to the journey of the magi or wise men that travelled, from undefined eastern lands, to

529 The caption for this work implies that Butler’s exhibition of Dawn at the Royal Academy may actually have been the catalyst for a revival of this type of composition in the illustrated press. “Dawn” has some of the directness of a newspaper cartoon. The image of a couple looking out across the sea to the sunrise (or sunset) was not original when Butler employed it but he gave it such a boost when he exhibited this painting... that it has since become one of the stock-in-trade devices of the cartoonist.”

City Art Gallery Bristol., Carmen Collell, Francis (Curator of Fine Art Greenacre, Bristol), Gillian Hedley and Maria Mendes-Maurao, An anthology of Victorian and Edwardian paintings from the collection of the City Art Gallery, Bristol (Bristol and Swansea: City Art Gallery, Bristol and Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea, 1975), 50.

530 The full passage (2: 1-15) reads: “Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem. Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When Herod the king has heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they aid unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. Then Herod, when he had privately called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. When they had heard the king, they departed; and , lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way. And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.”

The version of the Bible used here is the British Authorised King James Version as this was the most widely used version around the turn of the twentieth century and would have probably have been used by Butler. This assumption is aided by the fact that the wording of the biblical quotation used in the title of the painting Dawn is exactly the same in the King James Version of the Bible whereas later translations use different sentence structures such as the English Revised Version (1881-1895), the other major translation from Butler’s time that translates as: “Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we saw his star in the east, and are come to worship him.”

Bethlehem to worship the infant Jesus as the King of the Jews. Guided only by a star and a prophecy, the magi undertook this quest as the direct result of their clear religious faith and their actions were decided through their unquestioning belief in God’s wisdom, as demonstrated further in the passage. “And being warned by God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.” The specific section of the magi’s story quoted in the title is integral to the underlying meaning of the painting. The title words are those spoken by the magi to King Herod in Jerusalem. By revealing the royal future of the infant they sought, the magi unwittingly provoked the fear and jealously of Herod that led to the Massacre of the Innocents. Although Jesus was saved through the intervention of an Angel of God, the Gospel of Matthew states that many families suffered grievously as Herod attempted to eradicate his competitor for the throne.

Butler’s use of this particular biblical passage to accompany the composition of Dawn functions on two metaphorical levels. Firstly, his reference to the magi’s journey of unswerving faith is designed to act as an exemplary reminder to the English people of the need to affirm their religious convictions during the hardships of wartime. By placing their trust in the mysteries of God’s divine plan the nation could hope to overcome the current adversities and see the Dawn of God’s majesty break through the bleakness of the present. Secondly, the association of the quoted passage with the barbaric actions of King Herod against innocent male children conjures a comparative allusion between the biblical story and the contemporary historical events surrounding the production of this painting, where Kaiser Wilhelm’s greed for power had caused the unnecessary deaths of millions of young men. The high-minded, moralistic tone that underpins Dawn illustrates the intensity of Butler’s own religious beliefs and the zeal of patriotism that was encouraged by England’s wartime propaganda agencies and upheld by stalwart institutions such as the British Royal Academy.

532 “Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they were not.” Ibid., 2:16-18.
The other painting that Butler exhibited in 1917, *The Supreme Sacrifice* (1917), was given the honour of being included in *The Royal Academy Illustrated*. Only a handful of the works displayed at the Academy’s exhibition were featured in the annual catalogue. The painting is also listed as one of Butler’s “principal works” in his

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534 British Royal Academy, *The Royal Academy Illustrated 1917*, 142.
Like Dawn, this work contains religious subject matter, highlighted by the symbolic use of light and colour. It depicts a church converted into a makeshift shelter, possibly a field hospital, where a group of wounded men lie pitifully on the straw covered flagstone floor. The composition has three main focal points that form a slightly lopsided triangle across the canvas. Each point is accentuated by Butler’s use of high-key colour.

The eye is first drawn to the upturned face of an injured soldier, his body propped up and a bandaged hand limply held across his chest. He appears transfixed by the sight above him. The intensity of his gaze draws the viewer’s attention up also to the church’s Crucifix. In the otherwise dimly lit building, the statue is almost completely bathed in a miraculous beam of ethereal light. At the foot of the Crucifix, another soldier, with a serious head wound, is sprawled across the foreground, his body supported against the lap of a disconsolate comrade. The arrangement of this pair appears to deliberately echo the imagery of the dead figure of Christ above them, as if showing the next Station of the Cross – the Deposition (or Lamentation) – when Jesus’ dead body is brought down from the cross to be grieved over by his family and disciples. The transfixed soldier rests a hand on the feet of the ‘dead’ soldier, in a gesture of reassurance. This enhances and effectively underlines the spiritual message of the work that faith in God will give strength to those in need as well as providing comfort and reconciliation through the promise of resurrection and Heaven.

In comparison with Butler’s obvious attempts to understand and publicly justify the devastating repercussions of the conflict in Europe, the war barely featured in the works produced by the other expatriate New Zealand artists living in Britain and the Continent between 1914 and 1918. McIntyre and Thompson in particular seem to have carried on depicting their favourite subject matter and deliberately ignored the

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535 Waters, Dictionary of British artists working 1900-1950, 56.
very existence of the war. This is also true for the majority of Collier and Hodgkins’ production, with some notable exceptions.

Edith Collier had been living in England since 1913 and studying at the St John’s Wood School of Art. Her paintings were mainly portraits and landscape studies taken from the local environment. However, her letters reveal that she was passionately against New Zealand’s involvement in the war: “I think the N.Z. Govt. is dotty, why skin the country so of men…. Please excuse the blots [on] paper they are really my tears.” Her three brothers and two cousins all served in the war, any of which could be the subject of her sketch *Serviceman in Attic Studio* (c.1917–1918) when they visited her London apartment on leave. In 1917 Collier made a portrait of her younger brother Harry who had taken on the extremely perilous task of flying bombing raids over Germany for the British Royal Air Force (RAF). Richard Wolfe in *New Zealand Portraits* astutely describes Collier’s representation of this determined looking man in a dull brown airman’s uniform as “much more conventional than her other paintings at this time, it may have been intended more as a family record than an opportunity for experimentation.”

Collier was also actively involved in volunteer work, assisting the women and children who had been adversely affected by the war, “some of the women are about 50 or more. Thousands of women whose husbands were lawyers and so forth who have got [no one] to turn to.” In response to the dramatic social changes occurring around her, Collier produced *Ministry of Labour – The Recruiting Office for Women* 537

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(c. 1917–1918). The Post-Impressionistic style painting records in vibrant, almost Fauvist colours, a bustling array of women, some dressed in a uniform of knee high boots and shorts, offering their services to the war effort. The subject bears comparison with the series produced by the official British war artist, (Sir) John Lavery (R.A.), who was assigned to document the war on the Home Front. This included paintings like Shell-Making, Scotland (c.1918) that documented how women from across the class barriers moved into the workforce, filling the gaps left by the male population. “Women’s share in the making of shells, when our need was the sorest was worth many good divisions of troops…. What they have done in this war will surely be remembered for ever, not only helping to win it, but helping all men in future to a nobler idea of comradeship with women.”

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Drayton, Edith Collier: her life and work, 1885-1964, plate 17; Martin and Manawatu Art Gallery., New Zealand Images of War, 97, figure 51.
543 From the notes accompanying the reproduction of Lavery’s Shell-Making Scotland, in an official series of publications documenting the activities of the British war artists.
Lavery, Ross and Montague, British Artists at the Front. Part Two: Sir John Lavery. With introductions by Robert Ross and C. E. Montague, plate XII.
When the First World War broke out, Frances Hodgkins was teaching a summer art school in Concarneau, a popular artists’ colony in the French province of Brittany (and coincidentally the wartime home of Sydney Thompson and his family). Classes were abruptly disbanded and Hodgkins left for England where she would remain until after the Armistice. Initially her attitude towards the event was positive, echoing the enthusiastic sentiments of the general public. Significantly, her letters to her mother in New Zealand on the subject appear to be influenced by the teachings of the Futurist and Vorticist art movements that viewed the war as a platform for social revolution. “Heavens what a hammering the Germans & Austrians will get. They will be beaten to their knees of course… we are done with smugness & hypocrisy & the common danger will purge the world of much materialism & self interest & the Empire will be strengthened & purified. Some people think the horrors of war are not
too big a price to pay.” Like many others, her opinion quickly changed once the harsh realities of the situation became apparent, as the deaths of loved ones escalated and financial strains set in. Although she encountered many difficulties, the war period was not completely bleak for Hodgkins.

Unlike Collier, Hodgkins had already established a respectable name for herself as a professional artist and art tutor by 1914. During the war she strengthened this reputation within the English art world through the inclusion of her work, on multiple occasions, in the annual exhibitions of the British Royal Academy, the National Portrait Society and the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers. Hodgkins’ artwork at this point was on the brink of progressing into the distinctive experimental style that she would develop in the 1920s. Her wartime paintings maintain the Impressionist techniques that she had learned from Girolami Nerli (1863–1926) in Dunedin but also show the influence of several of the more modern stylistic trends that she had come across during her travels in Europe, particularly the work of Jean-Édouard Vuillard (1868–1940) and Walter Sickert (1860–1942). She also began to include oil and tempera media into her practice, which had previously been dominated by watercolour paint. The main subjects of Hodgkins’ work at this time were portraits of families, with a particular focus on women and children. Her sitters ranged from wealthy middle to working class as well as wartime refugees. Images of the latter were popular amongst British artists, especially at the beginning of the Great War when their depiction had definite political and propagandist overtones as in Frank Brangwyn’s recruitment poster for the London Underground or William Lee Hankey’s The Flight from Belgium (1914).

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545 Ibid., 152-53, 55, 59-60, 63, 68.


547 The dominance of this subject matter during the war can be attributed to the blanket ban on outdoor painting upheld in England from July 1915, particularly in Cornwall where Hodgkins rented a cottage and studio. Drayton, Edith Collier: her life and work, 1885-1964, 153-54; Buchanan, Hodgkins, Dunn and Eastmond, Frances Hodgkins: paintings and drawings, 31.

548 Buchanan, Hodgkins, Dunn and Eastmond, Frances Hodgkins: paintings and drawings, 32, 112.
Hodgkins was personally moved by the plight of the Belgian people. On 15 October she wrote to her mother, “It has been a black week. The fall of Antwerp a great blow… The misery and horrors are too awful – Belgium is a mere skeleton of herself, two-thirds of her population are flocking to England, penniless and starving.”

Hodgkins made several different studies of refugees that follow a similar compositional structure to these works but also drew on her knowledge of Renaissance art that she experienced first-hand in Italy and France. The wide triangular composition of her *Belgian Refugees* (1916) where the group of figures are shallowly stacked upon one another from the back to foreground seems to deliberately evoke Leonardo da Vinci’s cartoon of *The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne and John the Baptist* (c.1499–1500). Although it is not as overtly propagandist as the works by Brangwyn or Hankey, this painting does play

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551 Also see: Frances Hodgkins, *Refugee Children*, c.1916. Private collection on loan to Manchester City Art Gallery, Manchester.

provocatively on the emotions of the viewer via the forlorn faces of the family of subjects and the subdued tones of the palette. The solemn atmosphere of the painting and the direct, war-weary gaze of the older female sitter are also used, to similar effect in *The Food Queue* (1918) by Nevinson.553

Hodgkins continued to be fascinated by refugee subjects after the war though the mood surrounding her interest had changed. *Belgian Mother and Child*, painted around 1920554 shows a significant return to brighter tones, lighter brushwork and a style more closely associated with her pre-war watercolours like the whimsical *Summer* of 1912.555 However, in terms of war related subjects by New Zealand artists, Hodgkins’ *Belgian Refugees* is probably now the second most well known image produced during the First World War after Moore-Jones’ *Simpson and his Donkey* (1917). Crucially, neither work was the product of an official war artist.

Unfortunately for Butler and the other official New Zealand war artists, the images that they produced of the war have been overshadowed by these more popular paintings. Unlike Hodgkins or Moore-Jones, whose works have been consciously celebrated within Australasia, Butler’s prominence and accomplishments have gradually faded in New Zealand’s memory. This was not aided by his decision to remain in England until his death. However, in 1918, Butler was still distinguished and admired enough to be sought after by the combined interest of three distinguished New Zealanders – Colonel Heaton Rhodes, Major General Russell and Brigadier General Richardson, for employment within the official New Zealand War Artists’ Section.556 This group of men was especially eager to procure Butler’s services because of his connections with New Zealand. When Butler was first approached to work as an official war artist, it was explained to him that he would be required to produce an artistic record of New Zealand’s war effort and that his works would need to both commemorate and celebrate the Dominion’s achievements in a

553 Malvern, *Modern art, Britain and the Great War: witnessing, testimony and remembrance*, 60-63, figure 47.
ACGO, IA. 8333, 1. bx 2842. 124/52/8. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
new War Museum in Wellington and in a large scale exhibition in London.\textsuperscript{557} As an expatriate artist living in Britain but with strong family ties to New Zealand, Butler was extremely proud to be offered such an opportunity and his enthusiasm resulted in a contribution of over ninety official artworks.

An Artistic Education in New Zealand, Britain and Europe, 1890–1900

At the age of twelve he was taken to New Zealand and lived in the backwoods where, in the absence of any distractions, he was able to practise his obvious talent for drawing. He soon made up his mind that he wanted to take up art as a career and pinched and scraped enough to come back to England and study art seriously.\textsuperscript{558}

From relatively humble origins, Butler achieved a remarkable career as a professional artist. Much of his success can be credited to his upbringing in New Zealand where the comparative freedom of colonial life allowed him opportunities that he very likely would never have had had his family remained in England.

Born on 15 January 1872 in Southampton, England, Butler was the only son of seven children. His father, Joseph Cawte Butler, worked as builder (and bricklayer)\textsuperscript{559} in the parish of South Stoneham, in partnership with the timber yard owned by the family of his wife, Jane Tiller.\textsuperscript{560} George’s family were affluent enough to be able to send him to be educated at Taunton’s College, a local, British

\textsuperscript{557} Letter from Captain Gambrill, on behalf of Brigadier General Richardson, to G.E. Butler, 12.08.18. ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWRS/12. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.  
\textsuperscript{559} Information from correspondence with Pam Jackson, descendent of George Edmund Butler, 20 December 2008.  
Government funded, trade school. In 1883, the entire Butler family, which then only consisted of six children (Jane, Ada, George, Annie, Winifred and Harriet Amy), along with the wife and family of Jane’s brother William Tiller, immigrated to Wellington, New Zealand. Joseph Butler kept a travel diary of this voyage in which he recorded their experiences sailing for seven weeks aboard the Ionic.

Figure 88 – The family of Joseph Cawte and Jane Butler (c.1892–93).

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Information on Taunton’s College is from the history of the school on the Old Tauntonians’ Association website, the historical information on which is cited as being drawn from H. Spooner, *A History of Taunton’s School, Southampton, 1760–1967*, Southampton, Taunton’s School, 1968. “Taunton’s School was established as an Endowed School, to be called Taunton’s Trade School with its own independent Board of Governors. It had Junior (7–12) and Senior (12–15) departments and was to provide ‘a sound education with special regard to Technical and Commercial training’.” [http://www.ota-southampton.org.uk/history/newroad.html](http://www.ota-southampton.org.uk/history/newroad.html)


When the Butlers arrived in Wellington, Joseph worked to set up a new family home and a building business in Cuba Street. George Butler, who was eleven when he arrived in New Zealand, was enrolled at nearby Te Aro School in the Aro Valley. When he left school, Butler took up his father's trade and assisted him with building projects, including the construction of a home for his eldest sister Jane when she married David Ernest Beaglehole in 1895. In the 1893 electoral roll, George still recorded his profession as carpentry. However, it was not long after this that George chose to pursue a career as a professional artist.

As the only son of his tradesman father and the obvious heir to the family business, it was perhaps quite surprising that his family appears to have supported George’s bold and potentially reckless career move into the poorly paid and unstable financial realm of the creative arts in New Zealand. Indeed, in 1917, artist and critic E.A.S. Killick was still publicly bemoaning the fact that “There is in New Zealand at present practically no market for works of art. A few sketches find purchasers every year, but the higher priced finished works remain unsold. There are a few artists however – all honour to them – who, knowing this, still have the courage to spend their time and money producing the finished article.” Had the Butlers remained in England, it is unlikely that such an opportunity would have been available for George to pursue his artistic impulse – the Butler men having been agricultural labourers for several generations. However, George’s resolve to follow his passion and his eventual success in this venture illustrates the advantages of his upbringing in the flourishing society of colonial New Zealand where the fortunes of an individual were still buoyant.

George Butler was also fortunate that his father believed in the pioneering philosophy of hard work and a little luck yielding success. In his shipboard diary,

567 Beaglehole, A Life of J.C. Beaglehole: New Zealand Scholar, 36.
568 Detail from the New Zealand Electoral Roll, 1893.
569 Killick, "Landscape Art in New Zealand," 90.
570 Information provided by correspondence with Pam Jackson, descendent of George Edmund Butler, 20 December 2008.
Joseph recorded his meeting with “a good many Colonials who have been home [England] for a trip and are now returning and the general verdict seems to be that if a man is energetic and sober, there is not much fear but he will do very well in New Zealand.”

Joseph Butler's pursuit of prosperity in New Zealand however, was not completely positive. Alongside the building business, Joseph also tried his luck at flax milling. This project was a failure and he was declared bankrupt in 1891, bringing his large family under some financial strain. This unpleasant event makes the timing of George’s career change even more remarkable and is further demonstration of his family’s belief that he would be successful.

In 1890, at the age of 18, Butler began attending art classes at the Wellington School of Design. The following year the school changed its name to Wellington Technical College and appointed a new drawing and painting instructor, James McLauchlan Nairn, who had recently arrived in New Zealand from Glasgow, Nairn brought with him an intoxicatingly fresh approach to art that had a substantial effect on the burgeoning artistic community of New Zealand and would be an extremely important influence on the generation of young New Zealand artists that he taught, including Butler and his fellow official war artist, Welch.

In Scotland Nairn had attended the Glasgow School of Art, was a member of the Glasgow Art Club and exhibited his work at the Glasgow Institute of Fine Arts. He also belonged to the group known as the Glasgow Boys (or Glasgow School). Inspired by the work of Jules Bastien-Lepage and the French Barbizon School, The Boys rejected the conventions of British, and particularly Scottish academic painting. Led by vivacious local artist William York MacGregor (1855–1923), they turned instead to a style that championed the use of en plein air or outdoor painting and emphasised the pre-eminence of nature as a source of artistic inspiration.

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571 From diary entry dated 'Saturday 13th October 1883' in - Joseph Cawte Butler, Diary of Our Voyage to New Zealand, 20 September - 8 November 1883, Hampshire Record Office Archives, Hampshire
572 Pugsley, "Butler, George Edmund (1872-1936)."
574 One of the original British war artists, Sir John Lavery, was also a Glasgow Boy as was Sir D.Y. Cameron who worked for Beaverbrook’s Canadian War Art Programme and British War Memorial Council.
In their analysis of Scottish Art pre-1900, David and Francina Irwin describe how these Glaswegian artists, “Painted light conditions that softened forms and blurred outlines; sunshine filtering through leaves, or shaded by a parasol, days leaden and sunless, twilight, and mist, and dim interiors lit sometimes by a flickering fire.” They explain that even the early works of the School “show a desire to break away from meticulous handling of detail. In varying degrees their works are painterly, executed in broad strokes. Tones, at the beginning, were generally low. Everyday realism, in natural settings, is simplified, and often only a few bold strokes suggest sheep, or a thistle or the folds of a skirt. At best the style was vigorous, at its worst coarse and heavy.”

Roger Billcliffe’s publication on the Glasgow Boys indicates that Nairn played a substantial role in “the gradual development of the Glasgow painters.” Billcliffe aptly refers to Nairn as a “landscapist” whose personal style drew strongly on the aesthetic of the Glasgow School, namely idyllic representations of rural life painted direct from nature with an emphasis on exaggerating the plastic qualities of the picture surface. Nairn was a passionate champion of the Glasgow methodology that “strove more toward achieving an effect, especially in relation to light and colour values, rather than a close objective analysis of the images making up a painting.”

Due to his poor health, Nairn decided to leave behind the increasingly industrialised city of Glasgow and immigrate to New Zealand. However, his timing could not have been worse. The same year that he arrived in Dunedin, the artists associated with the Glasgow Boys attained British and international success through a series of well received exhibitions. This began with a major group show at London’s Grosvenor


David Irwin and Francina Irwin, Scottish painters at home and abroad, 1700-1900 (London: Faber, 1975), 383.


Ibid.

Gallery where the group was first classified as ‘The Glasgow School.’ This critical success was followed by a series of exhibitions in Munich then “Dresden, Berlin, Vienna, Budapest, Venice, St. Petersburg, Bruges and Brussels, and in the United States, in 1895, in St. Louis, Chicago, Cincinnati, Philadelphia and New York. Never before had Scottish art been so extensively exhibited and acclaimed abroad as the Glasgow group in the 1890s.” As Billcliffe suggests, Nairn’s departure in 1899 meant that he missed out on this important development and as such, he remains a minor member of the Boys within British art history. However, the overall impact of the Glasgow School was brief. After 1900, the importance of this group to the development of Scottish and British art dwindled as the artists moved away from their original manifesto.

By contrast, Nairn is acknowledged as having been an extremely influential figure in the development of New Zealand’s visual art culture. As a teacher and mentor, Nairn insisted that his students should draw directly from life. Shockingly for prudish Victorian New Zealand, he introduced the use of nude life-models instead of plaster casts and statues to his figure classes at Wellington Technical College. The scandal of this was increased by the fact that many of his students were young women, several of whom would carry on to become successful artists and teachers in their own right. Nairn also introduced his students (and the general public) to the naturalist approach to painting. He encouraged young artists like Butler to move out of the studio and into a direct relationship with the landscape. His artistic dictum was “always go direct to Nature for your work, and you cannot go wrong.” He taught his students to paint with an emphasis on light, colour and the use of loose, fast brushwork to capture the essential atmosphere of a scene, in the manner of Impressionism.

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579 Irwin and Irwin, *Scottish painters at home and abroad, 1700-1900*, 391-94.
582 Brown, Hocken Library and Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand, *New Zealand painting, 1900-1920: traditions and departures*, 32.
Many of Nairn’s New Zealand works were studies made in the field such as *Wellington Harbour* (1894) or *Wharf at Kaikoura with S.S. Wakatu* (1903). These display his characteristically loose brushwork applied rapidly but purposefully and with great gusto. Such works are indicative of Nairn’s focused desire to capture the atmospheric qualities of the environment before him. Although his style followed a similar vein to the techniques used by the Impressionist painters, Nairn pointedly did not associate himself with this movement. Nairn’s paintings may now appear fairly timid in comparison with the stylistic experimentation conducted by his contemporaries Eugène Henri Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), or Claude Monet (1840–1926) but in New Zealand Nairn’s work was then considered revolutionarily *avant-garde*. The charismatic Nairn stubbornly ignored the criticism of his work in the local

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press and continually pushed at the boundaries of the accepted artistic conventions within the colony.  

Nairn was vocal in his criticism of the New Zealand public's out-dated perception of the arts in the 1890s and the entrenched traditional values upheld by the nation's regional art societies. As a result of this and because of his prominent public position as a teacher of the next generation of artists, Nairn earned himself considerable notoriety within the New Zealand art community before his early death in 1904. Nairn was publicly berated in the national press for his "shockingly bad influence upon the Wellington amateurs and students... This teaching has travelled in New Zealand and we find these shocking slovenly blots and smudges from other parts of the colony (even from Wanganui and Nelson)... What chance has true, genuine, and pure art, in a land where those who set up as teachers don't know their ABC, and are producers of such inartistic work?" In spite of such disapproval, Nairn's example encouraged his pupils to pursue with gusto the new artistic frontiers that he had introduced them to: "There is nothing which I believe tends more to advance art than young, vigorous, and healthy painting outside... Now, let the public accept it or not, let them call it what they like, but I uphold that they have no right to judge. An artist's place is always given him by his brother artists." As Brown and Keith argue in *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting*, the young artists of New Zealand wholeheartedly embraced Nairn's teachings.

The prettiness, the sentimentality and the old anecdotal subject pictures painted by their elders were out. The new enthusiasm was for a direct approach to nature, a fullness and richness of tone... and broad, generalised brushwork that was to impart an overall unity to a work. Their aims strove more toward achieving an effect, especially in relation to light and colour.

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values, rather than a close objective analysis of the images making up a painting.\textsuperscript{589}

It is certain that Nairn made a strong impression on the young Butler. “Depressed by the state of the [New Zealand] Academy of Fine Arts,” Nairn formed the Wellington Art Club in August 1892.\textsuperscript{590} In direct opposition to the Academy, this group functioned as an outlet for those who wanted to engage in a higher level of experimental artistic expression than was then considered acceptable for exhibition by this institution. The original group of twelve artists in the Club consisted mainly of Nairn’s students and fellow teachers from the Technical School as well as some other interested local amateurs. Butler was quick to join Nairn’s initiative, becoming

\textsuperscript{589} Brown and Keith, \textit{An introduction to New Zealand painting 1839-1967}, 81.


\textsuperscript{591} Quote from Mrs M.E.R. Tripe on Nairn’s decision. Wellington Art Club, \textit{Seventy Colourful Years: a history of the Wellington Art Club}, 5.
one of the founding members of the group and exhibiting his work at the Club’s inaugural exhibition in July 1893.\footnote{The Wellington Art Club has continued to exist, in various incarnations, until the present day. Ibid., 5-8.}

Butler participated in the Wellington Art Club’s regular excursions to Pumpkin Cottage, Nairn’s property in the Silverstream area of the Hutt Valley. Here Butler and the other members could practise the technique of sketching \textit{en plein air}, in the midst of the rugged landscape and wild weather of the Wellington countryside. These skills would serve Butler well later in his life when capturing battlefield scenes as a war artist. As mentioned previously, Welch also studied briefly under Nairn and was a regular participant in the excursions to Silverstream.\footnote{Photograph of Pumpkin Cottage sketching class by an unknown photographer. The model is Ethel Eades, George Butler’s cousin’s sister in law. George Butler himself does not appear in the photograph and therefore may have actually been the photographer.}

\footnote{Wellington Art Club, \textit{Seventy Colourful Years: a history of the Wellington Art Club}, 10-11.}
Nairn’s presence in New Zealand had an undoubted catalytic effect on the spread of new stylistic ideas and painting techniques throughout the colony at the turn of the century. However his untimely death in 1904, at the age of just 45, left a void in the art community that no other contemporary artist was successfully able to fill. Nairn had not been alone in bringing challenging new aesthetic doctrine to New Zealand. Italian Girolamo Nerli and Dutchman Petrus van der Velden are also widely credited with the dissemination of new artistic theories throughout the country’s main

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All three artists arrived in New Zealand between 1889 and 1890 and by doing little more than applying the methods they had learnt and developed overseas to a New Zealand context, each of these artists created their own personal sensation amongst the viewing public and the local art community. They each encountered strong disapproval when they attempted to pass their artistic methodologies onto local aspiring artists. While Nairn was vilified for his teaching of “chromatic lunacy,” Petrus van der Velden, who had settled in Christchurch in 1890, was refused a tutoring position at the Canterbury School of Art. Girolamo Nerli too does not appear to have been taken particularly seriously by the Dunedin art community, where he lived temporarily between 1893 and 1898, although his work was generally admired for its picturesque qualities. Nerli was viewed as a “rather romantic, though slightly comic, character” but his “independent, free spirit unhampered by domestic responsibility…[and] bohemian contempt for routine” undoubtedly gave him a controversial reputation.

As many of these artists were only present in New Zealand for short periods of time around the turn of the century, the legacy that they had on the development of New Zealand art has been much debated by art historical scholars. Gil Docking asserts that, “If their fundamental ideas had taken firmer root, a larger body of work bearing the fruits of their influence would be in existence today. But for various reasons these painters were to exert the spell of their personalities on resident painters rather than

601 Dunn, *A Concise History of New Zealand Painting*, 44.
602 Art historian Gordon Brown also includes Louis John Steele (1843–1917/8?) within this group of influential art teachers practising around the turn of the century. Although he was actually born in Surrey, England, Steele spent most of his early career studying and working in Europe, predominantly living in Paris. In 1886 he arrived in Auckland and set up a studio. His most prominent pupil was C.F. Goldie who followed Steele’s romantic historical painting style. Michael Dunn and Gil Docking do not mention Steele in this context but do include the Swedish artist Claude Edward Fristrom (1864–1950) in the group of significant foreign immigrants. Fristrom did not arrive in Auckland until 1903 and stayed only until 1915 but his decorative style, based on the *fin-de-siecle*, Aesthetic movement and Art Nouveau was relatively unheard of in New Zealand art circles at this time. Docking, *Two hundred years of New Zealand painting*, 80-83, 87-88; Michael Dunn, *New Zealand Painting: A Concise History*, Revised and expanded ed. (Auckland, N.Z.: Auckland University Press, 2003), 48; Brown and Keith, *An introduction to New Zealand painting 1839-1967*, 70, 119; Brown, Hocken Library and Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand, *New Zealand painting, 1900-1920: traditions and departures*, 20.
generate distinctive art movements within New Zealand painting. Peter Tomory refers to them as “catalysts” with few real heirs. “None of these artists had a prolonged influence on New Zealand painters,” he claims before continuing on to describe the “disastrous” effect of the expatriate movement. However, the effect that Nairn had on Butler and Welch was arguably much greater than these comments suggest. The influence of Nairn on the artistic development of these two young men was great and long lasting. Throughout their careers, both artists centred their practice around the aesthetic principals advocated by Nairn. In particular, this can be seen in the manner each artist interpreted landscape subjects in their work. As will shown in this and the following chapter, both artists can equally claim the right to be classified as heirs to the impressive aesthetic mantle of Nairn. More importantly for the purposes of this study, Nairn’s teachings would eventually have a significant impact on the manner in which both men approached their roles as war artists.

Figure 93 – George Butler, Farmyard Pump (1902).

603 Docking, Two hundred years of New Zealand painting, 70, 70-82.
As would be expected of a true protégée of Nairn, Butler’s early works were characterised by loose, impressionistic brushwork and a fascination with capturing the atmospheric effects of light and shadow. An oil painting from 1902, now in the collection of the Auckland Art Gallery entitled Farmyard Pump, is likely the same work that Butler exhibited in the Otago Art Society’s 1906 exhibition as The Pump. It is difficult to determine whether this is a scene of rural life in New Zealand or was made later in Butler’s career, after his time in Europe. The manner of its execution and the subject matter of the work are however, extremely similar to one of Nairn’s most celebrated paintings Tess (1893).

Figure 95 – George Butler, *Off Kaikoura* (1901).\textsuperscript{608}

Figure 96 – James Nairn, *Hot Afternoon, Kaikoura Shore* (1899).\textsuperscript{609}


\textsuperscript{609} Nairn, *Hot Afternoon, Kaikoura Shore*, 1899.
Butler’s painting *Off Kaikoura* (1901) also shows the distinct influence of Nairn. Its rough application of paint in broad forceful strokes indicates that it was almost certainly an *en plein air* study, made rapidly to capture the atmospheric effect of a cloud coloured briefly to a rose hue by the rising or setting sunlight and reflecting onto the shallow water of the foreshore. *Off Kaikoura* is very similar to Nairn’s own *plein air* sketch of a similar location *Hot Afternoon, Kaikoura Shore* (1899). Although it is a finished work and not a *plein air* sketch, Butler’s *A Heavy sea at Moeraki* (1903), also illustrates Butler’s early talent for capturing the wild nature of the sea, coastline, and weather conditions so that the viewer can almost hear the roar of the turbulent water. 610 While *A Heavy sea at Moeraki* is not named amongst the works exhibited by Butler at the Otago Art Society exhibition in 1903, a review of the event in the *Otago Daily Times* of “a couple of seascapes” by Butler could apply equally to this particular painting. The critic compliments the artist’s ability to “successfully suggest respectively the large flow of spent waves upon the sand and the unrest of breaking waves upon the rocks, together with the broken turbulence of the backwash.”611

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610 This work was gifted to the National Art Gallery collection in 1938.
Alongside his training under Nairn, Butler took further lessons in drawing and painting at Morrison’s School of Art in central Wellington under the direction of local artist Mr William Leslie Morrison. He also rented a little studio space for six years where he worked towards mastering his artistic skills. The young Butler exhibited the fruits of his labour at the annual New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts Exhibition. He was listed as a working member of the Canterbury Society of Arts in 1896, 1897 and 1898, exhibiting a series of landscapes with atmospheric titles such

613 In 1912 Morrison created the decorative plaster-work for the St James Theatre in Wellington, which has been recently restored. Morrison’s cherub decorations are mentioned in the speech by the former Governor-General of New Zealand, Sir Michael Hardy Boys at the opening of the St James Theatre, Wellington after its renovations, 05.02.1998. The transcript of this speech is published on the New Zealand Government’s official website for the Governor-General of New Zealand. URL: http://www.gov-gen.govt.nz/node/454
Information from correspondence with Pam Jackson, descendent of George Edmund Butler, 20 December 2008.
614 Information from correspondence with Pam Jackson, descendent of George Edmund Butler, 20 December 2008.
as *Where Strong Waters do Roll and Break; A Grey Day, Island Bay* (both 1896) and *The Gathering Storm* (1897).\(^{616}\) Butler was not a working member of the Otago Art Society in the 1890s but he did exhibit several works in their 1896 and 1897 annual exhibitions held in November.\(^{617}\)

In the small Wellington arts community, Butler became acquainted with local businessman, Mr McGregor Wright. With his brother, George, the Wrights owned and operated McGregor Wright and Company, on Lambton Quay, a fine art dealership and art supplier, picture framer, gilder and carver.\(^{618}\) This business was well known as "a general rendezvous for local artists and lovers of art. The firm have unrivalled facilities for disposing of the productions of New Zealand artists in all cases where the pictures themselves are worthy of admiration." The McGregor Wright brothers were particularly skilled salesmen who would "lay themselves out specially to bring buyers and sellers together, all who favour the firm with their patronage may rely upon receiving every consideration and attention."\(^{619}\) The friendship that developed between Butler and the Wrights must also have extended to Butler's wider family because in 1906, when McGregor retired, he sold the business to George's father Joseph Butler.\(^{620}\)

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619 Ibid., 621.

620 Although the connection with the McGregor brothers to the business ceased with this purchase, the Butler's retained the original trading name that was well established in the Wellington market. Joseph Butler eventually passed the running of the company onto his son-in-law, Alexander (Alex) Paterson, the husband of Ada Butler (second Butler child). Later Alex passed the business to his nephew Dick Osbourne, the son of Annie Butler (fourth Butler child). McGregor Wright and Co has remained under the ownership and operation of members of George Butler's family through to the present day.

Information from correspondence with Pam Jackson, descendent of George Edmund Butler, 20 December 2008.

In 1897, Butler and McGregor Wright travelled to Sydney to study the collection of artwork in the Art Gallery of New South Wales. At this time the Sydney Gallery was one the most prestigious, influential and wealthiest art establishments in Australasia. Like many of the regional New Zealand art collections, the Sydney Gallery developed out of the formation, in 1871, of the New South Wales Academy of Art. From 1874, the local New South Wales Government allocated state funding to the Academy to aid their establishment of a significant ‘national’ art collection that could rival the one already formed in Melbourne. Initially, the colonial reliance on the cultural dominance of Britain meant that the majority of the works acquired were by English artists. In 1876, the Gallery Trustees spent their entire yearly budget of £500 pounds on Ford Madox Brown’s *Chaucer at the Court of Edward III* (1847–1851). European, particularly French production was also consciously collected. The purchasing of these works from the Old World was done with an educative function for both the public and local artists but was also seen to add significant status to the collection. By the time Butler visited the Gallery a deliberate effort was also in place to procure the works of prominent Australian artists working in the region such as Conrad Martens, William (W.C.) Pigenut and Arthur Streeton.

It is highly likely that Butler and Wright made the voyage to Sydney to view the 1897 ‘Loan Exhibition’ of 570 artworks from the private collections of the citizens of New South Wales. This event was organised to celebrate the completion of the first section of the current Gallery complex in the Sydney Domain. Although European artworks dominated the exhibition, a considerable proportion, around one-third, were by local artists and there was a separate section for early colonial paintings, indicating a reasonable level of community support for Australian production. The same year the Gallery also organised an exhibition of Australian artworks in London but, as Heather Johnson points out in her publication *The Sydney Art Patronage System 1890–1940*, the underlying intention of this was to gain approval and validation of the quality of the works amongst the British art community.

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621 Obituary, "Mr George E. Butler: A Well-Known Artist."
622 Ford Madox Brown, *Geoffrey Chaucer reading the "Legend of Custance" to Edward III and his court, at the palace of Sheen, on the anniversary of the Black Prince's forty-fifth birthday, 1847-1851*. Collection of the National Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.
624 Ibid., 10-14.
and-coming artist, Butler would have found the amount of Australian artwork on show at the Sydney exhibition an encouraging sign that the Australasian market could adequately support the production of local artists. However the main reason for his visit would more likely have been to take advantage of this rare opportunity to view first hand such a large collection of high quality British and European works. He would certainly have made careful study of the styles and techniques on display – gaining visual inspiration for his own burgeoning practice.

As in Australia, the New Zealand art community was also dependent on the opinion and fashions of Britain and, to a lesser extent, Europe. These sentiments permeated the whole of New Zealand society from the very beginning of the colony until well into the twentieth century and had a far-reaching effect on the history of the nation. The political repercussions of this dependence led directly to New Zealand’s involvement in the South African War and the subsequent World Wars.\textsuperscript{625} In the arts, it provoked the phenomenon of expatriatism – the, often permanent, migration of talented young New Zealand artists overseas. Most commonly this meant going ‘Back Home’ to Britain, which was then thought of as the ‘Mother Country’.\textsuperscript{626}

After his years of training in New Zealand, what Butler saw during his time in Sydney must have whetted his appetite to experience not only the art but also the opportunities that Britain and Europe could offer. There were many pragmatic reasons why young artists chose to make this voyage. Around the turn of the century, it was still considered highly desirable for an artist to train at the major European institutions and, ultimately, to exhibit their work at the various Academies. Anyone who could claim to be a Royal Academian (R.A.), an Associate Royal Academian (A.R.A.) or even just to have been selected for inclusion in one of the annual Academy exhibitions would immediately gain a higher level of respectability within New Zealand’s art community. In Europe itself, many younger artists were beginning to openly scorn the opinion of the Academies who were increasingly seen


as old fashioned and stuffy for their non-progressive tastes. Colonial New Zealanders however, continued to maintain their awe for these venerable institutions long after they had fallen out of vogue elsewhere. Although Frances Hodgkins favoured the bohemian artist’s lifestyle, she still was honoured to have her work accepted for the Royal Academy’s summer exhibition in 1915, despite the conservative nature of the event, as she realised the potency that such an esteemed gesture would give to her career “Have I my lucid moments or have They?”

Butler was indeed determined to travel overseas despite the limitations of his financial situation. As a contemporary article in the Auckland Star explains “It is not only infeasible for almost any artist to save money enough from his pictures to journey to Paris or Florence or Rome, and there to sojourn for a season; but it is really not possible even for the men at the top of the colonial tree to live on art, or even to obtain from the annual sale of pictures the bread without the butter.” Nevertheless, Butler was aware that the risk of this journey overseas had the potential to increase his artistic prospects and provide him with future financial sustainability. Maintaining a viable artistic career in New Zealand was a constant struggle for even the most well-known and popular artists. In order to make ends meet most were forced to take up teaching positions or to downgrade their fine art aspirations to work as artisan illustrators or cartoonists for local newspapers and periodicals. However, the market for such work was small. Ambitious young artists like Butler realised that the qualifications and exhibition successes gained overseas would help them achieve much greater prosperity in the colony on their return. Therefore, in 1898 Butler set sail for England aboard the S.S. Gothic, not as a common passenger but working in the stokehold in order to save his money for his tuition at London’s Lambeth School of Art.


Letter by Frances Hodgkins to her mother Rachel Hodgkins, 28 April 1915 in - Drayton, Frances Hodgkins: a private viewing, 152.

Brown, Hocken Library and Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand, New Zealand painting, 1900-1920: traditions and departures, 21-22.
Following his time at Lambeth, Butler was advised by the school's headmaster Thomas McKeggie to enrol at the Académie Julian in Paris. The Académie Julian was established in 1868 as a more liberal alternative to the strictly academic training provided at the elite Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts (National School of Fine Arts, Paris). The Académie Julian encouraged the enrolment of keen amateurs and was one of the first art schools to allow the entrance of female students. It was particularly popular with international students seeking to train in Paris. For many young New Zealand artists, including Charles Goldie, Alfred O'Keeffe and Sydney Thompson, the Académie Julian was the foremost school of choice in order to gain a thorough artistic education in Europe. The Académie was also favoured by French and European art students as one of the several fashionable ‘free academies’ scattered throughout Paris. The school’s training programme focused on the rigorous training of its students in the studio. An emphasis was placed on drawing and shading; the figure was studied from life; and allegorical subjects were regularly given as assignments to create compositions. Butler flourished under the direction of M. Jules Lefebre’ and M. Tory Floury and received a qualification with Honours.

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630 Obituary, "Mr George E. Butler: A Well-Known Artist."
632 Obituary, "Mr George E. Butler: A Well-Known Artist."

There are few known works traceable from this period in Butler’s training. As will be discussed later, one example, *Alone Amidst the Cloisters Dim* (1898), would eventually be used by Butler to raise his artistic profile within New Zealand. Another work, titled *Visiting the Patient* (1899), was known to have been sold into a private collection in 1992 at auction in London. While it is difficult to judge much of Butler’s painterly skill from the auction catalogue’s poor quality reproduction, the subject


matter of the child invalid reveals the work to be a key early example of the intimate family and household scenes that would later become a hallmark of Butler’s practice.

After Paris, Butler travelled on to Antwerp where he was a student at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, under M. Albrecht de Viendt. At the end of the nineteenth century, attendance at Antwerp’s Royal Academy was considered as the final ‘finishing school’ for a well-rounded artistic education in Europe. Again, Butler excelled here and in 1900 he won the Concours Gold Medal for painting from life and portrait work “and was crowned with the laurel wreath.” The Christchurch Press records that this “distinction is greatly valued, and which is competed for by all the highest class students, who come from all parts of the world. The successful picture in this competition is retained by the State, and finds a place in one of the principal public halls.” In late August 1900 The Evening Post proudly reported on the receipt by “George Butler of Wellington” of this prestigious award and commented on his overseas success. “He has been travelling in France and Belgium, studying art most assiduously in both of these countries so rich in artistic treasures. He has got on very well.”

During his time abroad Butler returned to visit his relatives in Southampton where he met and married a cousin, Sarah Jane (Jeanne) Popplestone, on the 29 April 1899. The couple would eventually have two children, Berenice who also had artistic inclinations, and Brian.

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635 The Academy’s name in Belgian is Koninklijke Academie voor Schone Kunsten van Antwerpen.
637 “Art Exhibition,” The Press Tuesday 5 February 1901.
639 Sarah was the daughter of Fanny Tiller (George’s aunt) and Thomas Popplestone. The couple married at Ebenezer Chapel, New Forest, Southampton, England on the 29th April 1899. George was 27 and Jeanne 30 years old. Information provided from correspondence with Pam Jackson, descendent of George Edmund Butler, 20 December 2008 and from Mary Dibben, descendent of Isabella Popplestone, sister of George Butler’s wife Jeanne, September-October 2009.
An Artist of Stature in New Zealand, 1900–1905

Having completed his training in Europe, Butler was now ready to pursue a career as a professional artist. Instead of remaining in Britain, Butler chose to return to New Zealand with his new wife. Contrary to the finality implied by the term expatriatism, Butler was not alone in his decision. Most New Zealand artists of his generation who travelled overseas did not intend to abandon their homeland forever. In his publication on the development of New Zealand nationalism, *A Destiny Apart*, Keith Sinclair comments on the common feeling amongst early New Zealand artists of being torn between two places. Many felt a sense of being detached in colonial exile from the cultural centre of the Old World. However, most also felt a strong attachment to this new “nation that had no past” and were keen to form a national

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641 Photograph of George Edmund Butler as a young artist in his studio, no date, possibly taken in New Zealand, Courtesy of Trish Ramsay (descendent of the artist’s family).
artistic culture from scratch to fill this perceived gap.\textsuperscript{642} Although Sinclair refers specifically to the early New Zealand literary community, these emotions apply equally to those working in the fine arts.

A large number of the artists that were amongst the diaspora overseas did return, like Butler, to New Zealand once they had completed their studies. Those who did were keen to apply their new artistic knowledge to the New Zealand environment and to begin the process of establishing themselves back amongst the local art community. Many were successful in their endeavours and chose to remain in New Zealand permanently. After studying together in Paris, Charles Goldie and Alfred O’Keeffe both returned to New Zealand in the late 1890s. They each built up respectable professional careers in Auckland and Dunedin respectively, establishing successful studios, supplementing their income with teaching positions and exhibiting their work locally. In later life, Goldie’s paintings were regularly accepted for exhibition at the Royal Academy (between 1934–48).\textsuperscript{643} As described in the previous chapter, despite already having a relatively buoyant career as a teacher and professional artist in New Zealand, Archibald Nicoll also decided to leave the Dominion in 1910 to continue his artistic education in Britain. Here he was extremely successful, exhibiting at the British and Scottish Royal Academies and the Glasgow Institute. After being overlooked for duties as an official war artist, Nicoll resumed his career in the Dominion, serving as the Director of the Canterbury College of Fine Arts for eight years (1920–1928) and was eventually awarded an O.B.E. in 1948 for his services to Art.\textsuperscript{644}

It is likely that when the 28 year old Butler returned to New Zealand around September 1900, he assumed that his new qualifications and experience overseas would bring him respectability and success in the colony and that eventually he would achieve a similar level of cultural status and prestige as that gained by other


\textsuperscript{643} Platts, Nineteenth century New Zealand artists: a guide & handbook, 107-08, 84.

locally based artists.\textsuperscript{645} Unfortunately, such long-term accomplishments were not to be his fate. Although Butler's career in New Zealand was buoyant to begin with, his triumph was short-lived.

George and Jeanne Butler spent their first few months in New Zealand living in Wellington with George's family. His return was received positively by the press, the \textit{New Zealand Free Lance} commenting that, "Mr George Butler... is an excellent example of the gritty young colonial. Son of a Wellington builder, he was brought up here to his father's trade, but at an early age developed artistic qualities, and for some time before he left this city – which was about three years ago – his paintings had come to be looked for as a regular feature of the annual art exhibitions. Since then, Mr Butler has studied in London and on the Continent, and he has added to his valuable possessions by taking to himself a wife.\textsuperscript{646} In mid-December 1900, Butler held an exhibition of recent works at McGregor Wright's Gallery that received admirable praise by a critic from the \textit{New Zealand Free Lance}. This article contains some extremely revealing commentary about the cultural status of Butler's early art career and the exclusivity of Wellington's New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, which Nairn and his followers, including Butler, had pointedly rebelled against.

A really fine exhibition of pictures is that which George Butler – Wellington's very own artist – showed during the week at Wright's Gallery, Butler has proven himself a painter of whom the colony will some day be decidedly proud. It is small consolation to the clever man that fame comes after death, but Butler is young, he has a large heart, and he has through deserving gone halfway to meet a success, which must come to him. It is strange that before he went Home to finish his art education, and when he was only a carpenter George Butler was 'barred' by the art circles of the city. His seascapes were

\textsuperscript{645} This article mentions that, "Mr Butler proposes returning to New Zealand some time next month." As the article is dated in late July and the voyage to New Zealand from England took about six weeks, it is likely that he would have arrived in Wellington in September, perhaps October. \textit{Evening Post London Correspondent} (unnamed), "New Zealanders in London, London 28th July, Personal Items."

\textsuperscript{646} "All Sorts of People," \textit{New Zealand Free Lance: An Illustrated Journal of Information and Racy Comment upon the Topics of the Hour} 11 August 1900.
far superior to the product of the pets of the circle, and therefore he was ruled out of competition.  

An art critic from *The Evening Post* gave Butler an equally favourable review for this exhibition, discussing several of the artworks at length and noting the artist’s versatility across a range of genres. “Some very fine work has been put into the many small canvases shown.” However, this critic also comments on the snobbery that tainted the initial perception of Butler’s production but which was quickly dismissed when confronted by the quality of the actual works. “Many people who went to criticise the young colonial’s work stayed to admire his pictures with a delight that must have afforded to the artist the pleasure of finding that there is for him some honour in his own country.” The reason behind this apparent negativity towards Butler in the Wellington art community may have been as simple as his association with Nairn and the Silverstream Group. The statements made by both these critics clearly indicate the social obstacles that young artists like Butler had to overcome to establish an art career for themselves in New Zealand. Even obviously talented artists were treated as inferior by the New Zealand art establishment until they were able to conduct a period of study abroad and could receive recognition, as Butler did, from an international establishment like the Royal Academy, Antwerp. When Butler made his return to New Zealand backed by these honours, his transformation was complete and he was automatically accepted by his peers, and in particular, his elders. The positive manner in which his career was reported from 1900 confirms this.

In February 1901, Butler held another solo exhibition, displaying works from the McGregor Wright show and others at the Christchurch Chamber of Commerce. Entrance to this was free to the public and the show remained open for two weeks. Following on from his successes in Wellington, the Christchurch art reporter for *The Press* was suitably impressed by what he saw.

The figure studies are excellently treated, while the landscape works are agreeably diversified, and afford a good example of the painter’s style in a

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647 Unknown, “All Sorts of People,” *New Zealand Free Lance: An Illustrated Journal of Information and Racy Comment upon the Topics of the Hour* 15 December 1900.

648 “Mr Butler’s Exhibition: A Fine Collection of Pictures.”
distinct branch of art. There are also studies from the nude, which...are notable for their conscientious drawing. Among the fifty-one examples of his work to be found in the exhibition, there is not one that is not worthy of careful study.649

On 25 September 1901 George and Jeanne’s, first child, Berenice was born. At this point the couple were living on Great King Street in Dunedin, having shifted down to Otago sometime earlier in the year.650 By 1902, the South Dunedin Electoral Roll records that the family had moved to Allandale Road, Caversham, perhaps to a larger house, more suitable for a growing family.651 To provide a steady income to support his wife and child, Butler worked part-time as a drawing master at Otago Boys’ High School, a position he held between 1901 and 1905.652 He also had a studio in the Club House, 51 Moray Place (opposite the Dunedin Public Library, just outside the Octagon in Central Dunedin) where he offered private classes in “Drawing and Painting from Life, Landscape, and Still Life.”653 One of his former pupils J.H. Oliver recalls that Butler “was a quiet, soft-spoken man, with fine, kind features. He knew how to keep his own counsel... During his first years in Dunedin Butler found it difficult to make ends meets, but an increasing number of pupils and occasional sales of paintings helped him considerably.”654

Around 1901 Butler joined the Otago Art Society as a working member and exhibited fourteen pictures at the annual November exhibition. He continued to exhibit a

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651 J.H. Oliver, a pupil of the artist also recalls that Butler lived in the Dunedin suburb of St Clair which borders Caversham. A map of Dunedin shows that these two suburbs border each other and that Allandale Road lies between both, so it is probable that this is the same house address being described.
652 Hocken Library Pictorial Collection, ‘Information from J.H. Oliver, a pupil of G.E. Butler, 4 November 1960’; 1902. 7926, Butler, George Edmund, Allandale Road, Caversham, Artist, 297, 3,0, PTL111, KK1111 South Dunedin Electoral Roll Database
substantial amount of work regularly with the Society and held his membership until 1908, well after he had departed Dunedin permanently. On 7 November 1903, the *Otago Daily Times* art critic reported that, “an enormous acquisition to the local strength of the Otago Art Society lies in Mr Butler’s work.” The *Otago Witness* repeated this positive opinion of the artist in early 1905.

Since Mr Butler settled in Dunedin, something over four years ago... he has gained many friends and admirers among those to whom an interest in art is real, and the number of admirable examples of his work that have been frequently set before the public have been ample testimony to his skill, versatility, and exceptional industry.

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Figure 101 – George Butler, *Mother and Child* (1903).

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Catalogue number 92, *Mother and Child*, G.E. Butler, £70 in -
Butler’s peers at the Art Society must have also shared these sentiments of high regard as in 1903 they purchased one of his paintings, *Mother and Child* (1903) for the permanent collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, at the substantial cost of £70 pounds. Judging from photographs of Jeanne and the age of the child depicted, it is highly likely that this work is a portrait of Butler’s wife and daughter. The painting is a charming Edwardian domestic study set in a lush and slightly whimsical garden bower. In the dappled light beneath the greenery, a mother reclines in a wicker outdoor chair with her child draped across her lap. The tender intimacy of the gaze between the pair forms the central focal point of the image. A blossom laden tree branch delicately frames the boundary of the portrait, creating a halo-like curve over their heads, a subtle evocation of the traditional Christian imagery of the Madonna and Child. In addition, the curve of blossom flowers performs several integral compositional functions. The almost complete circle of pink and white highlights of the flowers and clothing flows around the canvas, drawing the eye around and up the composition to the focal area. This is a deliberate structural device to prevent the viewer’s gaze ‘slipping-off’ the picture. The highlights also create depth in the picture field and lessen the dominance of the garden greenery, which could otherwise overwhelm the seated pair, while the flowers serve to balance the strong diagonal line of the mother’s extended legs. The entire composition has been closely cropped, in the style of the Impressionists, to mimic a photographic snapshot and to intensify the sense of intimacy in the scene. While the elegant impressionistic application of paint used in this painting is certainly reminiscent of Nairn’s *Tess*, the subject matter also evokes the informal, private world of women and children glimpsed in the work of French Impressionist artists Mary Cassatt (1844–1926) or Berthe Morisot (1841–1895). Butler has expertly captured the bond of love between mother and child. This painting is an excellent early example of the artist’s talent for portraying convincing child subjects, a difficult genre, which he was able to master over the next two decades.

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Otago Art Society, *Catalogue of the Twenty-Sixth Annual Exhibition* (Dunedin: J. Wilkie and Company, November 1903 (note that there are two Twenty-Sixth Annual Exhibitions in 1902 and 1903 due to a mistake on the original catalogue in 1903)).

659 Information provided by Mary Dibben, descendent of Isabella Popplestone, sister of George Butler’s wife Jeanne, September-October 2009.
Mother and Child appears to have been a popular feature of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery collection for many years following the artist’s return to England, as it was described as being “very much admired” in Butler’s Obituary, published by The Evening Post in October 1936. During his actual residence in Dunedin, paintings by Butler were definitely desirable. The copy of the 1903 Otago Art Society Annual Exhibition catalogue used for this investigation was marked, by a contemporary hand, with ticks and ‘sold’ beside the works that had been purchased. Of the fourteen works shown by Butler that year, three are marked as sold and five are ticked. Although it is unclear exactly what the writer meant to indicate with the tick, the catalogue does illustrate that there was a relatively high demand for Butler’s work within the Dunedin community. His local success was confirmed when he was commissioned to paint a series of portraits of Dunedin City dignitaries.

This painting is referred to as “Spring Blossoms” in Butler’s obituary published by The Evening Post. The article mentions that this work was still on display at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery at the time of Butler’s death in 1936. Due to the similarities between the description of “Spring Blossoms” and Mother and Child, it has been assumed that these works are indeed the same painting. Obituary, “Mr George E. Butler: A Well-Known Artist.”


It is unclear if this painting was part of George Butler’s work for the New Zealand Tourist Department but it gives a sense of the type of landscape work he was making during the period.
Around 1903–1904, the New Zealand Government awarded Butler a roving commission to paint the beauty spots of the country for the Department of Tourist Health and Resorts. The Tourist Department had been founded in February 1901 and was soon amalgamated with the new Department of Industries and Commerce. In 1903 the Department opened an office in Dunedin as a base for its Otago and Southland operations. Presumably, it was through this branch that Butler received his commission. It is an interesting coincidence that the man in charge of this Department, Thomas Edward Donne, later worked for the High Commissioner, Thomas Mackenzie, in London before and during the First World War. Mackenzie worked closely with the New Zealand War Records Section and was instrumental in the formation of the War Artists Section as well as the creation of New Zealand’s official photography and cinematography units (as mentioned in Chapter Two). Both Mackenzie and his assistant Donne served on the New Zealand War Museum Executive Committee in 1918 and Donne was also part of the Art-Sub Committee that controlled the employment of the New Zealand war artists. It is possible that Donne suggested Butler as a candidate for an official role with the War Artists Section because of the good work Butler had done for the Tourist Department.

The titles of the works that Butler exhibited around this time such as Sketch – Mt. Earnslaw from Glenorchy (1903) and Mt Cook, from the Malte Brun Hut, Early Morning (1904), indicate that he travelled around the South Island to carry out this work. These artworks “found more than a local appreciation.” In April 1904, the Otago Witness reported that, “Mr George Butler, artist, of Dunedin, has completed for the Tourist Department a series of five coloured photo enlargements of New

George Butler, Mountain and Lake, 1904, oil on canvas, Hocken Library Collection, Given by Mrs J. Begg, Dunedin, 1965, Accession 23,927, Location F B985

664 English Correspondent for The Press, "The Official War Artist."
665 New Zealand Tourist and Publicity Department, 75 Years of Tourism, 3-4; Nightingale, Dingwall and New Zealand Department of Conservation Science & Research Unit, Our Picturesque Heritage: 100 years of scenery preservation in New Zealand, 22.
667 "Mr G.E. Butler's Pictures."
Zealand scenery. It is intended to send them on to the St. Louis Exposition.” The Louisiana Purchase Exposition (or World’s Fair), held in St. Louis, Missouri between 30 April and 1 December 1904 was one of the major international events of the early twentieth century, with sixty-three nations represented. It is not known if all five works by Butler were sent to the Exposition but the Otago Witness does note that Butler’s painting of the Waimangu Geyser, Rotorua was shown in St. Louis.

Butler’s commission with the Tourist Department appears to have continued into early 1905 as on the 22 February 1905 the Otago Witness noted that Butler “has only now returned from Milford Sound, where he has spent five weeks in carrying out a commission from the Tourist Department for two pictures of the Sounds. Although the weather was much of it bad, Mr Butler was, in the time at his disposal, naturally able to secure many pictures and sketches.” The subjects of these works included Mount Cook from Lake Pukaki; A Wet Day, Milford; “couple of pictures of Mare [sic Mitre] Peak” and the Milford track, all of which the journalist labelled as “very interesting pictures treated in the artist’s typical style.”

Figure 103 – George Butler, Brittany (1904).

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668 “Wellington News Notes (From Our Own Correspondent) Wellington April 19,” Otago Witness 27 April 1904.
669 Correspondence with Jason D. Stratman, Assistant Reference Librarian, Missouri History Museum, St Louis, March 2009-February 2010.
As can be seen by studying the annual exhibition catalogues of New Zealand’s regional art societies, Butler exhibited his artworks throughout the colony. As his reputation grew, many of his works were purchased. Paintings by ‘G.E. Butler’ from this period are now scattered throughout the major art collections of New Zealand. These were, either, bought by the art societies themselves, donated by patrons or collected by local institutions. During his residence in New Zealand between 1900–

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c.1905, Butler exhibited paintings based on both local and European subject matter. Some of the latter were either made during his time overseas or were worked up in New Zealand from sketches and drawings. One such painting is Brittany (1904), which was bequeathed to the Dunedin Art Gallery Collection in 1948 by Sir Henry Lindo Ferguson, a leading Professor of Medicine and noted patron of the local art community who may have known Butler in Dunedin. This painting is strikingly similar to the compositional structure used by Butler in several of his official war artworks such as The road from Ploegsteert to Hyde Park Corner (1918), “From Ypres”, the road to Becelaere and Gheluvelt (1918) or The Catacombes, road to Neuve Eglise (1919), except that the trees in these later works are now shattered stumps and the landscape has been heavily pounded by artillery. The representation of an avenue of slim (poplar) trees, receding into the distance is a device used by many significant European artists in the pre-war era to evoke the natural beauty of the French countryside but during the First World War it became a symbol of French patriotism and Allied propaganda. By showing bombed roads or vast lines of marching troops as in Butler’s The Bapaume-Arras Road (1918), the war artists could describe the enormous destructive impact that the war brought to France and Belgium without having to negotiate the hazards and pictorial difficulties of the front lines and no man’s land. This will be discussed further in the following chapter.

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674 George Edmund Butler, The Bapaume-Arras Road, 1918. Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, Wellington Office.
In February 1904 Butler’s *Alone Amidst the Cloisters Dim* (1898), described as a “forcible portrait” from one of “the leading artists in the colony,” was awarded first prize in the art section of the Hawera Industrial Exhibition, as judged by the Director of the Wanganui Technical School, Mr D.E. Hutton. In 1907 the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts acquired this work for its collection and it was transferred into the National Art Gallery’s collection when it was established in 1932. This same “excellent head” was also exhibited with the Wellington contingent at the New Zealand International Exhibition of Arts and Industries held in Christchurch between November 1906 and April 1907. Other Butler paintings included at this event were “‘Mount Cook’, ‘Under the Trees’, ‘A Country Road’, ‘The Pond’, [and] ‘A Village Street.’” Each of the Wellington artworks sent to the Exhibition were considered to be “the cream” of those presented at the 1906 September exhibition of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts. Those also selected included D.K. Richmond, Miss E. Patterson, Mr John Wright and James Scott (who would later become an official

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Australian war artist). The *Evening Post* summarised the artworks on display in Christchurch. "There will be a pan-Britannic display of art – particularly pictures – at the New Zealand Exhibition. Leading painters of Great Britain have sent some of their best work, Australia will be represented, and New Zealand, undaunted by the brilliancy of the talent from other shores, will not be ashamed to show her head. Wellington’s contribution, which went South yesterday, will not disgrace this province." The meekness and humility of this statement speaks volumes about the perceived cultural inferiority present within New Zealand, even in this early era, where the accomplishments of the nation were continually measured beneath those of Britain and even Australia. In spite of his achievements, Butler would have been uncomfortably conscious that this derogatory value judgement would always see the work he produced in New Zealand classed as subordinate to anything made by an artist from ‘Home.’

Therefore, it is not so surprising that, at the height of his success in New Zealand, George Butler left the colony for England and never returned. This seemingly ill-timed decision appears to have been prompted by the news that his painting *I shall go softly all my years* was to be included at the 1904 British Royal Academy’s annual exhibition. "The artist received a hearty letter of congratulation from Mr Alfred East, one of the most prominent of English landscape painters, and Mr Butler’s personal friend, and Mr East strongly recommended him to come to the Old Country, which advice Mr Butler not unwillingly is following." The acceptance of Butler’s work by the Royal Academy’s venerable Hanging Committee provided a substantial boost to his international reputation and offered him the prospect of greater financial sustainability in the larger economies of Britain and Europe where money was more readily available for luxury items like artwork. Much to the dismay of the local art community, Butler made the bold decision "to pursue his calling in the wider field.

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679 Quotations taken from:
680 "The Exhibition: Pictures from Wellington."
681 Graves, *The Royal Academy of Arts: a complete dictionary of contributors and their work from its foundation in 1769 to 1904*, 363.
682 "Mr G.E. Butler’s Pictures."
offering in the Home-land,” departing Dunedin around the end of February 1905.

Not surprisingly, the increasing occurrence of artistic expatriatism had a significant negative effect on the development and perception of this early period in New Zealand’s cultural history. Butler would eventually become a casualty of this movement as would many of his contemporaries including Raymond McIntyre, Frances Hodgkins, Sydney Thompson, Owen Merton and, perhaps most famously, Katherine Mansfield (1888–1923). Like Butler, these now prominent local artists also made the journey to and from Europe with the intention of settling into life back in New Zealand but eventually found that the small nation could not sustain them as professional artists or provide adequate challenges for their ambitions. Unfortunately, the talent exhibited by many local artists was not always appreciated or understood by the local art societies who displayed their work. As explained by Gordon Brown in *New Zealand Painting: 1900–1920*, the founding editor of the monthly New Zealand arts and culture magazine *The Triad*, Charles Naider Baeyertz, voiced his dissatisfaction with "The astounding ignorance or prejudice, or both, displayed by the Hanging Committee of the Auckland Society of Arts, who for the most part have treated the works of southern artists with gross unfairness.' He condemned the fact that fine paintings by C.N. Worsley and G.E. Butler ‘were hung in a dark passage’ and other works by Butler, R. Proctor and S.L. Thompson ‘were skied, whilst some of

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683 The writer refers to Butler as “a young New Zealand artist now in London.” See 'Section X: Art in the Exhibition’ in - Cowan, *Official record of the New Zealand International Exhibition of Arts and Industries held at Christchurch, 1906-7: A Descriptive and Historical Account*, 270.

684 Before Butler left he had a large exhibition of his work at Messers McCormick and Pugh’s, Rattray Street, Dunedin. "Including sketches, between 40 and 50 examples of Mr Butler’s work are shown – some previously exhibited, but many new…. Of Mr Butler’s other pictures, most noteworthy perhaps are the charming figure study entitled ‘The Violinist’ another entitled ‘The Widow’ and landscapes and seascapes such as ‘The Lagoon, Outram,’ ‘Cattle Rock, Brighton,’ ‘Low Tide, Brighton,’ ‘A Winter’s Evening’ and ‘Marshland’. Some of the artist’s small, unframed sketches in oil and watercolours of the Sounds are particularly pleasing and effective. Pictures-lovers should not fail to take advantage of the opportunity – the last they are likely to have here – of inspecting a representative collection of work by Mr Butler, which, as indicated, will in the present case much more than repay inspection.”

Also on display at this dealer gallery at this same time as Butler’s exhibition were two large horse studies, described as “conspicuous for their fine colouring and glowing effect of sunlight” by Harold Septimus Power, originally from Dunedin, but then residing in Adelaide. Power would later work as an official war artist for Australia. His painting *Bringing up the Guns* (1917) is on permanent loan to Archives New Zealand from the Australian War Memorial art collection.

the weirdest abominations of desolation were hung on the line.’ Yet more worthy pictures, including ‘A Child’s Head, by Raymond McIntyre, were hung in the Chamber of Horrors amidst a howling wilderness of shrieking discords.’ ‘The Hangers be Hanged!’ exclaimed Baeyertz. ‘What a back-to-front side-before way of educating our public!'  

Many young artists attempting to establish their careers in the colony found the intrinsic smallness of its artistic community with its closed attitudes impacted negatively on their career. Most found the cultural situation in New Zealand to be unrewarding or creatively stifling and struggled to succeed financially. Like Katherine Mansfield, Moore-Jones departed Auckland for Sydney in 1891 on account of its “confined cultural climate.” Hodgkins returned to Wellington in 1904 with plans to remain but was ultimately dissatisfied with her decision and left within two years. Similarly, Grace Joel (1865–1924) did not stay long in her hometown of Dunedin after she returned around 1894–95 from a successful period of study in Melbourne where she had received an award for her painting achievements. She was briefly involved with Nerli’s circle and gave lessons at her studio but by around 1899 she departed to study in Europe and never returned.

Maud Sherwood (1880–1956) began her artistic education at the Wellington Technical College under Nairn. She later recalled the radical painting advice offered to students like Butler and herself to “dash it on, slash it on, don’t be afraid of it! Let the world stare!” In 1910, to broaden her training, Sherwood travelled through Europe and studied at Colarossi’s school in Paris. Instead of returning to New Zealand, she settled in Australia in 1913 where she made a respectable name for herself in the substantial art market of New South Wales. She did not return to

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685 The Triad, July 1908, p. 1 and 9, quoted by Gordon Brown in - Brown, Hocken Library and Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand, New Zealand painting, 1900-1920: traditions and departures, 8.  
687 Dunn, A Concise History of New Zealand Painting, 52.  
688 Docking, Two hundred years of New Zealand painting, 100-02; Dunn, A Concise History of New Zealand Painting, 56-58.  
689 Maud Sherwood’s recollection, New Zealand Free Lance 15 April 1925, p. 10  
Anne Kirker, New Zealand women artists (Auckland, N.Z.: Reed Methuen, 1986), 80, 227.
Wellington until 1924 and although the National Academy held an exhibition of her work in 1925, she only stayed just over a year. The rest of her career she spent between Europe and Australia and, if she did maintain contact with New Zealand, she never returned to the country. This was likely due to her opinion, shared by her acquaintance Hodgkins and many other expatriates that, “Good, modern art would be high above the heads of 999 out of 1000 New Zealanders.” Owen Merton, Francis McCracken and Raymond McIntyre were also among those who left New Zealand to advance their careers and never returned. McIntyre’s reasoning for this decision was logical for his situation and ambition.

I am not working on the line of making a success with New Zealanders because I happen to be one of them. I cannot see that such success is really any test at all. There is a much bigger world in London to work for, than is comprised in the New Zealand settlers here. Any real success must come from this larger London.

Butler’s own decision to leave falls somewhere between the extremes of the sentiments that underlined the expatriate movement. He was very successful in New Zealand, gaining excellent reviews, awards and prestigious exhibition placements, so it was not likely that he was discontented with his career in the colony. He may have found the everyday living expenses difficult to meet but this was not an uncommon predicament for a professional artist with a family to support and he did receive a steady income from artwork sales and teaching. Butler was, however, ambitious. His achievements in New Zealand were not merely based on luck but were rather the result of a concerted effort to progressively advance his career. Butler was frequently noted for his amiable personality, which would have helped in this pursuit, but he also appears to have known the right people, such as Mr McGregor Wright and developed his connections within the local art community by exhibiting regularly with art societies around the country. On the strength of the reputation he had developed for himself in the colonial world, he deliberately struck out into the larger and more fickle art market of England. “The past century has

690 Ibid., 80-84, 80.(quote, uncited); Docking, Two hundred years of New Zealand painting, 102.
691 Quotation from Raymond McIntyre (undated, origins not cited).
shown that the Dominion [of New Zealand] has produced many gifted men and women who through force of circumstances have journeyed overseas to enrich the art of other countries. This is a national reproach.°692


The years between 1901 and 1914 were years of tremendous social turmoil as the pace of modernisation set in train during the Victorian age accelerated further. Beneath a social surface that remained glossily intact, huge social movements strained and heaved: the old rural way of life sank and disappeared; the industrial working class assumed menacing political shape; Irish nationalism lunged like a knife at the jugular of Crown, Army, Land and Empire; the Empire itself creaked and teetered; and the suffragettes called into question the basic assumptions of patriarchal society. To enumerate these problems sets off all the more strikingly how these same preoccupations dominated contemporary culture. For the Edwardian era was also a period of astonishing artistic exuberance... It can be no accident that Ireland, the New Woman, rural nostalgia, social criticism and imperial pretensions all figure so strongly in Edwardian culture – there can be few other periods when the arts mirror so faithfully the problems of the day.°693

The majority of the works produced by Butler from the period between his return to England c.1905–1906 and his recruitment as a New Zealand war artist in 1918, follow the conventions of conservative Late Victorian and Edwardian art. These works typically portray historical, religious or allegorical subjects, with strong sentimental and romantic themes. During this time, particularly from the early 1910s and into the war years, Butler’s style is marked by a pronounced academic style and distinctly English content. Although he would not be an obvious candidate, the

°692 New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs and McLintock, National Centennial Exhibition of New Zealand Art: Catalogue, 16.
concepts and ideas that Butler chose to explore through many of these paintings could arguably give him claim to the title of a ‘painter of modern life.’

In 2001, the publication *English Art 1860–1914: Modern Artists and Identity* edited by David Peters Corbett and Lara Perry, examined recent scholarship that has redefined the definition of modernism, removing it from the standardised critical parameters established by Clement Greenberg in his seminal essays *Towards a Newer Laocoon* (1940) and *Modernist Art* (1960) which chart the increasing tendency of artists beginning with Manet, Cezanne, the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists, to reject literary content and three-dimensional modelling in favour of revealing the intrinsic flatness of the painting surface.  

The revision offered by Peters Corbett and Perry has made modernism, and particularly English modernism, more inclusive and, importantly, more in keeping with the actual perceptions of what modernism meant to contemporary society at the turn of the century both within the art world and in the wider social context. “Modernist art – of England as elsewhere – we define as art which responds to the evolving conditions of modern life prevalent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The formal appearance of their works is less significant for their status then for their connections to their historical and cultural context.”

With this definition in mind, a central essay in *English Art 1860–1914* by Paul Barlow, attempts to re-establish the modernist stature of one of the least likely artists, John Everett Millais (1829–1896). In ‘Millais, Manet, modernity’ Barlow asserts that Millais was indeed a truly modern artist because throughout his career his “art was fully engaged with the ‘debates’ of his day concerning the practise of painting and its social role.” Millais was adept at recognising what his public wanted to see in his compositions while also following the current art movements and experimenting with trends when appropriate.

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Barlow uses an equally unlikely work as his key example of this theory – the 1885 painting *The Ruling Passion* (originally titled *The Ornithologist*), which depicts an invalided old man showing off his stuffed bird collection to his doting daughter and grandchildren. On first viewing the work could easily be dismissed as a gaudy work of typically sentimental Victorian kitsch rather than to piece of modernist art. Millais’ stylistic treatment of *The Ruling Passion* certainly does not fall easily within Greenberg definition of modernism. Even the current owners of the work, the Kelvingrove Gallery, Glasgow, “seem uncertain whether it is art at all. It is displayed rather awkwardly on the staircase on the way up to the official art gallery.” However, as Barlow notes, this particular painting was held with high regard by none other than John Ruskin, who despite being no great fan of Millais’ late work declared that, “I have not seen any work of Modern art with more delight than this.”

Although Ruskin’s statement seems completely incongruous, as Barlow points out, this does not mean that Ruskin was wrong in calling *The Ruling Passion* ‘modern’ or

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698 Barlow, “Millais, Manet, modernity,” 56.
that the work of conservative academically oriented artists like Millais or George Butler, should be dismissed from the history of modern art. Referring to *The Ruling Passion*, Barlow declares that, “the painting is neither ‘progressive’ nor ‘reactionary,’ in any meaningful sense…. What is certainly wrong is the attempt to insist on the concept of progressiveness as a value judgement.”

Barlow’s essay goes on to point out how Millais used *The Ruling Passion* to examine the contemporary fashions that were of interest to his audience, particularly the Victorian fascination with exotic creatures (the bird collection) and with the paranormal (alluded to through the semi-disembodied figure of the mother). Alongside this, the work contains more serious philosophical mediations on the ages of man (represented by each of the characters), religion (the ‘sacred heart’ symbolism created by the Bird Of Paradise placed in front of the mother and through the religious connotations associated with the different bird species), imperialism and colonisation (the origin of the birds), and scientific enquiry (ornithology). However the pictorial surface and composition of the painting also participates in a theoretical dialogue with the artistic manifesto of the Aesthetic movement, championed by Millais’ friend James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834–1903). Across the composition Millais establishes painterly juxtapositions of colour and mark making that deliberately emphasise the artificiality of the painting surface in the manner of the Aesthetes. Nevertheless Millais never succumbed entirely to the pointedly detached nature of Whistlerian Aesthetics but instead sought to humanise the movement and make it more accessible through his additional use of a narrative structure. “Millais is able to reconcile the divergent strands within Victorian visual culture – strands which later critics were to define as opposed realms of ‘avant-garde’ and ‘kitsch’. Millais seeks to maintain a cultural dialogue between the two realms.”

In his article ‘Not as “modern” as the word is now understood?’ Tim Barringer also uses this revised definition of modernism to re-evaluate the career of another historically much maligned artist, John Byam Liston Shaw (1872–1919) who was a contemporary of Butler. The aim of Barringer’s critical review is to breakdown “art-

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700 Barlow, “Millais, Manet, modernity,” 56.
702 Ibid., 173-80; Barlow, “Millais, Manet, modernity,” 59-63.
historical teleologies [that] by definition impose an anachronistic pattern on the past” in favour of allowing for “the richness and diversity of artistic practise and visual culture. To consider the work of such artists [as Byam Shaw] seriously allows an enormously expanded field of enquiry and debate, a broad cultural history of the visual which can accommodate both celebration and critique.”

The same philosophy could and should also be applied to Butler and other less well-known artists who chose to work in an English academic style and were not moved to incorporate European avant-garde stylistic innovations into their practice.

Barringer argues against judging and dismissing Byam Shaw as an unfortunate example of an artist whose aesthetic inclinations were almost a century out of date. Instead, he presents Byam Shaw as an eclectic artist, who used his academic training and admiration for the work of his predecessors like Lord Frederick Leighton (1830–1896) and the Pre-Raphaelites, to address the shifting definition of Englishness in the late Victorian and Edwardian era. Although they are presented in a retrospectively stylistic guise, the central themes of Byam Shaw’s work are based firmly on the concerns of the contemporary society in which he lived. As a member of the upper middle class, his paintings revolve around the issues that effected this social status, such as the shifting dynamics between men and women; the relationship between the family unit, servants and employers; the continued successful functioning of the British Empire; the rise of the (professional upper) middle class and the subsequent effect that this had on the fashions and morals of society as a whole.

Through his investigation, Tim Barringer positions Byam Shaw within the pantheon of modern British artists. This thesis will argue that the same treatment should also be applied to George Butler.

Following the logic of Barlow and Barringer’s reassessment of Millais and Byam Shaw, there are several reasons to also classify Butler as a modern ‘British’ artist. Although he was not as well known as Millais or Byam Shaw, Butler’s career does resemble theirs, albeit on a smaller scale. Although there is an obvious gap of


705 Ibid., 64-83.
several decades between the flourishing of their careers, Butler’s work from the Edwardian and Georgian periods is in many ways similar to the late Victorian paintings of Millais. In 1863 Millais was elected to the Royal Academy. For many years, critics and art historians have referred derogatorily to this event as marking a point of regression in Millais’ career where he consciously moved away from the experimental and progressive ideology of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in favour of academic traditionalism and the financial security of a stylistic commercialisation that pandered to the interests of the wealthy English middle classes. This critical argument follows that after 1863, Millais’ work could no longer be considered to be of any lasting aesthetic value to the evolution of modern art in Britain.

Figure 107 – George Butler, Man with a Pipe (c.1900–1905).\textsuperscript{706}

\textsuperscript{706} George Edmund Butler, \textit{Untitled (Man with a Pipe)}, Date unknown (c. 1900-1905). Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna O Waiwhetu, Christchurch.
The same could also be said of Butler c.1910. However, like Millais, Butler knew how to pitch his work to his audience to gain both critical respect and popularity. As Butler attempted to find a profitable place for himself within the English art market, works that dealt with purely landscape subjects like *A Heavy sea at Moeraki* (1903) and *Mountain and Lake* (1904) began to disappear from his from his practice. While this type of work had been popular within New Zealand, Butler seemed less inclined to produce such work of English subjects while in Britain – perhaps because he found his paintings of this kind did not sell. He also does not appear to have attempted to revise any ‘exotic’ New Zealand subjects for his new audience – a tactic he had certainly employed in reverse when he exhibited works such as *Brittany* (1904) throughout the Dominion. Instead, Butler began to dwell more and more on works that could be classified as ‘genre’ pieces. These everyday domestic scenes had been a staple part of his practice since the beginning of his career, as seen in *Visiting the Patient* (1899), *Mother and Child* (1903) or *Man with a Pipe* (c.1900–1905). While his painting technique retained much of the loose ‘impressionistic’ style that he had first developed while studying with Nairn, his application of paint became much more delicate and careful, particularly when dealing with figurative subjects. Although the work from his English pre-war period remained predominately focused on domestic ‘genre painting’ subjects, many of these paintings were clearly overlaid with complex layers of meaning and highly evocative symbolism. This strongly suggests that Butler was aiming to establish a name for himself as an artist who dealt in allegorical works. This would associate him with the more prestigious artistic category of ‘history painting’ that was highly favoured by the Royal Academy and many English art collectors. Also, it would seem that, just as Byam Shaw did in his career, Butler consciously used his art to engage with the central issues affecting the society in which he lived to make his work even more appealing to the purchasing public. As will be discussed later and in the following chapter, Butler’s ability to recognise the needs of his audience and to adapt his style accordingly, became of critical importance when he gained his position as an official war artist for New Zealand.

The works that Butler produced in England in the immediate pre-war years and before 1918, present a multitude of overt visual responses to the major social
upheavals affecting the traditional English way of life, particularly the shifting conception of religion, morality, patriotism, the family unit, and especially the changing understanding of childhood. Unlike many of his contemporaries however, Butler did not represent these themes through the avant-garde stylistic methodologies, such as Fauvism, Cubism, Futurism or Vorticism, that were emerging in the artistic culture of Britain in this period. Like Byam Shaw, Butler’s stylistic sensibilities essentially belonged to the previous Victorian era and his paintings contained elements of the main stylistic trends of the Belle Époque: classical Academism, Romanticism (or late Pre-Raphaelitism), Impressionism and Aestheticism. Butler underwent his artistic training in Britain and Europe in the same generation as many of those who later adopted the anti-Victorian harsh tonalities and angularities of modernism such as Wyndham Lewis and Spencer Gore (Slade School of Art, London, 1898–1901 and 1896–99 respectively),707 Significantly, Butler’s return to New Zealand in 1900 dislocated him from these developments and his decision to live in Bristol on his return to England separated him from the experimental vitality of London. However, despite his unfashionably anachronistic techniques, like Millais and Byam Shaw, Butler made a successful career for himself because his work was accessible and engaging.

Butler and his young family returned to England sometime between 1905 and 1906. Butler’s son Brian was born on 6 August 1906 in Weedon, Buckinghamshire, northwest of greater London and in 1907, where the Butlers’ address is listed in the nearby county town of Aylesbury.708 Soon after this the family moved to Bristol where Butler began the process of inserting himself into the local art community. He set up an art school and studio at 92A Whiteladies Road, in the Clifton area, near the centre of the city. The teaching of students was an acknowledged strategy among artists, including established New Zealand practitioners like Frances Hodgkins and Sydney Thompson, to support themselves financially and to increase the local recognition of

their work.\textsuperscript{709} The 1911 English Census records that, on the day that the records were taken, the Butler family had staying with them a Miss Julia Daniels, a 23 year old art student from Chicago, Illinois.\textsuperscript{710} The presence of this international visitor gives some indication of the stature of Butler’s reputation during his time living in Bristol.

Aside from his private teaching, several different records of Butler’s life state that, not long after his arrival in Bristol, he gained a position as an art master at Clifton College, one of the leading boys’ public schools in the area.\textsuperscript{711} However, in contradiction to these histories, the College’s archives record that Butler was not appointed to this position until April–May of 1915, after he had lived in Bristol for almost ten years.\textsuperscript{712} It is possible the former timeline is incorrect or that Butler was affiliated with the College on a less formal basis before 1915, but after this time Butler certainly earned himself a reasonable wage for his duties at the College (around £100–200 pounds a year). Most importantly for his career, this teaching post associated him with a venerable social institution of the Bristol community.

In 1907 Butler joined a local art institution, the Bristol Savages Club, as an artist member and exhibited his work regularly at their annual exhibitions.\textsuperscript{713} Butler was an

\textsuperscript{709} Drayton, 	extit{Frances Hodgkins: a private viewing}, 146-49, 53-54; King, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, and Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand., 	extit{Sydney Lough Thompson: at home and abroad}.

\textsuperscript{710} The 1911 census records the Butler family living in Eastfield Road, Westbury on Trym, in greater Bristol, Gloucestershire. Official English Census 1911, ‘George Edmund Butler and Family, Bristol’, Official English Household Census Transcript 1911, 1911, \url{www.1911census.co.uk}

\textsuperscript{711} Clifton College was established in 1862 as an independent Public School for boys, in the fashionable middle-class suburb of Clifton. See - Old Cliftonian Society, 	extit{History of Clifton College, Bristol}, \url{http://www.cliftoncollegeuk.com/ocs/history/}

\textsuperscript{712} Helen Elizabeth Meller, 	extit{Leisure and the changing city, 1870-1914} (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), 37, 49, 83.

\textsuperscript{713} The discrepancy in dates may be due to the fact, as the College archivist Tom Gover explains that it “is difficult to find [exact details of Butler’s employment] as so many records were destroyed during the American occupation during the war, when Clifton went to Bude.” 27.07.2009. Information provided through correspondence with Tom Gover, Archivist, Clifton College, Bristol, February - July 2009.

Broome, 	extit{Biography of Butler, George Edmund RWA} http://www.bristol-savages.org/past-artists/24.html; English Correspondent for The Press, "The Official War Artist."

\textsuperscript{714} The Savages Club was unique to Bristol and remains an important institution in the city. The Club history records that “Artists more than others, seem to need the comradeship of their fellows. It was to meet this need that, in 1894, Ernest Ehlers invited his ‘brothers of the brush’ to spend a friendly evening in his studio to work and talk. At first, meetings were held in their private studios, then as their numbers grew, in rented premises. By 1904 this led to the official founding of the Bristol Savages and the holding every since, of similar weekly meetings between October and May each year.” The Club,
active member of the Savages for thirteen years until 1920 when he moved from Bristol to Suffolk. The Savages own forty-one works by Butler “mostly landscapes in oils or water colour. Later he turned to portraits and became well known in that branch of art.”

referred to as ‘The Tribe’, is comprised of artist and lay members, who are given the honorary title ‘Brother Savage...’ Annual exhibitions of work by the Tribe members have been held annually since 1905. In 1920 the Tribe acquired permanent premises in Bristol, known as ‘The Wigwam’.


The Savages donated one of these works, The Comforter (date unknown), to the Bristol Children’s Hospital. Unfortunately, this artwork appears to have gone missing in the interim years. In November 2001, Mary Dibben, a descendent of Butler, contacted the Bristol Royal Hospital for Children in order to find out more about this work but was told that a recent audit of the Hospital’s art collection did not list Butler’s painting.

Private letter between Mrs M. Dibben and Ms Emma Williams, Art Co-Ordinator, Bristol Royal Hospital for Children, United Bristol Healthcare, NHS Trust, 21 November 2001.

Information provided by Mary Dibben, descendent of Isabella Popplestone, sister of George Butler’s wife Jeanne, September-October 2009.


Stanley Anderson, Geo. E. Butler - Butler the Palette Tickler, 1908. Bristol Savages Club Collection, Bristol.
Just as he had done when he returned to New Zealand in 1901, Butler spent these pre-war years, exhibiting extensively and working to establish a name for himself in Britain. Between 1904 and 1923 he was a regular exhibitor at the British Royal Academy of Arts where his paintings were frequently placed 'on the line.' Of the twelve works he presented at this institution, three were given the honour of being selected for illustration in the Royal Academy’s exhibition catalogue (The Golden Dustman, 1911; The Shining Pathway, 1912; and The Supreme Sacrifice, 1917).

The art community in New Zealand kept a watch on the progress of Butler's success in Britain. On 27 June 1911, the Dunedin Evening Star jubilantly reported that,

Mr George E. Butler, late of Dunedin, seems to have made himself felt in the world of art. It is difficult to get a picture hung in the Royal Academy; to be noticed is out of the question for most. But Mr Butler's Academy picture, entitled "The Golden Dustman" has attracted the notice of the leading English illustrated papers, as well as of the "New York Times," and they have large reproductions of it. The picture itself, judging by the reproduction, is quite original in idea, and a difficult subject well thought out. Mr Butler deserves to be congratulated on his success.

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716 Pugsley, "Butler, George Edmund (1872-1936)."
717 British Royal Academy, Royal Academy Pictures and Sculptures: Illustrating the Hundred and Forty-Third Exhibition of the Royal Academy, (London: Cassell, 1911); British Royal Academy, Royal Academy Pictures and Sculptures: Illustrating the Hundred and Forty-Forth Exhibition of the Royal Academy, (London: Cassell, 1912); British Royal Academy, The Royal Academy Illustrated 1917.
718 Butler and Hocken Library Pictorial Collection, vol.
Butler’s critical success and exposure in the media had a positive effect on his financial success in Britain. In 1917, following the exhibition of *The Supreme Sacrifice* at the Royal Academy, Butler was able to sell this work for the substantial sum of £450 pounds. This was a marked increase from the prices he had commanded in New Zealand where most of his smaller paintings and sketches sold for under £10 while a major oil work such as *Mother and Child* fetched only £70 pounds.

As well as exhibiting at the Royal Academy, Butler also presented nine works at the Allied Artists’ Association's London Salon; two at the Royal Scottish Academy; and had a work exhibited at the Royal Hibernian Academy, the Walker Art Gallery

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720 Pugsley, "Butler, George Edmund (1872-1936)."
721 At the 1903 Otago Art Society exhibition, Catalogue number 107, *The Dart Valley* sold for £5, s.5 and Catalogue number 92 *Mother and Child*, sold for £70. Otago Art Society, *Catalogue of the Twenty-Sixth Annual Exhibition* 10.
Liverpool and the Glasgow Institute of Fine Arts.\textsuperscript{722} In addition, on several occasions Butler’s work was included in the Paris Salon of the Société des artistes français.\textsuperscript{723} In 1911 he received the distinction of a Mention Honorable at this event for his painting A Woman of Yesterday.\textsuperscript{724} Such an award from this prestigious institution was “only accorded to some twenty or thirty out of the three or four thousand exhibitors each year.”\textsuperscript{725} By 1912 Butler had gained enough of a critical standing to be elected as an Academian member of the Royal West of England Academy, following which time he was granted the right to use the title ‘R.W.A.’ (or Royal West of England Academian) after his name.\textsuperscript{726} The elegantly painted At the Piano (1915) is now the only example in this Bristol based institution’s collection of Butler’s prestigious status.

\textsuperscript{722} Royal Academy of Arts (Great Britain) and Jarman, Royal Academy Exhibitors, 1905-1970: a dictionary of artists and their work in the Summer Exhibitions of the Royal Academy of Arts, 250; Johnson, Greutzner and Antique Collectors’ Club., The Dictionary of British artists, 1880-1940: an Antique Collectors’ Club research project listing 41,000 artists, 89.
\textsuperscript{724} This work is referred to in a document provided by Mary Dibben from an unknown source.
Information provided by Mary Dibben, descendent of Isabella Popplestone, sister of George Butler’s wife Jeanne, September-October 2009, February - March 2010.
\textsuperscript{725} English Correspondent for The Press, "The Official War Artist."
\textsuperscript{726} From correspondence with Louise Holt, Exhibitions and Collection Officer, Royal West of England Academy, Bristol, 31.07.2010.
Considering Butler’s eagerness to succeed within the British art market, the timing of his decision to look for greater recognition within these established academic institutions by incorporating more English subjects into his works can in part be ascribed to the unfavourable reaction to Roger Fry’s 1910 landmark exhibition *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* held at London’s Grafton Galleries. The uproar that surrounded this exhibition drew a distinct line in the sand between the traditionalist audience, who found the work of Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), Paul Gauguin, Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890), Henri Matisse (1869–1954) and Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) ugly or unsettling and those who were fascinated and inspired by what they saw. As Fry’s collaborator on the exhibition, Desmond MacCarthy remarked in his article ‘The Art-Quake of 1910,’ “the ordinary visitor collapsed with laughter at the

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728 The other artists whose work was included in this exhibition were Cross, Maurice Denis, Andre Derain, Flandrin, Friesz, Girieud, Herbin, Laprade, Maillol, Eduard Manet, Manguin, Marquet, Puy, Odilon Redon, Rouault, Seurat, Signac, Vallotton, Valtat and Vlaminck. Anna Gruetzner Robins, Tomoko Sato, John Hoole and Barbican Art Gallery., eds., *Modern art in Britain, 1910-1914* (London: Merrell Holberton in association with Barbican Art Gallery, 1997), 17.
sight of the Cézanne’s; one elderly man… went into such convulsions of laughter on catching sight of Madame Cézanne that his companion had to take him out and walk him up and down in the fresh air.”

MacCarthy was initially repulsed by such challenging works as Van Gogh’s *The Postman Roulin* (1888) but his attitude changed after several months of exposure to this new aesthetic. “The longer I live with these pictures the more certain I am that van Gogh is a great man of the movement. I admire him so much. He moves me. He gives me faith in the beauty of I want most to realise in the world & in human beings.”

Among those that objected to the exhibitions content was a vocal faction that criticised the foreign works shown at this exhibition on the basis that their influence would corrupt young British artists. Philip Burne-Jones, son of the Pre-Raphaelite artist, called the show “a huge practical joke organised in Paris at the expense of our countrymen.”

Referring the “deliberate” primitivism of Gauguin, the art critic for *The Times*, C. Weld-Blundell declared that, “like anarchism in politics, it is the rejection of all that civilisation has done, the good with the bad.” In the increasingly nationalist and jingoistic atmosphere of pre-war Britain, the influential art critic P.G. Konody went so far as to use Van Gogh’s work, which was popular in Germany, as a platform to make openly antagonistic comments on German standards of taste. “It is not likely that English collectors will follow the lead of Germany and rush blindly into filling their houses with [these] pictures…. Germany is welcome to them.” Such patriotic sentiments intensified with the outbreak of the Great War as nationalistic propaganda worked to widen the cultural rift between ‘us’ and ‘the evil enemy.’ In *Art at the Service of War*, Maria Tippett summarises this phenomenon,

After the war began many art critics, patrons, and advisors... equated modernism with ‘the same spirit of unrest which had brought about the great clash of arms.’ They linked modern painting to German Kultur, then after the

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Ibid., 21, 197-98.  
730 Desmond MacCarthy to Mrs Van Gogh Bonger, 9 December 1910.  
Ibid., 35, 198.  
October Revolution, to Bolshevisim... People who had never thought of making a choice between modern and traditional art now did so. Patrons became careful about whose work they purchased.\textsuperscript{734} 

In spite of the furore it created with the public, \textit{Manet and the Post-Impressionists} marked an important point of development in English art.\textsuperscript{735} Many significant artists in Britain wrote publicly on the content of the exhibition including Walter Sickert (1860–1942), who admired Gauguin but was unimpressed with Matisse\textsuperscript{736} and Virginia Woolf (1882–1941), literary luminary of the elite Bloomsbury Group, who made the bold claim that after Britain’s exposure to these works “human character changed.”\textsuperscript{737} 

The exhibition at the Grafton Galleries became both a radical cultural arena and a free marketplace – an institutionalised space and time of apparent freedom from the insidious forms of Victorian convention and control where dramatic and compelling artifacts of modernity, perceived by some as indicators of both aesthetic and social change, were exhibited in great numbers and variety before an English audience.\textsuperscript{738} 

The subsequent \textit{Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition} (October 1912–January 1913) illustrated the substantial effect of its predecessor by its inclusions of a large English component of works showing the influence of Cezanne, Gauguin and the Fauves.\textsuperscript{739} However the divisions between the two reactionary factions still remained. As Searle explains in \textit{New Oxford History of England} “after the brouhaha surrounding the 1910

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{734}] Tippett, \textit{Art at the Service of War: Canada, art, and the Great War}, 6-7.
\item[\textsuperscript{735}] In the face of extreme controversy, Roger Fry and his compatriot Clive Bell attempted to justify why it was necessary to display these works, developing the aesthetic theory of ‘Significant Form.’ Farr, \textit{English Art, 1870-1940}, 200-03; Harrison and Wood, eds., \textit{Art in Theory, 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas}, 78-86, 113-16.
\item[\textsuperscript{736}] “If you will look at Matisse’s drawings, you will see he has acquired the most fluent school facility, just the kind of school facility that you do not find in good drawing or great drawings.... In the paintings, unrelated colours tell us no more than the empty drawings do.” Walter Sicket, \textit{The Fortnightly Review}, January 1911. Robins, Sato, Hoole and Barbican Art Gallery., eds., \textit{Modern art in Britain, 1910-1914}, 41, 199.
\item[\textsuperscript{737}] In response to the exhibition, Sickert and his informal group of followers who gathered at his London studio in Fitzroy Street, co-founded the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist inspired Camden Town Group. Farr, \textit{English Art, 1870-1940}, 196-99.
\item[\textsuperscript{738}] Searle, \textit{A New England?: Peace and War 1886-1918}, 589, 94.
\item[\textsuperscript{739}] Robins, Sato, Hoole and Barbican Art Gallery., eds., \textit{Modern art in Britain, 1910-1914}, 16.
\item[\textsuperscript{730}] Ibid., 89-105.
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Post-Impressionist Exhibition, London audiences largely took these latest provocations in their stride, though perhaps more from stunned politeness than a sense of approval.”

Although Butler may not have actually visited the Post-Impressionists exhibitions, considering the extent of the media frenzy that surrounded them, it would be extremely unlikely that the debates they stimulated would have escaped his notice. Manet and the Post-Impressionists and the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition called for artists to choose ‘a side’ against which to align themselves. Broadly speaking, the exhibition spilt the British art community into two camps: those who sought to uphold the conservative values championed by the British Royal Academy and the progressive clique who considered the Academy to be old fashioned and out-dated. “In 1913 a new word came into currency, the ‘intelligentsia,’ a word denoting the existence of a gap, not only between the avant-garde and the democratic masses, but also between the artistic community and those who claimed to be the guardians of conventional middle-class taste.” As has already been explained, because of his upbringing in colonial New Zealand, Butler saw his acceptance within the English academic milieu as being something worthy of praise and not of degradation. Therefore, to Butler, the sensible choice was to continue to paint subjects that would keep him afloat financially. In other words, he chose to not to adopt any of the controversial and poorly patronised stylistic elements advocated by the British avant-garde coteries and instead continued to produce formally conservative images that would appeal to the wealthy middle class audience who dominated the purchasing sector of the English art market.

It may then be that the great British success story, unbroken until 1914, helped guarantee the allegiance of British artists to traditional forms at a time when artists from nations with a less comfortable relation to history were turning to consciously modern means of expression. The pretensions of

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741 Ibid., 577.
742 Ibid., 571-77, 89-94.
empire encouraged a last luxuriant growth of traditional forms, but it so doing inflated them to bursting point.\textsuperscript{743}

The paintings that Butler produced in England during the pre-war and early war periods were predominately fanciful and imaginatively constructed compositions based on historical, literary and religious subjects relating to Britain’s cultural heritage. This shift in Butler’s practice corresponds directly to the fashionable nationalistic revival in Edwardian and Georgian England of traditional English folk arts, crafts, music and oral literature. At the turn of the century, many artists and intellectuals believed that England’s native cultural heritage was in imminent threat of extinction due to the spread of urbanisation and the increasing migration of rural peoples to the cities in search of employment.\textsuperscript{744} It was also feared that the rapid modernisation of society and the new mass-market commercialisation of retail produce would result in a disastrous homogenisation of the nation’s traditional cultural diversity.\textsuperscript{745} English culture also faced intense external pressure from increasing Imperial instability as unrest in Ireland grew and the Boer uprising erupted into the South African War. In response to this, several different groups aimed to halt the onslaught of progress by reinvigorating popular interest in England’s folk culture with the underlying intention of defining the distinctive nature of English national identity.

By self consciously asserting the artistic production and aesthetic values that defined traditional English cultural identity, the folk revival produced a solid platform of national identity on which the arts could counteract the intense social pressures of the age. Butler’s reaction to this movement was not to produce work in an archaising

\textsuperscript{743} Ford, ed., \textit{The Cambridge Guide to the Arts in Britain: the Edwardian Age and the Inter-war Years}, 13-14.

\textsuperscript{744} In late Victorian and Edwardian England the traditional “rural society was in crisis. Between 1870 and 1911 some 250,000 acres of Great Britain went out of cereal production, and in some counties, such as Suffolk, large tracts of what had once been farmland were converted to field sports. During these years of agricultural depression many labourers moved into the cities or else emigrated. As a result, the total agricultural workforce in England and Wales (including farmers) dropped from 1,409,117 in 1881 to 1,253,322 twenty years later…. Meanwhile the populations of urbanised and industrialised counties expanded dramatically: Durham from 867,000 to 1,370,000, the West Riding of Yorkshire from 2,237,000 to 3,131,000 and Warwickshire from 737,00 to 1,250,000. Already by 1886 mainland Britain… could definitely be catagorised as a predominatey urban country – indeed, the most heavily urbanised society in Europe apart from Belgium.” Searle, \textit{A New England?: Peace and War 1886-1918}, 88-89.

\textsuperscript{745} Ibid., 107-11.
or primitive folk style but to draw his subject matter from popular folklore and nationalistic literature produced in the late Victorian and Edwardian English context. By aligning himself with the folk revivalist movement, Butler was able to make his work more desirable to his English audience. Unfortunately, in accommodating his work to suit the fickle fashions of the English art market, Butler’s paintings lost some of the unique qualities of style and content that would have distinguished him as a colonial artist.

Figure 111 – George Butler, A Jousting Tournament (undated).\textsuperscript{746}

Figure 112 – George Butler, Knights Assembling (undated).\textsuperscript{747}

\textsuperscript{746} George Edmund Butler, A Jousting Tournament, from ‘Sir Nigel and the White Company’ by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930), Date unknown. Private Collection, Christopher Wood Gallery London.
Butler is known to have produced two paintings illustrating episodes from Arthur Conan Doyle’s historical novels *The White Company* (1891) and *Sir Nigel* (1905), based loosely on the events of the Hundred Years’ War (1337–1453). Conan Doyle produced these novels during a timeframe that spans the zenith of British Imperialism and English patriotism, following the successes of the First and Second Anglo-Boer Wars (1880–1881, 1899–1902). Through his highly detailed portrayal of England in the fourteenth century, Conan Doyle intended these books to “illuminate our national traditions.” The chivalric code of war these works endorse corresponds directly to the nationalistic revival and deliberate refashioning of Britain’s legendary folk heroes to suit the cultural climate of the era: the Celtic King Arthur, became the quintessential English gentleman and Robin Hood, the defender Anglo-Saxon liberty. “This allowed English patriots to hold their heads high, believing that they possessed a native mythology that ranked with the Homeric legends and surpassed the epic myths of most other modern European nations.”

Butler’s *A Jousting Tournament* (undated) represents the contest between English squire Nigel Loring and a French knight in *Sir Nigel*, a fictional scene that alludes to The Combat of Thirty (1351), a famous engagement considered an exemplar of chivalrous conduct. Following a similar thematic vein, the two bands of knights gathered on either side of a clearing shown in *Knights Assembling* (undated) could

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748 The first book, *The White Company*, was originally published in installments in *The Cornhill Magazine* between January and December 1891, and then in a three volume edition by Smith, Elder and Co. “As might have been expected, however, the book had a lively and lasting success. The three-volume edition was quickly exhausted and more than fifty editions in one volume followed without pause.” *Sir Nigel*, a loose prequel to *The White Company* adventures was also originally published in installments in *The Strand Magazine* (July 1905–December 1906) and then printed by Smith, Elder and Co., as a one volume book.
depict the prelude to either of the major battles that form climax of both novels.\textsuperscript{753} The Battle of Poitiers (1356) and the Battle of Nájera (1367) were both resounding victories for the English in which the central characters win glory and prove their heroic worth.\textsuperscript{754}

It is very unlikely that Butler would have been inclined to produce paintings that treat the subject of war so flippantly and romantically after his personal experience of the brutal realities of the battlefield in 1918. The cultural mood in post-war England had shifted dramatically from the optimism of the pre-war era and Butler, whose work consistently shows a consciousness of the trends of the English art market, would not have made works that no-one would have wanted to purchase. In spite of the English victories that Doyle’s books illustrate, it is difficult to imagine that the zealous nationalism represented in the final passages of The White Company would have been welcomed in the depressed climate of post-war England. “The sky may darken, and the clouds may gather, and again the day may come when Britain may have sore need of her children, on whatever shore of the sea they be found. Shall they not muster, at her call.”\textsuperscript{755} Even the most extreme proponents of the pre-war English avant-garde, the Vorticists, who had exulted the creative forces of the machine in 1914, were forced by circumstance to review their ideology after 1918. “Mechanisation was responsible for the destruction of human lives on an appalling scale, and it produced a feeling of revulsion. The Vorticist language did not seem an adequate means of conveying their altered awareness…. All the former Vorticists returned in their different ways to a more representational approach.”\textsuperscript{756}

\textsuperscript{753} Butler, Knights Assembling, from ’Sir Nigel and the White Company’ by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930), Date unknown. This work is now a popular art print sold on several internet websites.


\textsuperscript{755} Coren, Conan Doyle, 63.

\textsuperscript{756} Ford, ed., The Cambridge Guide to the Arts in Britain: the Edwardian Age and the Inter-war Years, 190-91.
Another picture by Butler, *Alexander Selkirk tells the story of his adventures to De Foe at Bristol 1711* (c.1916), also draws its subject from a work of English heroic literature. The painting recounts the popular Bristol folklore, which claims that Selkirk, a famous real life castaway survivor, met the English writer Daniel Defoe at a Bristol public bar, *The Llandoger Trow*. Selkirk’s story became Defoe’s inspiration for his celebrated novel *Robinson Crusoe* (1719).\(^758\) *Alexander Selkirk* was one of several paintings by Butler that was owned by the Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery. Until the 1950s, the Bristol Gallery had a substantial holding of works by Butler from the pre-1918 period but, unfortunately, a large portion of these works were de-accessioned so that only four major paintings by Butler still remain in their

\(^{757}\) George Edmund Butler, *Yeamans and Bowcher surprised while plotting to deliver Bristol Castle to the King, 1643*, c.1915. Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery (deaccessioned), Bristol.


Information provided by Mary Dibben, descendant of Isabella Popplestone, sister of George Butler’s wife Jeanne, September–October 2009.
collection. The Gallery’s original inventory of Butler’s paintings indicates that almost all the works in this collection were of historical subjects related directly to the history of Bristol. Several of these situate the city of Bristol at the heart of British political and royal history. *Yeamans and Bowcher surprised while plotting to deliver Bristol to the King, 1643* (c.1915) depicts a failed Royalist plot by supporters of King Charles I during the 1643 Royalist Siege of Bristol in the English Civil War (1642–1651). The fate of the leader of the opposing Parliamentarian forces in this siege was also illustrated by Butler in his *Colonel Fiennes Governor of Bristol, at the High Cross, 1643* (c.1915).\textsuperscript{759} Two other paintings *Edward II and Hugh Despenser escaping from Bristol Castle, 1326* and *Edward II being conveyed from Bristol Castle to Berkeley Castle 1327* (both c.1915), relate to the events leading up to the forced abdication of King Edward II.\textsuperscript{760} As a group, these paintings use historical events to illustrate the distinctive nature of English royal politics, the origins of England’s constitutional monarchy and the establishment of personal and religious freedom in Britain.

Although both the Civil War paintings represent real historical events, there is no concrete evidence that connects the city of Bristol with either of the *Edward II* paintings or *Alexander Selkirk*.\textsuperscript{761} In spite of this, Butler has deliberately presented and labelled all of these compositions as illustrations of Bristol’s historical importance within British history. Butler’s decision to repeatedly portray these subjects indicates that he was purposefully attempting to achieve popularity for his work among the local, art buying public of Bristol. Butler’s *Bishop Wulfstan Preaching in Bristol, 1080* (c.1915) is a perfect example of this direction in his work.\textsuperscript{762} Bishop Wulfstan (or Wulfstan II) was known to have influenced William the Conqueror’s decision to ban the Irish Slave Trade that ran its operation through the port of Bristol. Wulfstan is also known to have preached his religious teachings throughout England. In this painting, Butler has combined the two facts into one singular incident, which may or

\textsuperscript{759} George Edmund Butler, *Colonel Fiennes, Governor of Bristol, at the High Cross, 1643*, c.1915. Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery (deaccessioned), Bristol.

\textsuperscript{760} George Edmund Butler, *Edward II being conveyed from Bristol Castle to Berkeley Castle 1327*, c.1915. Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery (deaccessioned), Bristol.


\textsuperscript{762} George Edmund Butler, *Bishop Wulfstan Preaching in Bristol, 1080*, c.1915. Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery (deaccessioned), Bristol.
may not have occurred but which sets Bristol definitively in the centre of English cultural lore.

All of these works (except *Alexander Selkirk*) were purchased by the Bristol Gallery from the 1915 Bristol Savages Club Exhibition for small sums of between £10–15 pounds.\(^{763}\) There is a notable discrepancy between the value placed on these paintings and amounts paid for the major works that Butler exhibited at the Royal Academy later in the war, which commanded between £300–500 pounds. No dimensions are recorded for these works in the Gallery’s inventory catalogues, however, the sale price suggests that they were either of a small scale or that the works were purposefully sold at a considerably reduced, wartime rate to the bolster the local content of Bristol City’s art collection.\(^{764}\)

Butler’s oeuvre between 1910 and 1918 is comprised of a diverse mix of contemporary or historical scenes that explore topical themes in allegories that centre on children as was noted by his biographer from the Bristol Savages Club.\(^{765}\) This somewhat unusual choice of subject matter makes Butler’s work particularly fascinating and unique. Images of children are typically defined pejoratively as ‘genre’ paintings, one of the lowest academic categories of art. Interestingly though, the man who essentially defined the academic hierarchy in English art, Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792), was also an avid painter of children, *The Age of Innocence* (c. 1788), a portrait of his great-niece, being one of his most celebrated works. Reynolds saw these “fancy-pictures” as a welcome interlude from his more serious portraits and historical works, “He delighted much in marking the dawning traits of the youthful mind, and the actions and bodily movements even of infants; and it was by these means that he acquired the ability which enabled him to portray children with such exquisite happiness, truth, and variety.”\(^{766}\) While Butler’s child paintings,

\(^{763}\) It is unclear from the details recorded on the catalogue cards held in the Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery whether this group of paintings was sold on behalf of Butler or owned by the Bristol Savages.

\(^{764}\) Details of catalogue cards for the Butler works in the Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery.

\(^{765}\) “in appearance he was tall and lithe, with a mop of dark hair and a beard which was beginning to turn grey. Of a mild disposition he was extremely fond of children who were often the subject of his sketches.”


\(^{766}\) Quotation from James Northcote, an assistant to Joshua Reynolds.
featuring charming images of bonnie babies and healthy young children with cherub-like faces and rosy cheeks, are visually pleasing, they also express highly complex ideas and thus transcend the standardised limitations and restrictions of the genre to become significant pieces of serious art.

Figure 114 – George Butler, The Donkey Ride (1912).


George Edmund Butler, The Donkey Ride or Two Children Riding Donkeys on the Edge of a Moor, 1912. Private Collection. Image provided for reproduction through the Bridgeman Art Library, London.
In *The Donkey Ride* (1912), Butler presents an idyllic English pastoral scene that contrasts starkly with the everyday urban reality experienced by most of England’s population at the turn of the century who typically lived and/or worked a the high density, industrialised city environment. The overall mood of the work suggests that Butler was influenced by the Edwardian utopian fashion of ‘pastoralism’ or ‘rural nostalgia’ that coincided with the folk revival movement and was championed by Edward Carpenter, writer of *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure* (1889). The family group are each dressed in a version of Carpenter’s ‘rational clothes’, essentially loose fitting, comfortable garments: soft woollen shirts and knickerbockers for boys, floppy hats, and no corsets for women. It is possible that this painting is a portrait

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768 Unknown photographer, Butler Family portrait of Sarah Jane (Jeanne) Butler with her children Berenice and Brian, unknown date c. 1912, black and white photograph. Image provided courtesy of Erica Popplestone, a relative of Sarah Jane Popplestone, wife of George Butler.

of Butler’s family as it includes a young girl with fair hair of about eleven or twelve years old who could be Berenice, a young boy that could be Brian, and a woman of about the stature of Jeanne Butler (see photograph). *The Donkey Ride* is the simplest and most informal of Butler’s major compositions from this period and stylistically it is also the most closely reminiscent of *en plein air* impressionist style he had been taught by Nairn in New Zealand. His other remaining works from this period were all composed for exhibition at the Royal Academy and, as such, they adopt much more formal tone, using academic stylistic techniques to produce high-minded compositions that express religious, moral and patriotic messages.

![Image of The Shining Pathway](image)

*Figure 116 – George Butler, The Shining Pathway (1912).*

In the same vein as *The Donkey Ride, The Shining Pathway* (1912) is a deft examination of contemporary childhood play, a concept that was being developed by social analysts and investigated by a new class of specialist child psychologists. James Sully’s seminal psychological treatise *Studies in Childhood*, first published in 1896, established, in particular the importance of childhood imagination and

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creativity within the English cultural idiom. The production of *Studies in Childhood* reflects a wider shift in the perception of childhood and adolescence that occurred at the turn of the century. Children were no longer regarded as “miniature adults” but instead were seen as having distinct and separate “personalities and needs.” “Increasingly, childhood status was being redefined to signify dependence on parents, economic and sexual inactivity, and an absence of legal and political rights. In middle class milieu this led to an idealisation, or ‘sacralisation,’ of the child which found expression in the view that childhood was a magic realm, a time of heightened emotional sensitivity.”

However, the key to decoding this painting lies in the inscription attached to the work, written Butler’s daughter Berenice, “Oh! Blessed little ones. The vision splendid still [sic] for you pure in heart. You lift your happy wondering eyes towards the Shining Glory of the Western Skies and see The Son of God.” *The Shining Pathway* is fundamentally a religious work of profound devotional sentiment. In the manner of the Renaissance, Butler has produced an earnest, contemplative religious painting set firmly in modern England where the child participants are dressed in typical contemporary garb. The Christian content used in *The Shining Pathway* follows the same philosophy as that seen in the children’s literature of the era where the child is presented as possessing an inherent spiritual innocence. Butler’s painting alludes to the unique capacity of children to experience a closeness to God or Jesus through their innate faith, unspoiled by doubts.

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772 This attitude resulted in large scale changes to the treatment of children in society. Schooling was made compulsory in 1880 for all children and the leaving age was gradually raised from 10 to 14. Attendance was sternly enforced. The 1899 Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act punished those who neglected children and restricted child employment. This was then reinforced by the 1903 Employment of Children Act “that prohibited the employment of children in specified occupations, curtailed street trading, and prescribed maximum working hours and an age threshold.” These laws were essentially the product of the falling middle class birthrates which “resulted in children being more valued as individuals,” however, the increasing altruistically motivated political intervention into English society caused major difficulties for large lower class families who relied on their children to assist with the household and bring in extra revenue. *Searle, A New England?: Peace and War 1886-1918*, 46, 47-51.

773 This inscription was presumably attached to this work later than 1912 when Berenice was an adult. It was written on a copy of the painting provided by Mary Dibben, a descendent of George Butler’s family.
The Shining Pathway was well received when it was shown at the 1912 British Royal Academy annual summer exhibition. Presumably, a portion of its success lies in its ability to tap into both the Edwardian preoccupation with idealised childhood and the strongly held Protestant sensibilities underpinning English culture at this time which placed supreme emphasis on the word of the Gospel and put faith in the concept of spiritual Predetermination, symbolised by the innocent children who unreservedly accept God’s message of Redemption. The deeply contemplative religiosity underpinning this painting would become extremely popular during and in the aftermath of the First World War when artists such as Paul Nash (We Are Making a New World, 1918), William Orpen (Harvest, 1918), George Clausen (Youth Mourning, 1916) and Stanley Spencer (Sandham Memorial Chapel murals, especially The Resurrection of the Soldiers, 1928–29), were searching desperately for motifs that could attempt to explain and justify the horrific suffering that occurred.

As will be explained in the following chapter, he continued to use these themes himself once he was commissioned as an official war artist, to help him comprehend and express the plight of the New Zealand soldiers on the Western Front.

Figure 117 – George Butler, The Children's Crusade (1914).

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774 This is written on the version of the image provided by Mary Dibben but is not present with the illustration of the painting in the 1912 Royal Academy exhibition catalogue. British Royal Academy, Royal Academy Pictures and Sculptures: Illustrating the Hundred and Forty-Forth Exhibition of the Royal Academy, 139.

In 1914 Butler painted *The Children’s Crusade*. Like *The Jousting Tournament* and *Knights Assembling*, the work is based on an historical event, the legendary Children’s Crusade of 1212. There were actually two Children’s Crusades, one originating in France and the other in Germany. Both were initiated by young boys who claimed that Jesus had told them to lead a campaign of pure hearted children to rescue Jerusalem. These innocents would succeed where scores of adult crusaders had failed. Thousands of children and others, including priests, answered this call. The child prophets had declared that once the Children’s Crusade reached the Mediterranean, the sea would open up for them as it had for Moses and they would walk across the sea floor to the Holy Lands. The French crusaders amassed at Marseilles while the German campaigners set out from Cologne, travelled down through Switzerland to an Italian port (either Genoa or Pisa). Many died on this arduous journey but once they reached the sea the legend claims that: “in their childlike innocence they waited for God to divide the sea and allow them to cross… Finally when the eagerly awaited miracle had proven a cruel deception, they fell into the hands of charlatans who loaded them into boats and sold them on the slave markets of northern Africa.”

Butler’s work appears to depict the French crusade gathered before the walls of the port of Marseilles, at the moment when the child prophet is calling for the seas to part, and, most importantly, just before the religious zeal of the campaign dissipates and the miracle is proven false.

*The Children’s Crusade* is a notably much darker image of childhood spirituality then the idealised vision of *The Shining Pathway* that Butler had produced only two years before. Instead of the innocent faith of children bringing them closer to God, *The Children’s Crusade* depicts how the spiritual naivety of children could provoke disastrous death and suffering. The specific subject matter of the painting and the date of its production, suggest that this work was made in response to either the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 or, if it was produced in the first half of the year, to the increasing political tensions that were forming in Europe and

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stirring up a reactionary nationalistic fervour in England. Either way, in the historical context of 1914 The Children’s Crusade can be interpreted as a subtly veiled political commentary of contemporary events. It warns against the consequences of blind faith in the decisions being made by Britain’s governing body. The child pilgrims, piously gathered at the water’s edge to begin their zealous quest, personify the youth of England who unquestioningly signed up to fight a patriotic ‘holy war’ against the wicked German army that had ‘sacrilegiously’ plundered neutral Belgium. The Bishop of London, A.F. Winnington-Ingram went so far as to actually declare that the conflict should be officially condoned as a Holy War, stating that it was, “a war for purity, for freedom, for international honour and for the principals of Christianity… everyone who dies in it [is] a martyr.” On 6 August 1914 Lord Kitchener, the new British Secretary of State began his famous recruitment drive to enlist 500,000 volunteers who would supplement the nation’s relatively small

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777 In A New England? G.R. Searle explains that both Britain and Germany were engaged in a battle of rhetoric and a reasonably sizable arms race in the early years of the twentieth century. Between 1906 and 1913 Britain increased its naval spending (considered the nation’s most important area of military strength at this time) by 33% but in spite of this both nations were only spending around 3% of their GDP on defence in the prewar period. Although a political Anglo-German antagonism did increase throughout the Edwardian period, there were many, like George Butler, who disagreed with the prospect of a war with Germany on the basis that the two nations had much in common, such as a joint cultural and religious heritage as well as many strongly established trade and business relationships, “Indeed, Britain possibly enjoyed a greater variety of contacts with Germany that with any other country, particularly in all matters affecting social policy.” Several different groups, especially Socialists and Liberals, proclaimed their affinity with Germany and rejected the prospect of warmongering, such as The Manchester Guardian (a Liberal orientated newspaper); the Anglo-German Union Club and Conciliation Committee; the Anglo-German Friendship Committee; the National Liberal Federation who declared that “a country with which we have no real grounds of quarrel, but, on the contrary, many powerful ties of race, commerce and historical associations”; and the Neutrality League, led by Norman Angell, writer of The Great Illusion (1910), a powerful treatise on the impact of war on capitalism, similarly declared that “wedged in between hostile States, highly civilised, with a culture that was contributed greatly in the past to western civilisation [Germany was] racially allied to ourselves and with moral ideals largely resembling our own.” However, these voices were quickly drowned out when the hostilities began. “Significantly, most national newspapers in the Edwardian era, including best-selling Daily Mail, leaned to the Conservative side in politics and adopted a warmly martial tone. So, although there was no widespread [public] enthusiasm for war [in the prewar period], neither did it appear as if the anti-war movement, whether Radical-Liberal or Labour in origins, would be strong enough to halt one should a real crisis develop.” Searle, A New England?: Peace and War 1886-1918, 517-20.  

778 The Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in Serbia on the 28th June 1914, kick starting a complex chain of international responses and invoking the implementation of treaties and formal agreements of aid and mutual support made between countries. These led quickly to the full outbreak of the First World War. On the 4th August 1914 Germany invaded neutral Belgium and in response to this Britain declared war against Germany on the 5th August. By the 14th August the British Expeditionary Force was in France. Ibid., 521-25; Hew Strachan, The First World War, vol. I: To Arms (Oxford [England]; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 64-102.  

regular army of six divisions. By the 12 September 478,893 men had joined up. By the end of 1915, 2.46 million men had volunteered for service, almost half of the 5.7 million total that served with the British Expeditionary Force throughout the entire course of the war.\textsuperscript{780}

The high quality production of \textit{The Children's Crusade}, with its large scale, attention to detail and complex composition, suggests that Butler intended to exhibit it at the Royal Academy or a similar major institution.\textsuperscript{781} Given that \textit{The Children's Crusade} is of a comparable standard to other paintings such as \textit{The Shining Pathway} or \textit{The Golden Dustman} that had been previously accepted for exhibition by the Academy, it is distinctly unusual that this work did not feature in the Royal Academy’s Summer Exhibition of either 1914 or 1915. The disastrous outcome of the children’s crusade would have been well known to the intellectuals who comprised the Royal Academy’s Hanging Committee. Several scholarly publications had analysed the event in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, including D.C. Munro’s article ‘The Children’s Crusade’ published in the \textit{American Historical Review} (1913–14).\textsuperscript{782} Therefore, it is conjecturally possible that the work was rejected for exhibition at the Academy because the conservative judgement of the Hanging Committee may have recognised that Butler’s painting made a statement about the necessity of caution regarding the waging of warfare. This message went against the predominately positive perception of the war felt in Britain following the rapid declarations of war throughout Europe.\textsuperscript{783}

\textsuperscript{780} Strachan, \textit{The First World War}, 160.
\textsuperscript{781} The work could possibly have been exhibited in a Bristol Savages Club exhibition or at the \textit{London Salon}. Butler is not listed as exhibiting any works with the Royal Academy in 1913, 1914 or 1915. He was however known to be exhibiting regularly with the Bristol Savages at this time (according to the old catalogue of sales made by Butler to the Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery) and he was admitted as a member of the Royal West of England Academy in 1910 – possibly gaining full membership in 1912.
\textsuperscript{782} The majority of these works were by German and French scholars such as G. de Janssens (‘Etienne de Cloyes et les croisades d'enfants au XIIIe siècle, \textit{Chateaudun}, 1891) and R. Röhricht (‘Der Kinderkreuzzug 1211,' \textit{Historische Zeitschrift} 36: 1-8. 1876). The notable work in English from this period is Munro’s work (D.C. Munro, 1913-14, \textit{The Children's Crusade}, American Historical Review, 19: 516-28) which Raedts refers to as: “The best source discussion to date is by the American medievalist Munro, who identified the legendary element in the later narratives, particularly that of Alberic of Troistontames and gae a very sober and convincing account of the Crusade.”
\textsuperscript{783} Raedts, "The Children's Crusade of 1212," 322-23.
\textsuperscript{785} The Royal Academy's Summer Exhibition is held annually between June–August with the works entered having to be submitted to the Academy's Hanging Committee a suitable time before the exhibition opened to allow for selection and installation.
Before receiving his official commission as a war artist with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in late 1918, Butler made several works that addressed the contemporary events of First World War. Although *The Children’s Crusade* had counselled against Britain’s unnecessary involvement in the war, once the war became an inescapable reality, Butler’s works on the subject generally seem to follow the tone of popular opinion. Butler’s change of stance was a fairly typical reaction. Searle explains that on 5 August 1914 “as ministers made their way through cheering crowds to hear Asquith tell an enthusiastic Commons that Britain was at war with Germany, they sensed that they enjoyed the backing of most of their fellow countrymen. ‘Peace Resistance’ melted away almost overnight…. Though reservations abounded, those who harboured them deemed it prudent, for the time being, to maintain a public silence.”

The outbreak of the First World War put a large financial strain on most artists in England. Many of their usual sources of income and exhibition outlets switched their attention to the unfolding events of the war. In her exploration of the relationship between art and the Great War, Maria Tippett describes how commercial galleries and public art institutions “discovered that patriotism and profit went hand in hand. Feeding the public’s insatiable appetite to see anything and everything connected with the war, they exhibited war photographs, cartoons, posters, and the work of Belgian and Serbian artists, often to the disadvantages of their regular stock of painters.” This increased demand for visual images of the war accounts for the increased use of war related subject matter in Butler’s paintings during the period before he was appointed as a war artist. Just as Frances Hodgkins had done with her *Belgian Refugees* series, Butler latched onto the opportunity to increase publicity for his painting. While Butler’s use of these subjects enabled him to overtly show his patriotism to the British Empire, they also offered him a conspicuous platform on which he could proclaim the beliefs of his religious faith and subtly put forward his opinions and perception of the war.

The catalogue records of the Bristol Savages Club Collection show that Butler painted several war related subjects including *War* (1914), *The Winter of our...*

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Discontent (1915), Burdens (1916) and Scattered (1917). Unfortunately, these cannot currently be viewed by the public however, the titles of these works give a fair description of what each might depict. Importantly, the tone of the titles that Butler has used appear to display an incremental sense of disenchantment over the years that parallels the increasingly grim circumstances of the war as the casualties kept mounting and the fighting dragged on. However, in spite of the hardships they endured and in contrast to the post-war and modern cultural interpretation of the war “as a black hole or national trauma – a gap in history – redeemed and rendered meaningful for them only by disenchanted memoirs and the poetry of pity,” most British citizens were bound by their sense of national responsibility to accept the war and to not let their countrymen down through lack of commitment, as Hew Strachan explains in The First World War. “Popular enthusiasm played no part in causing the First World War. And yet without a popular willingness to go to war the world war could not have taken place. The statesmen had projected internal collapse as a consequence of prolonged fighting. Instead, the societies of all the belligerents remained integrated until at least 1917, and in large part into 1918. The underlying conviction of the war’s necessity, of the duty of patriotic defence, established in 1914 remained the bedrock of that continuing commitment.”

In the aftermath of the harrowing 1916 Allied Somme Offensive and the brutal winter that followed it, Butler’s next two major works were Dawn and The Supreme Sacrifice, both of which were completed in the first half of 1917, in time for their inclusion in that year’s Royal Academy Summer Exhibition in June. While not exactly ‘anti-war’ in tone, these works do acknowledge that both soldiers and civilians alike were experiencing terrible suffering and hardship as a direct result of the conflict. However, these paintings, The Supreme Sacrifice in particular, also conform to the

786 G. E. Butler, War, 1914, Watercolour sketch, 247 x 341 mm, Bristol Savages Club Collection, Bristol; G. E. Butler, The Winter of our Discontent, 1915, Watercolour wash sketch, 245 x 341 mm, Bristol Savages Club Collection, Bristol; G. E. Butler, Burdens, 1916, Watercolour sketch, 292 x 392 mm, Bristol Savages Club Collection, Bristol; G. E. Butler, Scattered, 1917, Watercolour sketch, 248 x 316 mm, Bristol Savages Club Collection, Bristol.

Bristol Savages, ‘George Edmund Butler’, Bristol Savages Club Members Artwork Lists, Bristol, Bristol Savages Club Collection Archives.

Correspondence with Geoff Cutter, Honorary Secretary, Bristol Savages, Bristol, February-March 2010.


Searle, A New England?: Peace and War 1886-1918, 745.

788 Strachan, The First World War, 162.
nationalistic ideologies that the circumstances of the war required the public to comply with. “A commonplace of patriotic rhetoric was the claim that the soldier who laid down his life for this country had made the ‘Great Sacrifice,’ for which the model was Christ’s crucifixion.”

Similarly, *For the Faith of their Fathers, Bristol 1682* adheres to the principles of this rote wartime philosophy. Butler also completed this painting in 1917 but it was not shown until the 1918 Academy Summer Exhibition, meaning that it may well have been produced later in 1917 and possibly in reaction to the horrific Third Battle of Ypres or Passchendaele Offensive that occurred in October of that year and which cost the British 275,000 casualties for only minor gains. In all three of these paintings Butler has sought to create a calm and hopeful mood and to provide a

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message of spiritual reconciliation that could attempt to counter against the staggering numbers of casualties incurred in this bloody central period of the war.

*Dawn* and *For the Faith of their Fathers* are also notable for the patriotic, quintessentially English imagery of their settings and subject matter. In *Dawn* this is epitomised in the rugged heath and ‘white cliffs’ of the English shoreline while in *For the Faith of their Fathers* this message is played out through the re-enactment of a dramatic scene, in full historical costume, of events that occurred during the nonconformist Protestant revolt of the English Civil War, as originally recounted by the Dutchman Willem Sewel in his publication *History of the rise, increase and progress of the Christian People called Quakers* (1722). In his section on Bristol in *Strolling through England*, W.S. Percy quotes from Sewel and specifically comments that, “the picture that gives me the greatest pleasure is that by G.E. Butler, R.W.A., *For the Faith of their Fathers*. Perhaps apart from the merits of the picture and its subject is my friendship for its painter and our boyhood days in New Zealand. The picture shows a group of young Quakers and a note below reads, ‘After most of the people called Quakers in Bristol were in prison, their children kept up their religious meetings, but, though not within reach of the law, yet the Sheriff threatened them with whippings, still they continued valiant without flinching.”

Although Butler was a Presbyterian and not a Quaker, both religions prescribed to the nonconformist ideology of the time, which stood apart from Church of England Protestantism and therefore stood on a platform of solidarity. Religious faith and all forms of spirituality were seen as a powerful antidote to the losses most families suffered in the Great War. Indeed, Searle tells that, “to heal the pain of bereavement, efforts to commemorate the dead more often than not found expression in ‘traditional’ forms, whether romantic or Christian.” *For the Faith of their Fathers* encompasses both these styles. The Quaker children are portrayed as exhibiting courage and devotion to the religious and political convictions of their parents in the

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794 Butler’s Defence Force file lists his religion as Presbyterian.
face of certain punishment and privations. As in *The Children’s Crusade*, the young Quakers can be interpreted as representing the youth of England who were fighting in the trenches to uphold the faith of their fathers. Expressed through the format of a historical allegory to contemporary events, the subject of this painting combines a heady mix of religious conviction and patriotism, with, again, an overriding positive message on the importance of faith when challenged by hardship. The subject matter of *For the Faith of their Fathers* also has especially strong connections to Butler’s home in Bristol where its optimistic and hopeful message of faith appears to have had a welcome resonance. The work was exhibited at the Royal West of England Academy in 1918 and then later purchased by the Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery in 1919 for the sum of £315 pounds.  

**Becoming a War Artist – George Butler Receives his Commission, August 1918**

By August 1918, Butler had built an impressive career for himself in Britain as a professional artist of a high calibre and had established a notable reputation within the European art community through the exhibition of his work, gaining a positive critical response from academic institutions and the media. Although his work followed an academic formula rather than an experimental style, his practice was nonetheless closely engaged with the contemporary concerns and the interests of his audience – giving him claim to the role of a ‘modernist’ painter. With his achievements still being reported in New Zealand, he had positioned himself as an artist of note – making him a prime candidate to be approached by the New Zealand War Records Section for a position as an official war artist.

Captain Gambrill of the War Records Section first contacted Butler, on behalf of Brigadier General Richardson, on 12 August 1918. Gambrill had been asked to ascertain whether Butler would be interested in “the possibility of your executing a

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796 Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery catalogue files for Butler.
picture or pictures depicting the work of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force” and if so, on what terms would he accept such a proposal. Butler’s connection to New Zealand, his artistic reputation and his current location in England, made him an ideal candidate for a position as a war artist on the Western Front. Gambrill’s letter to Butler outlined the duties that would be required of him but strategically downplayed the potential danger that the role would involve. “It is particularly desired to obtain battle scenes and portraits of prominent officers and men, and this would involve a trip to France for which all arrangements would be made at these Headquarters.”

Butler, who was then on vacation from his duties at Clifton College, replied directly on 15 August, confirming his interest in participating in the project and offering to come down to London for an interview, “I am able and should be glad to undertake the work you mention if it can be arranged.”

The process of officially appointing both Butler and Pearse for duty as war artists began in late August. Prior to their departure, Butler sent Captain Gambrill a flurry of letters, querying various aspects of his new role. This correspondence reveals much about Butler’s knowledge of the war from the perspective of a civilian and his interpretation of his duty as a war artist before his departure to the Western Front.

As part of this process each artist was told to purchase appropriate art supplies for their work in France. While Butler was able to arrange the procurement of the necessary supplies with the assistance of his fellow official war artist, Sergeant Ernest Heber Thompson, his practical query regarding the availability of “methylated spirits in France? (Near HQ). I do not want to carry it…” betrays his lack of understanding about the denuded conditions of the country in which he would be serving. Although Butler’s enthusiasm for his new role is obvious, his letters

797 Letter to G.E. Butler (No.3 Beaufort Buildings, Clifton, Bristol), from Captain Gambrill, on behalf of Brigadier General Richardson, 12.08.18. ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/12. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
798 Letter from Captain Gambrill to NZEF Headquarters, London, 26.08.18. Ibid.
799 Letter from G.E. Butler to Captain Gambrill, 30.08.18. Ibid.

The Sergeant Thompson referred to in this letter is Ernest Heber Thompson, who was already working for the War Records Section creating caricatures. Butler either knew Thompson or had been referred to him to assist in buying artistic materials in London. Butler may have even know the
illustrate his relative ignorance of what was actually going on in France and Belgium. “I am now ready and anxious to go as soon as possible to see the country under the same conditions as the season in which I gather most of the ‘stunts’ took place. Is there any record of events I could have for reference?” Although Butler’s use of the term ‘stunts’ this comes across as a flippant, in a contemporary context, the word was more commonly used to refer to an event, “a piece of business, an act, enterprise, or exploit.” It would appear that Butler was attempting to mimic this soldiering language – British soldiers often used the word to describe “an attack or advance, a ‘push’ or ‘move.’” Butler’s correspondence shows that he was anxious to ensure he was well prepared for his time with the army, asking many practical questions about what to expect during his military service (“on receiving a travelling warrant do I still pay in the ordinary way?”) and specifically requested a uniform to be supplied to him ahead of time, “I want to get used to it especially the boots and will you please add a pair of breeches and leggings to it.” While Butler does apologise profusely for worrying him so often, Captain Gambrill must have been left with the impression that this artist was quite unprepared to face the realities of a soldier’s life in the trenches of the Western Front.

Although Butler began his commission as an inexperienced and naive civilian, unfamiliar with military protocol and unaccustomed to the challenges of army life, the time he spent with the men of the New Zealand Division in France and Belgium had a profound affect on his personal life and his professional practice. Butler remained on the Western Front for around three and a half months, following the progress of the Wellington Regiment and working on a series of small-scale sketches in the Dunedin born Thompson’s family from his time spent in the city between 1901 and 1905. Whatever the connection, Butler and Thompson must have become well acquainted at some point as Thompson eventually married Butler’s cousin’s daughter, Miss Nellie Gutteridge in London in 1919. According to the family history, the extended New Zealand branch of the Butler family who were serving in Europe, would all spend time staying with the Gutteridge family just out of Southampton. In his obituary, Butler was particularly noted as being “of a most kindly and lovable disposition, and many young students who left New Zealand to study at home were helped by his advice and in every other way to set themselves on the right road to success.” It is therefore quite possible that he befriend Thompson and introduced the couple.


Obituary, “Mr George E. Butler: A Well-Known Artist.”

Letter from G.E. Butler to Captain Gambrill, 30.08.18 in - ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/12. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.

watercolour, oil and other graphic media. To visit former combat sites of particular interest to New Zealand, Butler had to be accompanied by an escort, as he reported to Captain Gambrill. “Yesterday I went over the Somme battlefields with four Otago officers and have made some sketches for a picture here.” After the Armistice in November 1918, Butler gained new access to areas that had previously been too dangerous to visit or which had been held by the German forces. Unhindered by the need to follow the combat schedule of the wartime armies, Butler now had the time and the ability “to retrace the roads to old New Zealand battlefields at Messines and in the Ypres Salient.” This gave Butler an important advantage over Pearse, as he was able to paint directly from the landscape, adding veracity to the quality of his work. Butler’s physical experience of the places where the New Zealand Division had fought also gave him a practical understanding of the strategic manoeuvres used by the armies and, perhaps most significantly, it allowed him see first hand what the New Zealand soldiers had undertaken, the conditions in which they had operated and the carnage that they had been a part of. As will be discussed further in the following chapter, it was through these experiences that Butler was able to gain an awareness of and a genuine appreciation for what the New Zealand soldiers had been through in this war – insights he translated into his paintings. Butler’s official war works illustrate the sincere respect he had for the men whose contribution to history he was charged with recording. Butler’s dealings with the War Records Section also give a clear indication of his enthusiasm for his position as an official war artist and his dedication to producing quality artworks that would showcase New Zealand’s war effort to a national and international audience.

802 This time scale is given by David Colquhoun after his intensive research on the war art collection held at Archives New Zealand in Wellington (then called National Archives) soon after the works had been transferred to the custody of this organisation.
Butler was discharged from the New Zealand Expeditionary Force while in London on the 31.12.1918. In total he is recorded as serving 107 days with the NZEF but this includes the time between his initial attestation and his arrival in France (16.09.1918 to 27.09.1918 or 12 days).
803 Letter from Butler to Gambrill, sent from France, written before the 09.10.18 (exact date not noted).
ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/12. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
804 Pugsley and National Archives of New Zealand., The Honorary Rank of Captain: Artists of the Great War, 1914-1918.
4) Defining New Zealand’s War Art

Figure 119 – George Butler, *The Battle of Polygon Wood* (c.1918).  

Figure 120 – George Butler, *The Butte, Polygon Wood* (1918).

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At the conclusion of his tenure as New Zealand’s official civilian war artist, George Butler had produced 53 small sketches documenting his experiences with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. From these sketches Butler was commissioned to produce a series of enlargements, purposed for the New Zealand War Museum. Ten works were proposed but only seven were completed. As Chairman of the newly restructured War Museum Committee, Brigadier General Richardson was passionate in his belief that these paintings “will be a great interest to the members of the Expeditionary Force, as well as the people of New Zealand of this and future generations.” Although Richardson was ultimately unsuccessful in achieving the war museum he envisioned, the enlargement subjects selected reveal much about how this institution planned to commemorate the New Zealand Division’s actions on the Western Front. Butler explains that the Division’s Commanding Officer Major General Russell was responsible for commissioning a work titled *Hyde Park Corner, and the Road to Red Lodge* (now referred to as *The Catacombs, Road to Neuve Eglise*, 1919); Colonel Robert Heaton Rhodes selected *The Butte, Polygon Wood* (1918) and *The Entry of New Zealand Troops into Solesmes* (1919); while his wife, Lady Jessie Rhodes requested an enlargement of *The Catacombes, Hyde Park Corner* (1918). In addition Butler also produced *The Scaling of the Walls of Le...*
Quesnoy (1920),\textsuperscript{810} The Menin Road and Chateau Wood with Ypres in the distance (1918)\textsuperscript{811} and A Sunken Road near Solesmes (1920).\textsuperscript{812} Butler does not mention who commissioned these three works but it is likely that a small committee consisting of High Commissioner Mackenzie, Brigadier General Melville and Mr T.E. Donne made the selections as Richardson had charged these men to liaise with Butler after he departed England in March 1919.\textsuperscript{813}

Figure 121 – Nugent Welch, \textit{Green Dump, Flers} (September 1918).\textsuperscript{814}
Nugent Welch was also requested to work up his field sketches into paintings destined for the war museum. In July 1918, after several months working as New Zealand’s Divisional Artist, Russell requested an interview with Welch in France. He was impressed by what he saw, complimented the artist on his work and requested that he be sent back to London and “given facilities to see what is being done in London in connection with the production of battle pictures.” At the arrangement of the War Records Section, Welch was given a London studio between July and late September when he recommenced his duties on the Western Front. A few weeks prior to the Armistice, Welch was seconded back to England to work through the new material he had gathered. Before returning to New Zealand in March 1919, Welch produced a set of 25 small watercolours and series of 8 larger works, mainly

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815 Nugent Welch, Thistle Dump and Cemetery at Delville Wood, c.1918. Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, Wellington Office.
816 See correspondence Q 2e/4198 ‘ Corporal N. Welsh [sic]’ between Brigadier General Richardson and Headquarters, NZ Division, 18.07.1918. ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/10. Wellington Office: Archives NZ; Welch, "[Interview with Nugent Welch, New Zealand war artist, WWI]," c. late 1960s.
executed in oils, the most significant of which are *The Butte de Polygon* (1918)\(^8\) and *German Pillbox Upper Section* (1918).\(^9\) The formal style of these works suggests that they were intended for display in the museum. Records surrounding the selection of these larger works are inconclusive but it is likely that Brigadier General Richardson or the War Records Section would have liaised with Welch on which works it preferred for this purpose. Together with Butler enlargements, these paintings document the major events in the history of the New Zealand Division’s campaign in France and Belgium between 1916 and 1918.

As previously stated, the other soldier-artists in the New Zealand War Artists Section were mainly attached to a variety of New Zealand medical and training facilities in England. Although predominately sketches and small studies rather than large formal paintings, the subjects these artists were assigned to document show that the War Records Section intended to accumulate a visual catalogue of works that could be used to illustrate the achievements of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in the planned war museum.

Regrettably, these plans were never properly fulfilled. This chapter will explain the significance behind several of the key subjects selected by the War Museum Committee for memorialisation, however it will be left to the final chapters of this thesis to examine the slow disintegration of the New Zealand War Museum. Instead, the following analysis will centre on a discussion of the thematic and stylistic manner in which New Zealand's war artists responded to the requirements of their official positions, with a particular focus on Butler and Welch.

While the commemorative ambitions of the War Museum Committee can be explained through their editorial selection of paintings for enlargement and display, in practise this group had very little control over the original subjects that their war artists chose to document. As mentioned in the discussion of Alfred Pearse in Chapter Two, even the New Zealand War Records Section appears to have taken a ‘hands-off’ role when it came to the manipulation and censorship of what these

\(^8\) Nugent Welch, *The Butte de Polygon*, c.1918. Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, Wellington Office.

\(^9\) Nugent Welch, *German Pillbox on Upper Section*, 1918. Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, Wellington Office.
artists actually recorded – in imitation of the war art scheme established by Charles Masterman at Britain’s Wellington House. Because the war ended before the War Records Section was able to successful follow through with their plans for the War Artists Section, in general, New Zealand’s National Collection of First World War Art is therefore comprised of sketches and unfinished works. What remains in this collection can, however, give important insights into the war experiences of each artist involved with the programme – the events they witnessed and the locations they visited which they felt particularly inclined to record for posterity.

Figure 123 – George Butler, *Butte de Polygon, Thy Father and I have Sought Thee Sorrowing* (1920).\(^{820}\)

With the notable exception of Welch, in most cases New Zealand’s soldier-artists did not have the opportunity to develop their sketches in the environment of a studio.

\(^{820}\) Butler, *Butte de Polygon, Thy Father and I have Sought Thee Sorrowing*, 1920.
before the war ended and they were sent back to New Zealand. Butler, by contrast, had both the time and facilities to augment and refine his work for the war art programme well beyond his demobilisation at the end of 1918. As per the terms of his employment agreement, all the sketches Butler produced while working on the Western Front belonged to the New Zealand Government. However, an organisational delay meant that these works were not sent back to New Zealand until February 1920. From this source material Butler completed an additional 26 small non-commissioned works, mainly in watercolour, and another large oil painting, *Butte de Polygon, Thy Father and I have Sought Thee Sorrowing* (1920). This is last piece is perhaps the most successful and affecting work in his official war series. While all his other paintings, portraits and sketches were eventually purchased by the Government for the planned museum, Butler felt compelled to donate this particular painting to the nation of New Zealand, believing its subject to be of such critical significance that he was willing to forego payment in order that it would be given a proper home in the war museum.

While his work is the most comprehensive visual record of New Zealand’s war experience (outside of that produced by New Zealand’s official war photographers), Butler’s understanding of the war from a civilian perspective was removed that of Welch and the other New Zealand soldier-artists. The contrasting effect that had on the work produced for New Zealand will be considered throughout this chapter. This discussion will also examine how these official artworks reflected the central concerns of New Zealand art and culture at the time of the First World War. By utilising published studies on the wider effects that the war had on New Zealand society, it will analyse how the works correspond to New Zealand’s perception of itself in wartime and discuss whether or not they can be used to illustrate the development of New Zealand’s national identity in the wake of the First World War.

New Zealand’s official war art will be examined against comparative examples of war related work made by artists from a variety of other nations during the First World War, with particular emphasis on the official war art programmes of Britain, Canada and Australia. This analysis will make apparent the presence of any characteristics
that can be said to distinguish the work of the New Zealand war artists from their international counterparts.

To establish these potential differences it is necessary to look into the commonalities that exist across national borders. Certain thematic trends pervade the war art produced during this war. These typically centre around two major concerns: the experience of men within a warzone – a form of portraiture; and the experience of the warzone itself – namely environmental art or landscape painting. These two subjects are, of course, not mutually exclusive. Artists frequently discussed both in tandem, particularly when they were confronted by the atrocities of the Western Front where nature and man were pitted against the advancements of technology. Although essentially a manmade phenomenon, technology is often cast as the villain of the First World War. This study will attempt to unravel the meaning behind why these particular themes were so prevalent throughout the art produced during the First World War by assessing their use within the work made by Butler and Welch, particularly their depiction of soldiers and their representation of the war landscape.

To make a case for the international significance of the New Zealand official artworks, this study will contextualise the aesthetic decisions made by Butler and Welch in comparison to the work of specific international artists. While the thematic content of First World War art is relatively consistent, the stylistic approaches that each artist used in response to these issues vary considerably. Of particular interest here will be the use of abstraction to interpret the war. Despite the increasing pervasiveness of such visual stylisations throughout the Western art community before and during the war, there was a pronounced lack of abstraction in the work produced by New Zealand’s official war artists. This chapter will explore the significance of this absence and will discuss the probable reasoning behind why the New Zealand artists chose to dismiss abstraction from their official war production.
Documentation and Commemoration / Truth and Fiction – reality and the representation of the First World War

Before Butler was commissioned as an official war artist for New Zealand, his artistic practice bore many of the classic hallmarks of Late Victorian and Edwardian English painting, particularly his use of historical and allegorical subject matter containing strong moral and religious themes. In spite of the academic style of their presentation, as argued in the previous chapter, Butler’s work from this period contains important reflections on and responses to the social and political conditions of modern life in Britain during the first two decades of the twentieth century. When Butler received his commission with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, he continued to respond to the contemporary circumstances around him while also adjusting the style and the subject matter of his work to best reflect the expectations of the New Zealand War Museum Executive Committee and the New Zealand public.

When Butler became a war artist he was placed in direct confrontation with one of the most catastrophic events in military and cultural history. This first global war marked a massive upheaval of society and was an important turning point in the modernisation of industry. Although Butler had made work relating to his understanding of the war before his official appointment with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, his perception of the war had, until the point of his recruitment, been made from the perspective of a civilian and an outsider, in no way involved with the military. The paintings he produced before becoming a war artist, such as The Supreme Sacrifice (1917) and Dawn, For we have seen His Star in the East (1917), are overtly sentimental and expose Butler’s limited knowledge of the war, gleaned only from media reports and via the second-hand experience of those around him who had sent their sons off to fight. It should be noted that Butler’s only son, Brian, was only 12 years old in 1918 and so was therefore not eligible to enlist while Butler
himself, at 44 years in 1916, was well past the standard age for conscription.\textsuperscript{821}

Although Butler himself was spared the fear and trauma of this situation within his immediate family, it is almost certain that he would have known friends or other relations, including those still based in New Zealand, who had been personally affected by the death or wounding of a loved one in the war.

This type of loss could certainly heighten the emotional quality of an artist's war related work but it could not give them an intimate understanding of what it was like to live with the fear of death while fighting on the frontlines of France or Belgium. Once given his commission as a war artist, Butler would have been extremely conscious that his work would need to do justice to those New Zealand families for whom the war had caused such a tremendous strain of suffering and loss. In \textit{New Zealanders at War}, Michael King summarises the overwhelming extent to which New Zealand paid for their contribution to the First World War.

For a country its size (a population of less than one million in 1914), the New Zealand contribution to World War One was massive. The percentage of eligible manpower recruited was 19.35. Of all the allied countries, only Britain's was greater; the other Dominions fell considerably behind. The number of New Zealanders sent overseas was more than 100,000, and of these nearly 17,000 were killed and more than 41,000 wounded. This casualty rate in proportion to population was the highest in the Empire.\textsuperscript{822}

In spite of these harrowing statistics the general public had very little visual exposure to the realities of the war that was being waged in Europe, especially not in the early stages of the conflict. As Richard Cork explains in \textit{A Bitter Truth}, "Most people derived their visual images of the war from newspaper photographs, carefully edited

\textsuperscript{821} According to the British Military Service Act, introduced in 1916, all men (single and, from June 1916, married) between the ages of 18 and 40 years were automatically eligible for conscription. George Butler’s Defence Force Personnel Record states the birthdate of his son Brian as being 2 August 1906, registered in Weedon Buckinghamshire. At the time of the English Household Census held in 1911, George Butler's son Joseph Brian Butler (known as Brian) was 4 years old. By the time the Armistice was declared seven years later in November 1918, he would only have been 12 years old. Although the minimum recruitment age for the war was 18 years, many young men did lie about their age to enlist. However, Brian Butler would have had difficulty pretending to be 18. Official English Census 1911, ‘George Edmund Butler and Family, Bristol’, \textit{Official English Household Census Transcript 1911}, 1911, \url{www.1911census.co.uk}

\textsuperscript{822} King, \textit{New Zealanders at War}, 160.
to exclude anything too alarming or defeatist, and illustrations of the action. These elaborate and highly professional drawings were intended to shape reader's views of the events they were purported to record.\textsuperscript{823} There were early examples of works that provided compelling images of the modern warfare based on the artist's experiences of life in the trenches such as \textit{Returning to the Trenches} (1914) by Christopher Nevinson, Franz Marc's \textit{Battlefield Sketches} (1915) or Per Krohg's 1916 \textit{Vosges} series.\textsuperscript{824} These works may have been "admired in avant-garde circles" for their stylistic innovation and sublime beauty but their limited exposure and intrinsic abstruseness meant that they had little impact on popular culture.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image}
\caption{Figure 124 – Franz Marc, colour plate published in vol. 1 of \textit{Briefe: Aufzeichnungen und Aphorismen} (c. 1914-15).\textsuperscript{825}}
\end{figure}

However, the civilian public preferred to be lulled with grand romanticised pseudo-historical paintings or “Boys’ Own” style war illustrations that pictured the war as a

\textsuperscript{823} Cork, \textit{A Bitter Truth: Avant-Garde Art and the Great War}, 125, 318.

\textsuperscript{824} C.R.W Nevinson volunteered with the Quaker run Friends Ambulance Unit in late 1914; Franz Marc volunteered in 1914 for the German Army cavalry and was killed in action at the Battle of Verdun in 1916; Per Krohg volunteered to help the wounded at the Vosges Front (in the disputed Alsace- Lorraine area) with the Norwegian ski patrol. Cork also refers to the Swede Nils Dardel's \textit{The Trench} (1916) who was not a soldier but was living in Paris during the war and painted his soldier friend in uniform who later died in battle.

grand adventure. As Cork explains, when reporting on the horrific events of the Battle of the Somme, like many other British sources, the populist magazine *The Illustrated London News* used a sanitised image by in-house artist Albert Forestier that represented the ‘Big Push’ on 15 July 1916 with “The troops advancing in this panoramic reconstruction encounter only the most token signs of shelling, and hardly any casualties are visible. No one would guess, from this anodyne picture, that the British army suffered 60,000 casualties on the first day of the attack. Nor was there any sign of the barbed-wire entanglements, which made the advance across No Man's Land so treacherous.” Although the extremely high casualties from this event were not hidden from the public, the press still tried to glorify the battle. Cork suggests that this portrayal of heroism was done to give the bereaved relatives of the dead a sense that their sons had not died in vain. “Hence the proliferation of newspaper reports rhapsodizing over ‘that first gay, impetuous leap from the trenches’, and even finding cause for satisfaction in the spectacle of British corpses. ‘The very attitudes of the dead, fallen eagerly forward, have a look of exuberant hope’, claimed the *Daily Mail*, adding, ‘You would say that they died with the light of victory in their eyes.’ This language of death and sacrifice was common in the press, particularly in the early stage of the war when writers such as W. Beach Thomas could still claim that, “even as he [the British Soldier] lies in the field he looks more quietly faithful, more simply steadfast than others.” In *In a Strange Room* David Sherman explains that, in combination with the images published in the popular illustrated newspapers, this journalistic language contextualised and perpetuated the nonsensical patriotic mythology that the British deaths were somehow better and more noble than that of their compatriots.\textsuperscript{827}

\textsuperscript{827} David Sherman, *In a Strange Room : Modernism's Corpses and Mortal Obligation*, Modernist literature & culture, 59.
Strict British censorship controlling the images of the dead coming through from the front lines complicated the manner in which all artists negotiated the portrayal of this delicate issue. The official war artist Muirhead Bone did attempt to reveal some of the truth surrounding the casualty rate through his depiction of gravesites in works such as *A Via Dolorosa*, *The Soldier’s Cemetery at Lihons* and *On the Somme: In the Old No Man’s Land*. However, when this last image was offered to the British public in *The Western Front* series it appeared with a conciliatory caption, written by journalist Charles Montague, that negated the possibility that these were British dead, “the foreground was won last July by the Manchesters, They found in No Man’s Land the bodies of many Frenchmen killed in earlier fighting and buried them beside their own dead.”

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With the truth too difficult to render, artists resorted to idealised fantasies of death. *The Great Sacrifice* by James Clark (1858–1943) is the most famous example of this genre. The work was published as a special souvenir print in the weekly pictorial newspaper *The Graphic* on 25 December 1914. It came attached with a subtitle from a well known biblical text from John 15:13: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” It achieved immense popularity and by February 1915 *The Graphic* made the work available for purchase not only as a print but also as an oil painted copy, a photogravure, merit card for Sunday Schools, an Easter greeting card and a card for church services, stating that “so profound the impression which its reverent symbolism produced, that, in response to the innumerable suggestions from Churchmen and Christian laymen, *The Graphic* is

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republishing this modern masterpiece of allegory in multiple form so as to ensure for it as wide a distribution as possible.” There was, the paper believed, “no picture of modern times has so stirred the imagination and aroused the conscience of the Empire.” The work also received a royal endorsement from Queen Mary and the Dowager Queen Alexandra who remarked that, “it is a lovely picture which must appeal to the feelings of the whole Nation.”

Figure 127 – George Butler, *The Supreme Sacrifice* (1917).\(^{834}\)

\(^{832}\) Ibid., 148-50.
\(^{833}\) Ibid., 150.
Illustration taken from: British Royal Academy, *The Royal Academy Illustrated 1917.*
George Butler's *The Supreme Sacrifice* capitalises on the fame of *The Great Sacrifice* and echoes its heightened religious sentiment through the central 'Deposition' arrangement of the composition, which implies that Redemption and Resurrection will reward the earthly suffering of these dying soldiers. Butler's use of an imaginary interior setting for this painting was a response to the wartime restrictions on artists working in Britain imposed by the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA). From 1915, artists in England were banned from painting out of doors for fear that they were enemy spies. Maria Tippet explains in *Art at the Service of War* that, "The very act of sketching out of doors put artists under suspicion, especially in Britain where 'amateur spy catchers abounded.' Prohibited sketching areas were not just restricted to military compounds." Many artists going about their regular business in England found themselves hamstrung by DORA. "No sooner had the Canadian artist James Wilson Morrice taken out his sketch pad and pencil in London when a policeman tapped him on the shoulder and escorted him to Scotland Yard." Another artist who worked primarily in the *en plein air* style, Alfred Munnings, "recalled that there 'came a time when an artist dared not be seen sketching out of doors in the country. He might have been reported as a spy! – and out of doors painting without a permit was practically forbidden.'"835

Frances Hodgkins struck this obstacle while working in Cornwall in 1915 where there were strict restrictions on sketching outdoors, particularly the sea and coast which was seen as vulnerable to enemy attack. "I tried my best blandishments on the Sergeant from time to time promising not an inch of coast line in to be included but he is adamant and threatens to confiscate my painting gear."836 This sketching ban posed a serious impediment to Hodgkins' financial well being as she was almost completely unable to continue teaching art students who wanted to learn her techniques for painting from nature. As a direct result of this her wartime paintings are almost completely restricted to portraiture.837

The DORA restrictions that banned outdoor painting and sketching meant that the English coastline that features so prominently in Butler’s 1917 painting *Dawn, For we have seen His Star in the East* was almost certainly composed within the confines of his studio. Butler’s placement of the couple on the coast in *Dawn* plays on the visual imagery used by the wartime media to counteract the national anxieties of Britain’s inherent vulnerability as an island nation under continual threat of invasion from the sea. In *(Is)land Narratives: Englishness, visuality and vanguard culture 1914–1918*, Jane Beckett describes how “representations of defensive insularity, secure and inviolate borders and marine supremacy played into and were part of contemporary imperialism... While images of the sea have a long history in the British cultural imagination, they were adroitly mobilised in the summer of 1914 and through the first months of the war in the press and propaganda, so the strength of the nation was perceived in its control of the sea.”839 This positive vision of England’s invulnerability was progressively eroded as the war progressed and the visceral truth of the fighting

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838 Butler, *Dawn, For we have seen His Star in the East*, 1917.
began to reveal itself to the civilian public through their exposure to graphic images of war published in popular visual media. “In the multiplicity of images of the war circulating on the civilian front in the first eighteen months of hostilities there is a gradual redistribution of heroic images of troops in uniforms imaged in the press, on posters, in letters and dispatches, or of ships static on the high seas, to include representations of conflict, of bodies engaged in battle. Sparingly described in letters home, newspapers, and the illustrated press slowly included images of the dugout trenches of the Western Front, of dead bodies or body parts mired in mud.”

Butler’s painting refuses to acknowledge the onset of this despair. In spite of the DORA restrictions, Butler was compelled to set this painting firmly on the English Channel coastline. The couple stand stalwartly waiting and watching the horizon for the dawn of hope to arrive. As discussed in Chapter Three, Butler's choice of the biblical reference in the title of this work deliberately suggests that the couple's Christian faith will allow them to bear through the current adversity of the war.

The restrictions placed on artists by DORA combined with the lack of understanding that civilian artists had for what was actually going on in the battlefields of the Western and Eastern Fronts and elsewhere was at odds with the publics’ desire to see accurate representations of the war. It was partly for this reason that the government's of the various belligerent nations commissioned official war artists. The sense of realism that these official artists could bring to the work they produced could not easily be faked.

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840 Ibid., 210.
As Tippett explains, it was this sense of reality that was behind the success of the London exhibition of the official Canadian war art, held at the Royal Academy in January 1919. “Beaverbrook had wanted spontaneous, eyewitness records of the war; the artists had been allowed to roam the front-lines and sketch whatever they wanted.... For the most part finished canvases had been produced from on the spot sketches. The eyewitness nature of the work appealed to those who had not been in the theatre of war as well as to those who had: the first were given an opportunity of seeing what it had really been like, the latter a chance of reliving their experiences.”

The few paintings in this exhibition that were 'constructed' in the studio were arguably the least successful. Richard Jack's depictions of The Second Battle of Ypres, 22 April to 25 May 1915 and The Taking of Vimy Ridge, 1917 both fell into this category. Jack was commissioned to paint the former work in late 1916 after being recruited as the first official artist of the Canadian war art program. Having been conferred with the honorary rank of Major, Jack was granted

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842 Tippett, Art at the Service of War: Canada, art, and the Great War, 3-4.
permission to visit the site where this 1915 battle took place in the Belgian sector of the Western Front. The Second Battle of Ypres was the Canadian Expeditionary Force's first major action of the war. The soldiers involved carried out their role in the battle with commendable heroism despite being exposed to toxic chemical gases (the first time these were used in the war) without protective masks. Despite considerable research, including interviewing surviving veterans, Jack's painting was heavily criticised for its historical inaccuracy and uninspired interpretation of the event, "which relied to a risible extent on the stereotypes of Victorian battle painting. They blinded him to the fact that the Canadians would have defended their position from trenches, not behind a wall of sandbags... Jack plumped for a cliché-ridden image of a bandaged officer standing up to the gunfire to urge his troops forward, the entire painting looked like a blown-up version of the heroic 'reconstructions' which illustrators supplied to pictorial magazines of the period." Although Beaverbrook described the work as "a most wonderful battle scene," those in charge of the Canadian war art programme realised that Jack's treatment of this work was severely flawed, "only one note of truth rang through Jack’s picture: its entirely realistic depiction of the dead." In an attempt to prevent other official artists from "shamelessly catering to patriotic sentiment" in this manner, it was decided that all further Canadian war artists needed to have direct experience of the events they were depicted in order to maintain the quality and truthfulness of their production.

Jack was not alone in his failure to find a visual language in which to express the events of war without resorting to cliché. Many academic painters struggled to define the modernity of the war without adapting their practice. Lucy Kemp Welch went to considerable lengths to establish the historical and visual accuracy of her painting *Forward the Guns* (1917). Her obituary, published on 28 November 1958 in *The Times*, records that, 'For this picture she sat with her easel on Salisbury Plain while eight batteries of horse artillery were driven towards her so that she could sketch the general outline of their movement.” But, as Richard Cork points out, the culmination of her efforts were “heavily dependent on nineteenth century prototypes…. The horrors of machine-age destruction are not permitted to undermine the comforting

845 Ibid., 23, 26-27.
jingoism of the *tour de force.*" Although the painting was widely praised when it was exhibited at the Royal Academy (in 1917) and was purchased by the Chantrey Bequest for the Tate Gallery collection its public reception since the war has always been mixed. "Visitors have experienced much difficulty in squaring this image of the new recruits’ indomitable charge with the probability that most of the young men had already ended up maimed or dead on the fields of France." 846

It is significant that the Canadian war art exhibition that featured Jack’s painting occurred just after the war had concluded. In the euphoria of the Allied victory, the public’s willingness to reflect on recent events was at its height and the overall success of this event owes much to this jubilant atmosphere. As will be discussed in the following chapter, this level of interest quickly faded as the harsh realities of the post-war world began to reveal themselves. During the war however, the civilian public’s desire to comprehend the conflict was voracious. Although the grandiose paintings produced by artists like Jack and Kemp-Welch were indeed popular throughout the war, the credibility of the idealised heroism they depicted soon waned. As the war wore on, the public’s perception of events began to change. Sanitised news reports could not hide the massive casualty figures that continued to mount. Audiences were quick to find fault with works that were not true. The gradual increase of their exposure to works that incorporated a greater level of detail and ‘truth’ brought them closer to the military experiences of their loved ones from which they were excluded.

The civilian population’s disconnection from this world was particularly keenly felt in nations such as New Zealand and Australia that were so physically separated from the main combat zones. The New Zealand War Records Sections’ war artist programme aimed to fulfil this basic public need for an accurate account of the war. While Butler could show his appreciation of the loss suffered by thousands of New Zealand families during the war in works such as *Dawn,* his civilian separation from the military gave him no understanding of what it was like to live with the fear of

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846 According to the Tate Gallery website, the current owners of the work was exhibited as picture no. 706 at the 1917 Royal Academy exhibition and reproduced in the *Royal Academy Illustrated,* 1917, p.133.


http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/kemp-welch-forward-the-guns-n03217
death while fighting on the frontlines of France or Belgium, limiting the truthfulness of a work like *The Supreme Sacrifice*. After the 28 September 1918, Butler's official commission with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force gave him the opportunity to experience the war from a soldier’s perspective for the first time. It also allowed him to paint the landscape directly again, an opportunity he would have relished. His new circumstances gave him a privileged understanding of the conflict and this, in turn, provoked a clear change in his visual representation of the war. This change was deeper and more profound than just the circumstantial difference marking his new ability to actually see the conditions of the Western Front itself – although this certainly did expand the scope, quality and authenticity of his war related subject matter. Instead of confining the wounded soldiers in *The Supreme Sacrifice* to interior space of a makeshift field hospital in a church, Butler now had the capacity to paint a war scene on the front lines, in a trench or at a real field hospital instead of one he had to conjure from his imagination. However, in none of Butler’s known official war art did he ever attempt to recreate another scene showing badly wounded and dying soldiers taking solace in each other's company or in the spiritual reconciliation of their Christian faith. *The Supreme Sacrifice* had been very well received when it was shown at the Royal Academy. The lack of its equivalent in Butler’s official war art indicates that he realised that such a work would have been completely inappropriate given his new position. The War Museum Executive Committee wanted paintings that commemorated and celebrated the achievements of the New Zealand soldiers on the Western Front, and a work like *The Supreme Sacrifice*, despite its strong, positive religious message, essentially portrayed the soldiers as defeated. As New Zealand’s official war artist, this type of imagery was diametrically opposed to Butler's new ambitions.

By the time Butler was deployed to the Western Front, the trench systems that had dominated this sector had been largely abandoned. On 21 March 1918, the German forces had launched the Michael Offensive – a massive push south towards Paris. Utilising their newly redeployed forces from the Eastern Front (where hostilities had recently ceased against the Russian Army) the German forces advanced up to 60 kilometres before they were halted by a determined Allied defence. The rapid movement of the German Army over the course of this Offensive weakened their capacity to advance any further and they were also unable to effectively defend
many of the positions they had just gained. In response, the Allies quickly launched a series of counter-offensives that steadily pushed the weakened German forces back north over the next few months. This period of the war is known as the Hundred Days Offensive (8 August – 11 November 1918). As part of the British Third Army, the New Zealand Division advanced through northeastern France, playing a key role in several of the major battles that occurred during this Offensive. Between the 24 and 29 August, just prior to Butler and Pearse’s arrival on the Western Front, the Division spearheaded the successful capture of the major German stronghold at Bapaume and the surrounding towns of Grevillers and Biefvillers. By the 2 September, the New Zealanders had helped to push the Germans back to the Hindenburg Line, “which had been the jumping off point for the German offensive in March and was not the German Army’s last line of defence on the Western Front.”

As the German defences fell apart, the character of the fighting changed. The stasis of the entrenched war of attrition, which had typified the experience of soldiers in France and Belgium between 1915 and 1917, disappeared almost overnight after the Michael Offensive broke the deadlock. Such massive advances, sometimes covering dozens of miles within days, had not been witnessed on the Western Front since the opening months of the war in 1914. This fluid type of warfare in open country was much more closely related to the style of soldiering last used by the British forces in the Boer and Crimean Wars. The New Zealand Division excelled in this fast paced warfare and, as Ormond Burton explains, the rapid advances opened up areas of Northern France, previously well behind German lines, where the countryside appeared virtually untouched by the ravages of war:

On 29 September they [the New Zealand Division] were brought up and early in the morning attacked across Welch Ridge and toward La Vacquerie. While brave [German] men in pockets here and there fought well and a couple of platoons were even cut off and compelled to surrender, the attack swept forward resistlessly and in an effortless fashion. Nearly fifteen hundred prisoners, thirty-two cannon and two hundred machine-guns were captured with the slightest of loss, and there is little doubt that the triumphal procession

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would have swept on still farther if it had not been halted prematurely. Such are the successes that can be won against a broken army. From the captured ridges the grey spires and towers of Cambrai rose from green unbroken fields. 

Butler and Pearse joined the New Zealand Division as they were pulled out of reserve in Bapaume to join the last stages of the Battle of the Canal du Nord (27 September – 1 October 1918) where they witnessed the Division’s capture of Crevecoeur. After the New Zealanders had swept through the area, Butler made several studies of this town and its strategic bridge. As previously seen in Nugent Welch’s Man’s Inhumanity (1917), Butler’s subtle inclusion of the broken rafters of the farmhouse roof to the right of the road is the only visual clue in this otherwise picturesque scene that the green fields of this pretty hamlet had recently been subjected to heavy fighting.

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849 George Edmund Butler, Crevecourt, 10 October 1918. Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, Wellington Office.
During his deployment as a war artist, Butler experienced the Second Battle of the Selle (17–25 October 1918) and the Battle of the Sambre (4–11 November 1918). Although he was never called upon to fight, Butler participated in these battles as a spectator within the entourage following the New Zealand Division’s advance where he was able to witness the progress of the New Zealand soldiers first hand. Butler made a point of getting near to the action so that he could record how the soldiers distinguished themselves in these battles. Because of the rapid movement of the forces, Butler was free to sketch the aftermath of the New Zealand advance in relative safety. He made several studies like *A barrage, Caudry, 2nd Otago attacking* depicting the towns that the Division moved through during this period. These paintings are frequently executed from a distance, suggesting they made have been from a camp or field headquarters nearby. Butler’s nearness to the fighting is not immediately evident in these quick sketches but, as seen in the Gallipoli works by Horace Moore-Jones, closer examination of the skyline often reveals the ‘cloud formations’ recorded are actually nearby bomb explosions.

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There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that Butler often painted close enough to the front lines to put his personal safety at risk. In a letter written to his mother from Bapaume on 28 September 1918, R. J. Richards (Reg) recalls meeting with Butler just after he arrived on the Western Front. “Wandering round the countryside I came across the official New Zealand artist, Captain Butler, at work. Apparently he is a New Zealander who has lived in England a good deal, and he has been commissioned by our Government to come out and paint the war. He is very genial and ready to talk. One day here he had an amusing, if somewhat disturbing, experience. He was engaged on a picture near the outskirts of Bapaume, where the fighting had been very fierce. In front of him was a big half-ruined barn, about 100 yards away. Jerry had chosen it to put in a huge time bomb, which went off just as Butler was painting. Back he went, head over heels, easel, stool, canvas, and all. There was much dust, smoke and showers of dirt, but he suffered no serious hurt. He was just as ready to laugh about it as everyone else who heard of it.”

Butler was not alone in experiencing danger while working as an official war artist. Paul Nash was constantly “getting as near to the real places of action as it was possible to go.” Nash was nearly killed by shelling while travelling the Menin Road, with the man who called “mad Irish chauffeur” who “piloted the car so skilfully, that he timed the constant shell bursts on the road, any one of which might have immediately killed” them both. Cork asserts that Nash used this sense of peril “as an energizing force, [which] stimulated him into an enlarged awareness of what warfare really entailed.” The artist’s letters to his wife Margaret reveal that Nash attached a zealous, almost religious, sense of vocation to his duties as an official war artist after witnessing the aftermath of the Passchendaele Offensive.

I have just returned, last night, from a visit to Brigade Headquarters up the line and I shall not forget it as long as I live. I have seen the most frightful nightmare of a country more conceived by Dante and Poe than by nature, unspeakable, utterly indescribable… only being in it and of it can ever make you sensible of its dreadful nature and of what our men in France have to

face. We all have a vague notion of the terror of a battle, and can conjure up with the aid of some of the more inspired war correspondents and the pictures in the *Daily Mirror* some vision of battlefield; but no pen or drawing can convey this country... It is unspeakable, godless, hopeless. I am no longer an artist interested and curious, I am a messenger who will bring back word from the men who are fighting to those who want the war to go on for ever. Feeble, inarticulate, will be my message, but it will have a bitter truth and may it burn their lousy souls.\(^{853}\)

As a former Second Lieutenant in the British Hampshire Regiment, Nash had a deeply personal reason to be compelled to act as an advocate for his fellow soldiers. Just a few days after he was injured and sent to England to recuperate in late May 1917, almost the entirety of his unit were killed in an assault against Hill 60, prior to the Battle of Messines (7–14 June 1917). During his recovery Nash produced a series of unofficial works based on his war experiences, which he exhibited at the Groupil Gallery, London in July. Described as having “an actuality, an immediacy, that brought to life everything about the front which people had read and heard but had found themselves quite unable to visualise,” these works received enough critical praise to aid Nash’s recommendation for a position as an official British war artist.\(^{854}\)

Like Nash, many of the official war artists from Britain, Australia and Canada wanted to get as near as possible to the action they were witnessing on the Western Front. Those artists who came to the warzone from a civilian background felt acutely obliged to see what was happening at the front in order to better appreciate the realities of the war they were trying to depict. However the constant heavy shelling of the trenches made it extremely hazardous to paint or sketch the landscape in close proximity to the front lines. For the majority of the war, those artists that went up to the front lines could only view the subterranean world of the trenches themselves. Venturing into No Man’s Land was only possible at night and this was impractical for sketching. Military artists used observation posts made out of fake trees and other clever disguises to produce topographical sketches and document enemy

\(^{853}\) Letter from Paul Nash to Margaret Nash, written mid November 1917.  
Ibid., 198.  
movements but war artists were not generally granted permission to use these facilities. Artists who had served as soldiers before becoming official war artists had a large advantage over their civilian counterparts, particularly those who had fought in the frontline trenches, and seen the conditions of No Man's Land during battle or on raids into German territory.

The Austrian civilian artist Oskar Kokoschka was sent to the Italian Isonzo Front in 1916 as a press liaison officer. He describes a close incident at Selo. "Today I received my second baptism of fire in a village through which the trenches run... Once it was very beautiful but today it is totally destroyed. I had climbed out of the trench and begun to draw the church, had taken from it only a tall votive candle for superstitious reasons although more beautiful things were lying about there, was observed as I was drawing and caught in a cloud of shrapnel which destroyed a house five paces away. Then I had to wait for a second bombardment, then escaped through the ruins." Despite actually witnessing the war from the frontlines, many artists struggled to interpret the war in a convincing manner. Kokoschka was able to translate his wartime experiences into compelling imagery. He was scathing of his fellow artists who took advantage of the luxuries offered by their commissions such as the Hungarian painter József Rippl-Rónai whom he describes as "being handled with kid gloves' by army command at Ljubljana 'where everything is comfortable and in a civilised state.' Nothing could be learned there about the harshest realities of war, as Rippl-Ronai's work testified."855

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The work of several of the older official British war artists also suffered from this lack of grit. While John Lavery produced a fascinating series of works documenting Britain on the Home Front, he struggled to reconcile his pacifist sympathies with his official war artist duties, describing his own work as “totally uninspired and dull as ditch water… Instead of the grim harshness and horror of the scenes I had given charming colour versions as if painting a bank holiday on Hampstead Heath.”

Richard Cork finds particular fault with the work of British society portraitist Francis Dodd, who was appointed by the British in 1916 to complete a series of official portraits. His work, Cork says, “lacked the moral involvement, which animates the protesting work produced by unofficial [British] artists like Gertler or Epstein. Sufficiently anodyne to be acceptable in all government circles, Dodd reduced the

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obscenity of the Somme to a picturesque panorama peopled by blandly handsome officers.” While accurate in sentiment, this statement ignores the simple fact that Dodd was commissioned with the mandate to make commemorative portraits of key individuals of importance to the British campaign. Although Dodd’s production may appear prosaic, this task was nonetheless a necessary one. It was not his role to interpret the war through his paintings. It was Dodd’s compatriot Muirhead Bone who was charged with this duty in 1916, and as previously stated in Chapter Two, Bone was free to admit that his commissioned had “resulted in rather prosaic work.” The privileges he had received as part of his official position, such as his officer’s accommodation and the chauffeur-driven car that he used to travel freely behind the lines on the Western Front, had given his a limited perspective of how the average soldiers’ experience of the warzone. Significantly, Bone’s personal realisation of his shortcomings helped the British war art programme to recruit a series of young soldier-artists whose skills were much better suited to this assignment.

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858 Ibid., 139, 319.
859 Malvern, Modern art, Britain and the Great War: witnessing, testimony and remembrance, 14.
William Orpen too was known to have struggled with his official role. A fair indication of the artists’ initial casual perception of his role – revelling in the privileges associated with his honorary rank of Major – can be seen in his self-portrait Ready to Start (10 June 1917) where he depicts himself in fancy ‘soldiering’ uniform housed comfortably within his well appointed apartment behind the lines, surrounded by bottles for cocktail making. This flippancy is also present in The Refugee (1917), a seductive portrait of his French lover Yvonne Aubicq, to which he added a fanciful tile ‘The Spy,’ capitalising on the recent execution of the famous Mata Hari. After these false starts, Orpen witnessed a scene during one of his sketching excursions that pointedly reminded him of the seriousness of his war artist duty. Although he struggled to translate these sentiments in paintings such as Blown Up (1917) and The Mad Woman of Douai (1918), to his credit, several works, particularly his strange, brightly coloured trench series, do come close to capturing his intense emotional response to what he saw.

Today when I had finished work, I went over some country that was really terrible… it was fought over last about three weeks ago, and everything is left practically as it was, they have now started to bury the dead in some parts of it, Germans and English mixed, this consists of throwing some mud over the bodies as they lie, they don’t even worry to cover them altogether, arms and feet showing in lots of cases, the whole country is obliterated… miles and miles of Shell Holes bodies rifles steel Helmets gas Helmets and all kinds of battered clothes, German and English, and shells and wire, all and everything white with mud, and one feels the horrors the water in the shell holes is covering – and not a living soul anywhere near, a truly terrible peace in the new and terribly modern desert.861

Figure 134 – George Butler, “From Ypres”, the road to Becelaere and Gheluvelt (1918).862

862 Butler, “From Ypres”, The road to Becelaere and Gheluvelt, 1918.
Butler was strove to capture a true sense of authenticity in his official war paintings. He wanted to gain a first hand knowledge not only of the war’s current events but also of the battles that the New Zealand Division had participated in before he arrived on the Western Front. The northern movement of the front lines in the final months of the war placed many, previously inaccessible battlefields once again into Allied territory. Taking advantage of this opportunity, Butler made a sketching excursion into Belgium to visit the 1917 battlefields at Messines and around Passchendaele where hundreds of New Zealanders had died in the Third Battle of Ypres. He also made a large number of sketches at Polygon Wood were the Division had been posted over the miserable winter of 1917–18. These battlegrounds had been heavily fought over for several years and were still deeply scarred by the events that had taken place there. Despite the lack of immediacy to their occupation by the New Zealand Division, Butler recognised that these were significant locations that needed to be documented for posterity. A substantial number of Butler’s official war paintings are landscape studies from this sector. This pilgrimage gave him a

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much deeper appreciation for the larger picture of what the New Zealanders had achieved and how they had suffered over the course of the war.

As new the advances of the Hundred Days opened up new areas of Northern France, Nugent Welch was also took the opportunity to review the former battlefields of the Somme area. When he returned to the Western Front in October, Welch reported to Captain Gambrill, at the War Records Section that, “On arrival here I discovered that a small detachment had gone to [Flers]… for the purpose of [restoring] the graves of New Zealanders in that locality. Think this a good opportunity to get some sketches of the old 1916 battleground… The weather was good so was able to make good use of the time. I don’t think you will consider the results unsatisfactory.”

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Also see - Captain Gambrill, Report on the proceedings of the War Records Section, undated c. September–October 1918. Welch had, he reported, visited the old “battlefield of Flers and obtained records of our cemeteries there and of the country over which we fought in 1916.” ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 6. ZWR11/26. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
Lance Corporal Welch had arrived on the Western Front in October 1916, just after the New Zealand Division's had completed their successful capture of the village of Flers during the Battle of Somme. However, Welch would have been familiar with the area from his participation in the 1918 battles in the Somme between March and April before he began secondment with the War Records Section. Welch spent much of his time with the New Zealand Rifle Brigade in Belgium, where he fought at Messines and Passchendaele. Like Butler, Welch also painted several landscapes of these 1917 battlefields in this area. While, on the surface there is very little noticeable difference between Butler and Welch’s portrayal of a major battlefield, like Polygon Wood, Welch’s paintings are underpinned by his direct experience of the fighting that occurred at this location. Like Kokoschka, Welch was certainly capable of successfully translating this knowledge to create artworks of substance and

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866 Welch, The Butte de Polygon, c.1918.
867 AABK. 18805. AccW5557. bx 61. 0120509. Wellington Office: Archives NZ
poignancy. However, as will be explored further in this chapter, the emotional impact of his active participation in the war would come through strongly in his official paintings.

Unlike Welch, George Butler never witnessed the virtually immobile front line trenches that stretched from the French–Swiss border to the Belgian coast and never glimpsed the infamously deadly territory of No Man’s Land that lay, unchanging, between these fronts from 1914 until the beginning of 1918. He therefore never experienced the war in the same manner as some of the other, more famous British, Australian and Canadian war artists, many of whom began their duties in 1917. This meant that Butler never had to negotiate the challenges faced by artists such as Paul Nash and Wyndham Lewis who wanted to portray the reality of the war but were unable to get close enough to the frontlines to sketch. To compensate for this, these artists were forced to roam behind the lines and through the rear trenches, searching for opportunities to get closer and sneaking daringly forward, at great personal risk, whenever possible. By contrast, the constantly moving frontlines of the Hundred Days Offensive meant that Butler was always on the move. After the New Zealand Division had swept through a town, Butler could easily move through the same location to observe and record battlefields that were hours rather than years old. This had an enormous affect on Butler’s portrayal of the war. It also made his, and the work of the other New Zealand artists, appear to be essentially at odds with some of the more famous works made during the war which were highly stylised and influenced by the geometric abstraction of Vorticism and Futurism.

However, the lack of abstraction in the New Zealand war work does not lessen its artistic validity. Artists from a wide variety of stylistic backgrounds interpreted the First World War and each artist who visited the front lines sought out subjects from the war in that suited their individual methodology. Vorticists and Futurists, like Wyndham Lewis and Nevinson and David Bomberg, focused on the mechanisation of warfare, accentuating the inhuman angularity of central implements of war, the machine guns, rifles, shells, trenches and the factory-style module production line multiplication of manpower that turned fragile human bodies into weapons themselves.
Like many other war artists, Butler and Welch were primarily interested in the landscape of the war environment. The constantly shifting war they observed meant that both were required to work quickly to record the events that occurred around them. Their official paintings are therefore mainly comprised rapid \textit{en plein air} sketches executed in a brief impressionistic style. However, unlike many of the other official war artists, Butler in particular did not have the luxury of time to contemplate the landscape behind the lines during his time on the Western Front. He does not appear to have been assigned a permanent billet in a town behind the lines from which he could make painting excursions like William Orpen, nor did he get the opportunity to be sent to some chateau occupied by General Headquarters to work up his sketches as Welch had done. Although the archival records documenting his movements are inconclusive, a review of the subjects of his paintings and their dates suggest that he remained close to the New Zealand Division throughout his two months on the Western Front. Through this closeness Butler gained many insights into the lives of the officers and men of the Division, and also how this unit functioned in battle. This gives his work a unique perspective that enriches the quality of his production as a civilian artist.

\textbf{'Heroism' and cultural stereotypes in the work of George Butler}

The New Zealand Government followed the lead of England in this matter and appointed two New Zealand Official War Artists; the late George Butler and Nugent Welch. Their work tells a vivid story not only of heroism and endurance in battle but also of comradeship and the grim humour of life in the trenches.\footnote{Excerpt from ‘Foreword’ by G.G. Gibbes Watson, Chairman, National Art Gallery Management Committee in - National Art Gallery, \textit{Exhibition of Official War Paintings by New Zealand Artists 1952}.}
Before gaining his official commission, Butler’s war related paintings typically centred on passive, non-violent acts of resistance or civilian acts of courage or heroism. In *For the Faith of their Fathers* the figures of brave young children symbolise those who stand against oppression, while in *Dawn* a wounded soldier, supported by resolute caring figure of his female companion represent the stalwart courage of the British nation in the face of adversity. Even in *The Supreme Sacrifice*, although its subjects are soldiers, these men are not shown in the act of fighting but rest calmly in acceptance of their fate, waiting for their moment of redemption through death. As a war artist however, Butler was obliged to show active acts of courage in the face of war.

Aside from pleasing the New Zealand War Museum Executive Committee and the New Zealand public, Butler was also motivated to produce positive images of New Zealand.  

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Zealand’s contribution to the First World War because of his appreciation for the work done by the soldiers of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force which, as a war artist, he was able to witness first-hand. As this chapter will explain, Butler’s sincere admiration for the courage that these men exhibited in the face of horrors and hardships comes through plainly in his war artworks. Because of his affinity with his subject, Butler’s depictions of the soldiers of the New Zealand Division can be favourably compared to those works made by official war artists who had seen active service before gaining their commissions.

Figure 139 – Eric Kennington, *Raider with Cosh* (1917).

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In a similar vein to Butler, Eric Kennington, a former British soldier turned official war artist, produced touchingly intimate portraits of ordinary men carrying out their mundane daily routines within the war environment like the group of men resting in their dugout making billy tea in *The Die Hards* or the *Raider with Cosh* who, with a cigarette held firmly between his lips, concentrates on checking his precious equipment.\(^{871}\) Like Butler, the Australian civilian war artist William Dyson (1880—1938) also achieved a comparable bond with the soldiers he depicted despite being an outsider. However, Dyson’s overtly emotive artworks, like *Coming out of the Somme* (December 1916) and *A Voice from ANZAC* (1927) that deliberately emphasise the camaraderie of the men in the face of the hardships and miseries of war, jar slightly in comparison with Butler and Kennington’s more understated approach.\(^{872}\)

![Figure 140 – William Dyson, *Coming out on the Somme* (Dec 1916) – left; and *A Voice from Anzac* (1927) – right.\(^{873}\)](image)

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\(^{871}\) Kennington, Dodgson and Montague. *British Artists at the Front. Part Four: Eric Kennington. With introductions by Campbell Dodgson and C. E. Montague*, illustrations III and VI.

\(^{872}\) McMullin, *Will Dyson: cartoonist, etcher and Australia’s finest war artist*.

Australia at War, a book of Dyson’s work published in 1918, was favourably reviewed by The Times, London, “Dyson does not draw exciting moments in the soldier’s life at the front. He does a harder thing. He draws fatigue, boredom, discomfort, dirt. And his own experience, his own passionate sympathy, invest these undramatic subjects with intense feeling… His men endure. And every drawing expresses his admiration of their endurance, his reverence before the mystery of the indomitable mind.” Ross McMullin comments that Dyson was aware of the contradiction between the tone of his works from 1917 and the contemporaneous type of warfare being conducted by the Australian forces when the book was published. The visual dynamics of the war had changed dramatically between these two periods from stagnant to dynamic.

During the Hundred Days Offensive in the last few months of war, the New Zealand Division distinguished itself as one of the strongest and most successful division in the British Armies. Butler was witness to many of the events that sealed this reputation including the actions around Solesmes, Bapaume, and Le Quesnoy. His paintings attempt to capture the essence of this new era of professionalism in New Zealand’s military history. The qualities that came to define the New Zealand soldier during the First World War are neatly summarised by Lieutenant General Godley’s in his farewell message to the New Zealand Expeditionary Force.

It has been a great privilege – a privilege I have most fully appreciated – to have not only raised and brought from New Zealand such a force, but to have had the honour of holding the command of it throughout the whole period of the war…

In Gallipoli, Egypt, Sinai, Palestine, France, Belgium, and the United Kingdom you have taken your full share of the burden and stress of this war, and you have earned, I believe without exception, the highest regard of all those under whom and with whom you have served.

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874 From The Times Literary Supplement, 05.12.1918. McMullin, Will Dyson: cartoonist, etcher and Australia’s finest war artist, 182, 322-23.
You will leave behind you a reputation for discipline, fighting qualities, steadiness, resource, initiative, hard work, and gentlemanly conduct of which both you and New Zealand have every reason to be proud.

My four years as General Officer Commanding the Forces in New Zealand and still more my nearly five years’ experience as General Officer Commanding the N.Z.E.F. have specially impressed me with the natural capacity of the New Zealander. New Zealand, I am convinced, is able and is destined to play a part in the world out of all proportion to her size and population.875

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Butler’s painting *The Scaling of the Walls of Le Quesnoy* (1920) depicts the liberation of the fortified town by 4 Battalion, New Zealand Rifle Brigade. It shows how the men used a ladder to scale the walls rather than risk civilian lives in an artillery bombardment. The work illustrates the qualities of courage, initiative and efficient teamwork that came to define the achievements of the New Zealand soldiers.

The circumstances of the ladder attack have produced a fascinating and unusual image, with few known compositional precedents. To avoid losing the effect of realism, Butler had to carefully negotiate the scale of the figures to the ladder. But he was still faced with a vast expanse of brick wall across the majority of his canvas. He livened up the area with shading and an assortment of gaping holes that allude to the covering barrage of a light trench mortar that was used to ward off any German resistance. However, the most interesting aspect of the painting is the distinct lack of a visible enemy, a technique that was used by many other war artists during the First World War because the soldiers of the opposing army were so often hidden by the trench systems. The effect of this compositional structure is a heightened dramatic suspense and a palpable sense of apprehension. The viewer is placed in the same uncertain position as these men. Hidden from view, beyond the foreboding wall, lurks the possibility of danger and death. Butler’s decision to represent this event at this particular moment, when the outcome of the mission remains unclear, was deliberately calculated to emphasise the heroism of the New Zealand soldiers.
While attached to the Wellington Regiment of the New Zealand Division, Butler visited Le Quesnoy and produced a preliminary sketch of the wall at the site of the ladder assault. Although the finished work very closely resembles the official account of the action, Butler did take artistic liberties with the composition to heighten the drama of the scene. Silhouetted against a tempestuous smoke-filled sky, the lone figure of Lieutenant Averill crouches low with his pistol out, bravely moving forward into the unknown. In his memoirs however, Averill stated that Lieutenant Kerr, here pictured at the foot of the ladder, was actually right behind him.

878 AABK. 18805. Acc W5530. bx 27. 0021129. Wellington Office: Archives NZ
when he peered over the wall and it was Kerr who fired when they were spotted by two German soldiers.\textsuperscript{880} Despite this alteration, Butler's composition also emphasises the teamwork of the group. Kerr is shown steadying the ladder on the narrow ledge above the sluice gate while Averill climbs. The man behind Kerr is poised to take up Kerr's position while the other men stand back on the bridge, on the lookout for a German counter-attack.

There is a strong sense here of the 'mate-ship' that became one of the trademarks of life amongst the Anzac soldiers. Enduring bonds of friendship and solidarity were formed between the New Zealand men through the hardships they shared. Butler's genuine respect for the everyday heroism of his fellow countrymen is obvious in his portrayal of their accomplishments. Analysis of the subjects he chose to depict indicate that he saw it as part of his duty as a war artist to establish a meaningful connection with the men and to acquire a close experience of the war. Alongside the New Zealand soldiers, Butler experienced the tension of life at the Front, often sketching while under fire and placing himself in areas of danger near to the battle lines where his safety could not always be guaranteed.\textsuperscript{881} As a result of his dedication to his position, his artworks are able to portray the realities of these events with a true sense of authenticity.

During his time as an official artist Butler made several portraits of New Zealand soldiers, from privates to officers. In these Butler captures a sense of the distinctive qualities of the New Zealand man at war that were solidified during the First World War, and which have since become the popular stereotype of the nation's masculine cultural identity. As Jock Phillips states in his seminal publication, \textit{A Man's Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male} “the Great War established the soldier as the shining personification of the New Zealand male, and indeed of New Zealand itself.”\textsuperscript{882}

\textsuperscript{881} Richards, "R.J. Richards Letter Collection: Personal letter between Reg and his Mother sent from Bapaume to New Zealand", 28 September 1918.
Butler’s *Digger in Ordinary* (1918), leaning casually against a wall, cigarette in mouth, is a succinct representation of what is now the ubiquitous image of the laid back New Zealand soldier with his laconic and even cheeky approach to the business of soldiering. Given the *laissez faire* attitude of the soldier, this work could possibly have been a portrait of Butler’s original batman, of whom the artist was quite dismissive. In early October 1918 Butler wrote to Captain Gambrill complaining about this man’s incompetence. “Please send on the stretcher I left behind and the paint also. I have rather a fool for a batman and he left my paint box behind at out last bivvye so that all I have is what I happened to be carrying.”

Butler’s portrait of this man’s replacement, which he gave the title *A Batman, A Good One* (c.1918) is

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884 Letter from George Butler to Captain Gambrill from France, written before the 09.10.18 (as note that stretcher and paint dispatched on 10.10.18), in - ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/12. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
much more sympathetic – the otherwise unnamed soldier coming across as stalwart and trustworthy.

Butler's portraits of Corporal J W Cahill, *Full Marching Kit* (16 October 1918) and Sergeant Miru, "A" Company, NZ Pioneers (c.1918) are equally respectful to the worthy character of his subjects. Corporal Cahill was with the Otago Regiment that escorted Butler around some of the old New Zealand battlefields after the Armistice. The portrait of Miru is notable as one of the few official images that records the contribution of Maori to the New Zealand war effort. These simple works again managed to enforce the iconographic image of the seasoned New Zealand soldier at war – a stoic, strong and determined naturally bred fighting specimen, ready either

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for combat or for heavy labouring on the farm. These works also show Butler’s careful attention to detail, recording the nuances of the New Zealand uniform and the various accoutrements and paraphernalia worn by the men.

This party of New Zealand stretcher-bearers in their lemon squeezer hat is of particular interest because the soldier being tended to on the stretcher wears the soft cap of a German soldier. The work is dated November 1918, made during the final month of the war when it could be expected that the Allied compassion for the enemy was running low in the face of their imminent defeat. Although it is not entirely clear, it is possible that this sketch was made from a real scene that Butler witnessed. The work illustrates an act of true heroism and compassion in war – the ability of the New Zealand soldiers to overlook the uniform of a man in favour of accepting his universal humanity in a time of need.

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Butler’s paintings are largely devoid of civilians, as these local people would have fled or gone into hiding while a battle was taking place. The exception is *Church at Solesmes used as a hospital by Germans* produced in November 1918. Butler later used this sketch to produce the large oil painting, *Entry of New Zealand troops into Solesmes* (1919). As a professional artist, skilled in both the field and the studio, Butler was easily able to take a scene that he witnessed, such as this sketch from Solesmes, and then later translate it into a celebratory image of the victorious entry of the New Zealand Division into the town. French and British flags now flutter on the buildings in honour of the occasion as the townspeople gather to watch the marching soldiers from the steps of the shell-battered church. In the foreground, New

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Zealanders in their lemon squeezer hats linger with their hands in their pockets or greet each other amicably, gaining stares from the local children.

Alongside his soldier portraits, Butler recorded some of the local people he came across while travelling through the Western Front. On the 14 November 1918 while camped with the New Zealand Division near the newly liberated town of Le Quesnoy, Butler painted a portrait sketch of Soeur [St] Jean, a sister of the Order of the Enfance de Jesus. In the Austin account, Soeur Jean was of the Sisters of Mercy. The 'St' is included in her name by Lytton but was not recorded by Butler in the title details of his sketch.

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889 In the Austin account, Soeur Jean was of the Sisters of Mercy. The 'St' is included in her name by Lytton but was not recorded by Butler in the title details of his sketch.

and the other Sisters had worked at the local civilian hospital tending to malnourished local population and to the British prisoners of war (POW’s) held within the town. The main section of the hospital having been commandeered by the Germans, the Sisters were forced to partially house their patients in a stable area, the unsanitary conditions of which resulted in many unnecessary deaths. British war correspondent Neville Lytton who met and interviewed “this charming sister” records that when the New Zealanders arrived in Le Quesnoy, Soeur Jean had “urged them to show no mercy to the Germans as their treatment of our prisoners was beyond all descriptions vile. Hundreds appear to have died from lack of food or clothing... the Germans never brought them to the convent till they were so frightfully ill that all hope of recovery was out of the question.”

In his *Official History of the New Zealand Rifle Brigade*, Lieutenant Colonel W.S. Austin recounts that Soeur Jean told the soldiers that, “a day passing without one of them [the POW’s] being carried out to the well-filled cemetery was exceptional.” Once the New Zealanders had secured their objectives on the 4 November, a dressing station was established at the hospital in Le Quesnoy where it is likely the wounded soldiers were assisted by the Sisters and local medical staff. Later, Soeur Jean did receive a partial fulfilment of her wishes when the German prisoners “were compelled to make amends for the gross delinquencies of their comrades” by cleaning the hospital and the hospital chapel. Austin also notes that Soeur Jean used the Sisters quarters and medical staff facilities, housed in the caves underneath the civilian hospital, as a base to gather and hide those being sought by the Germans forces. From there she and her team arranged for these refugees to be smuggled out of Le Quesnoy “under the cover of darkness, [they] were passed by the devoted nurses into the Forest of Mormal, close by. Thence they proceeded towards the border, and, if fortune favoured them, finally reached safety in a friendly or a neutral country.”

By participating in this vast secret network scattered throughout the occupied territories, Soeur Jean and her associates bravely risked the same fate as that of the martyred English heroine Nurse Edith Cavell, who was executed by firing squad on the 12

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891 Austin, *The Official History of the New Zealand Rifle Brigade (The Earl of Liverpool’s Own): covering the period of service with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in the Great War from 1915 to 1919*, 567.
October 1915 for disobeying the German authorities and “assisting men to join their own fighting lines.”

The creation of this portrait is indicative of Butler’s dedication to his position as an official war artist. Quick to recognise the importance of the New Zealand Division’s achievement at Le Quesnoy, Butler produced a series of works that document key aspects of the town and the events that unfolded there. As well as making a sketch at the site of the ladder assault he also painted a watercolour of the moat surrounding the town, and a rapid charcoal study of New Zealand soldiers Jumping a Machine Gun. Butler used these sketches to aid in the production of The Scaling of the Walls of Le Quesnoy (1920). Although no concrete evidence has yet to be uncovered to substantiate the claim, it is likely possible that Butler also intended to produce a finished portrait of Soeur Jean from the quick sketch that remains. This may have been intended to honour her outstanding contribution to the Allied war effort. The very fact that Butler selected Soeur Jean as a portrait subject shows that he met this charismatic woman during his stay in Le Quesnoy and was genuinely impressed not only by her personality but also by the many good works she carried out during the occupation.

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894 Butler, The Walls of Le Quesnoy, c.1918.
895 George Edmund Butler, Jumping a machine gun in the moat at Le Quesnoy, 1918. Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, Wellington Office.
Another notable artwork by Butler relating to the civilian population is his touching portrait of *A little French refugee* (c.1918). In this sketch Butler has captured the haunted wide-eyed expression of a child who has lived through many hardships and seen horrors beyond his years. The same powerful sense of loss is evoked in the vacant stares of the displaced family in Hodgkins’ *Belgian Refugees* (1916). Alongside Moore-Jones’ *Simpson and his Donkey* (c.1917), *Belgian Refugees* is one of the most recognisable images produced by a New Zealand artist during the First World War. Although Butler’s *Little French refugee* is less well known within the public arena, it nonetheless arouses an equally potent emotional response from the viewer for the innocent victims of the Great War who were caught in the thick of the violent struggle between the opposing armies. Refugees from the occupied territories were a popular subject for many British artists, particularly in the early years of the

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Also see: *Refugee Children*, c. 1916, Private collection on loan to Manchester City Art Gallery, Manchester.
Buchanan, Hodgkins, Dunn and Eastmond, *Frances Hodgkins: paintings and drawings*, 33, 112 (Plate 13).
war when Britain was looking to gain public support for their campaign against Germany. As discussed in the previous chapter, many of these works such as Frank Brangwyn’s recruitment poster for the London Underground or William Lee Hankey’s *The Flight from Belgium* (1914) were created with definite political and propagandist overtones in mind. Although it is just a simple sketch, *Little French refugee* conveys the heartfelt sense of sorrow that Butler, a father or two, felt when he encountered the pitiful sight of this young boy. It is possible, given Butler’s tendency to use child subjects in allegorical scenarios, that *Little French refugee* may have been intended as the basis for a larger work dealing with the issue of refugees in the war. While this apparently never eventuated, because this sketch was created as a piece of official war art, it nevertheless carries a politicised message to its intended audience in New Zealand similar to that evoked by Brangwyn and Hankey. By showing the New Zealand public a highly emotive image of a real person whose life had been traumatically effected by the war in Europe, a sketch such as *Little French refugee* could highlight the importance of the work that the men of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force were doing to protect those in need on the other side of the world and help justify the sacrifices that they made for this cause. Unfortunately, this sketch was not exhibited in New Zealand until 1952 by which time its strategic relevance had become largely irrelevant.

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898 Although Hodgkins’ painting does appear to invoke the compositional arrangement of these zealous works by Brangwyn, Hankey and others, the subject matter of her *Refugees* is just a slightly more typical continuation of her interest in representing the relationships between family groups, particularly women and children. Buchanan, Hodgkins, Dunn and Eastmond, *Frances Hodgkins: paintings and drawings*, 33, 112; Drayton, *Frances Hodgkins: a private viewing*, 153-54.

A Landscape in Ruins – Nugent Welch and the psychological impact of the war environment on the soldier-artist

Extract from 1914-1918: a documentary by Jim Henderson, recorded in 1964:
Q: Could you find any beauty amongst it all – the war artist of Wellington was asked?
Nugent Welch: Yes, yes! That’s the funny thing about beauty it comes in a strange way. One of the most vivid recollections I have was about half a yard of steak on bit of brown paper on top of a parapet out in the sun to thaw before it was made into stew. That piece of steak reflecting the blue sky was a joy. Oh yes, I would always see beauty in the sky.900

Figure 149 – Nugent Welch, Cemetery (c.1918).901

901 Nugent Welch, Cemetery, c.1918. Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, Wellington Office.
While Butler revelled in the opportunities that his official positions gave to paint all the drama and action of the New Zealand Division's campaign, Nugent Welch found his duties challenging. Welch had enlisted with the Expeditionary Force in March 1916, arriving in France in September. He spent almost two years in the trenches with only one allocation of leave in England. After surviving the horrors of Passchendaele he was briefly hospitalised in December 1917 but was not injured seriously enough to be invalided from France. Correspondence with his family suggests that by early 1918 he was on the verge of a psychological breakdown and his appointment as a Divisional artist saved him from this eventuality. Like Moore-Jones and the other soldier-artists, Welch’s works have an authenticity that comes from his intimate involvement with and understanding of the events he witnessed. The archival evidence suggests that he approached his new position as a type of therapy. His representation of the war on the Western Front deliberately avoids depicting the brutality, violence and death he had experienced first-hand. Instead he chose to approach the grim realities of his subject from an oblique angle, painting the aftermath and destruction that the war left in its wake.

Figure 150 – Nugent Welch, *The Buckshee* (1918).  

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Welch’s *The Buckshee* captures the essence of Welch’s own traumatic war experience. It shows a man, walking calmly alone down a road behind the lines as planes swarm overhead and explosions erupt in the distance. The Persian word *baksheesh* means small cash, which is given as charity, a gratuity or tip, also a bribe. It the First World War the word came to mean anything ‘free or extra.’ It usually referred to something gotten as an extra, like when extra rations were pilfered, but it could also be was also used like ‘Blighty’ to describe when a man had been made free of his duties by a light wound e.g. ‘to get off buckshee.’ Given the circumstances of Welch’s previous military career, *The Buckshee* could be read as a kind of idealised self-portrait. The soldier wanders calmly in the midst of the chaos around him. He is temporarily free from his responsibility to serve, kill and be killed if necessary. Perhaps Welch felt himself to be truthfully in this position through his new field of service as a war artist, free from the battle lines, able to move with relative ease between the front and the safety of Divisional Headquarters. *The Buckshee* is the visual personification of a letter Welch wrote to his mother in July 1918 that describes his sense of “joy” and being in “heaven again” simply by being able to again do what comes naturally to him: producing pictures.\(^{903}\) In an interview about his war experiences, Welch was quick to explain that he “was very lucky” to be granted the position of war artist as he “was dying of fright.” “I was no soldier believe me, I hated it. I let the country down. I was in the trenches two years and I never killed anybody. [Pause] No, I was a soldier.”\(^{904}\)

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\(^{903}\) Extract from a letter by Welch to his mother dated 18 July 1918. An abridged passage from Welch’s letter reads: “I am now attach to Headquarters, as Divisional Artist, and located at a beautiful old chateau. Just at the moment I am busy on illustrations for this Year’s publication of ‘New Zealand at the Front’ and I also have in hand some large works depicting historical points of much interest to New Zealanders generally... You may well understand what this interesting work means to me after the long spell in the trenches. You can rest assured I am throwing my whole heart into it, and I do hope that I shall be able to produce something of real worth to my own dear land.... Oh, the delight of being in the midst of beautiful surroundings, and the joy of having to produce these pictures is just heaven again.”


\(^{904}\) Welch, "[Interview with Nugent Welch, New Zealand war artist, WWI]," c. late 1960s.
Welch’s interpretation of the Western Front is completely at odds with the modern, abstract style used by several of the British avant-garde war artists who were his contemporaries. Images of the war created by the leader of the Vorticist movement, Percy Wyndham Lewis display a fascination, verging on an horrific glorification of war. Vorticism was Lewis’ creative response against the trend towards sentimental beautification and romanticism in British art of the early twentieth century. His vision drew on the innovations of Italian Futurism to celebrate the advance of industrialism and the machine age. The inhuman implements of modern mechanical warfare such as tanks, rapid-fire machine guns and heavy artillery, military transports and gas masks were the perfect subject matter for his highly stylised, fiercely angular designs. Another official British war artist, who also worked for the Canadians, William Roberts, was inspired by Lewis to move away from his experimentation with French Cubism and into the less restricted representational techniques of Vorticism. Many other artists drew on the techniques of Futurism and Cubist abstraction in an attempt to represent the events of the war like Nevinson’s *Returning to the Trenches*.

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(1914–1915) which closely resembles Marcel Duchamp’s seminal work, *Nude Descending a Staircase (No.2)* of 1912.\textsuperscript{906}

![Figure 152 – Nugent Welch, Bieville, Bapaume Road (c.1918).\textsuperscript{907}](image)

Welch’s war works do not attempt to incorporate any of these modern stylistic movements despite his having had access to images of such work through the Wellington House publications and during his time in London between July and September 1918 when he was working up his official war sketches. Neither are his works easily comparable with the approach of the more traditional British official war artists like William Orpen, Eric Kennington or James McBey. Instead, Welch’s style remained fixedly provincial in its stylistic origins.

\textsuperscript{906} For a further images and analysis of war artwork from the First World War using modern abstract stylistic techniques refer to: [http://www.art-ww1.com/gb/visite.html](http://www.art-ww1.com/gb/visite.html)

\textsuperscript{907} Nugent Welch, *Bieville, Bapaume Road*, c.1918. Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, Wellington Office.
Figure 153 – Nugent Welch, *Summer* (1916).\textsuperscript{908}

Figure 154 – James Nairn, *Harvest* (1893).\textsuperscript{909}

Before the war, Welch in particular was a confirmed proponent of Nairn’s naturalist philosophy. This had a profound impact on Welch’s interpretation of the Western Front during his time as an official war artist. An early career work like *Summer*, produced by Welch in 1916, bears striking similarities to a typical example of Nairn’s practice such as *Harvest* (1893). Both artists were equally adept at rendering picturesque pastoral scenes in loose impressionistic brushwork. *Summer* shows Welch’s assuredness with the oil medium but it was in watercolour that he truly excelled. As with his works in oil, it appears that Welch’s interpretation of the watercolour medium owes much to the broad application of paint and bold use of colour seen in the sketches of Nairn.

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Welch’s technical mastery of this medium increased throughout the war period, as can be seen in examples of his work published in *New Zealand at the Front*. An earlier painting like *Man’s Inhumanity*, printed in the 1917 edition, is the direct descendent of Welch’s rural New Zealand landscapes in the style of *Summer*, focusing as it does on the picturesque qualities of the scene. Without the cues of the title and the, almost imperceptible, sight of the bi-wing aeroplane flying in the distance, it is possible to believe that Welch chose to paint this work to capture the pretty sight of a quaint, dilapidated cottage, fallen into disrepair and suffering from the ravages of time rather than the more likely scenario, that the ruin was a casualty of a bomb or artillery shell.

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911 Watercolour painting by Nugent Welch published as a colour plate in – Written and illustrated by men of the New Zealand Division, *New Zealand at the Front*, 119.
Figure 157 – James Nairn, *Evening* (1893).  

Figure 158 – Nugent Welch, *Messines Ridge* (c.1918).

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913 Watercolour painting by Nugent Welch, published as a colour plate in –
Later in the war Welch’s watercolour paintings become more confident – his application of paint is much bolder and his interpretation of form gradually flattens and becomes stylised to a degree not previously seen in his practice. A work such as *Messines Ridge* is a key example of this transitional phase in Welch’s career. It was published in the 1918 edition of *New Zealand at the Front*, which was first released around August. Records suggest that Welch was employed as an official war artist for the New Zealand Expeditionary Force at the time that this work was submitted for publication but it is, however, unclear whether or not he made the work as part of his official duties.⁹¹⁴

![Figure 159 – Nugent Welch, *Ruin of Cathedral Convent, Bapaume* (1918).] ⁹¹⁵

Because of the nature of his assignment, Welch’s official war paintings are altogether more descriptive than *Messines Ridge*. Collectively however, they do

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share the same confidence of execution. In an official work like *Ruin of Cathedral Convent*, which was produced following the New Zealand Division’s liberation of Bapaume on 29 August 1918, Welch’s increasingly masterful brushwork creates the illusion of masonry and rubble from touches of minimalistic lineal inflection and the subtle laying of tone.

![Image](image_url)

Figure 160 – Nugent Welch, *Thistle Dump and Cemetery at Delville Wood*, (c.1918).\(^{916}\)

Welch’s training in the *plein air* tradition with Nairn also enabled him to confidently capture the emotive atmospheres of the war scenes he encountered. Using bold rapid brushstrokes of oil paint Welch not only captures the effect of oncoming rain clouds in a stormy sky in *Thistle Dump and Cemetery at Delville Wood* (c.1918) but also deftly manages to express the bleak and pensive mood he felt in response to the bitter scene of fresh graves dug into the churned ground of this formerly wooded hill.

\(^{916}\) Welch, *Thistle Dump and Cemetery at Delville Wood*, c.1918.
Drawing on the experience he gained on the Western Front, Welch later made a name for himself in the post-war period, producing a constant flow of watercolour

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landscapes exploring the sublime beauty of New Zealand’s rugged coastlines and atmospheric skyscapes. Deceptively simple, yet meticulously crafted, these luminous compositions are distinctly ‘Welchian’ style. However, these too can be said to claim a lineage from Nairn.

Welch was also acquainted with Petrus van der Velden before the war. This Dutch artist was involved with the Hague School of Realists, a group that Michael Dunn, in *A Concise History of New Zealand Painting*, describes as the “Dutch equivalent of the French Barbizon School.” In New Zealand Van der Velden became enamoured with the local landscape and intent in his pursuit of capturing both the physical and metaphysical qualities of the nation’s rugged, untamed environment. Between 1904 and 1913 Van der Velden lived in Wellington where he met Welch. Before the war, Welch had approached van der Velden for lessons when he was first beginning his professional career as an artist. Van der Velden had declined Welch’s request suggesting instead that the young artist should “go to Nature for instruction.”

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Welch was much taken with van der Velden’s spiritual approach to landscape painting, encapsulated by the assertion he made to Welch when describing a painting he was struggling to complete that “the Holy Ghost is in that rock.”\textsuperscript{921} The lifetime devotion that Welch placed in rendering the landscape of his beloved Wellington coastline certainly made him a worthy heir to van der Velden’s enormous legacy.

As a young professional artist in New Zealand, Welch was totally absorbed with the pursuit of landscape subjects. The titles of the works he presented at the annual exhibitions of the various regional art societies confirm this.\textsuperscript{922} In a 1933 issue of \textit{Art in New Zealand} T.D.H. Hall, a longstanding friend of the artist’s, commented on Welch’s fascination with the natural world: “Song comes naturally to his lips while he wanders the coast, exploring the pools, hurling stones in the water, making friends with the gulls, and all the time noting for future [artistic] use the effects he sees all around... he finds so much variety and subtlety in Nature that he is not tempted to improvise for himself.”\textsuperscript{923} While Welch’s paintings were grounded in the natural world, like van der Velden, Welch instinctively understood that the essence of a successful landscape lay in finding the drama and discord within the beauty – the quality of the sublime and picturesque that William Gilpin defined in 1794:

> Why does an elegant piece of garden-ground make no figure on canvas? The shape is pleasing; the combination of the objects harmonious; and the widening of the walk in the very line of beauty. All this is true, but the \textit{smoothness} of the whole, tho right, and as it should be in nature, offends in picture. Turn the lawn into a piece of broken ground: plant rugged oaks instead of flowering shrubs: break the edges of the walk: give it the rudeness of a road; mark it with wheel-tracks; and scatter around a few stones, and brushwood; in a word, stead of making the whole \textit{smooth}, make it \textit{rough}; and

\textsuperscript{921} Hall, "The Art of Nugent Welch," 12.
\textsuperscript{923} Hall, "The Art of Nugent Welch," 10-11.
you make it also *picturesque*. All the other ingredients of beauty it already possessed.\textsuperscript{924}

Figure 164 – Nugent Welch, *The Butte de Polygon* (c.1918).\textsuperscript{925}

The brutalised landscape of the Western Front offered Welch many opportunities to express the sublime qualities of nature in his work. Although France was far from his country of birth, because the landscape held such significance for Welch, his heartbreak at the merciless destruction of the natural environment in wartime France and Belgium is palpable in works such as *The Butte de Polygon* (c.1918). Although the site depicted has obviously been the site of intense fighting, Welch has purposefully not strewn the battleground with dead bodies. All that remains of the human presence is debris – a discarded shovel beside an empty trench and a large wooden cross (far right). While explosions continue in the background, the broken tree stumps stand like markers in a grotesque cemetery. The painting is dominated


\textsuperscript{925} Welch, *The Butte de Polygon*, c.1918.
by the grotesque sight of the Butte, a manmade mound of earth, surrounded by mutilated tree stumps, their charred white forms like makeshift grave markers, mourning the loss of what was once Polygon Wood. This land has been stripped of all its previous greenery, leaving only the ochre of the infamous Belgian mud, the dense gelatinous quality of which Welch conveys through the heavy impasto of his paintwork. The scene is bathed in a harsh sunlight that adds a bizarre, otherworldly quality to this striking image of the aftermath of war.

Figure 165 – Nugent Welch, *German Pillbox on Upper Sector (1918)*

*The Butte de Polygon* is one of only two paintings by Welch that allude, albeit extremely obliquely, to the vicious conflict that was raging on the Western Front. In the background, to the left of the Butte, an almost imperceptibly small group of soldiers are caught amongst shellfire explosions. In contrast, the main area of the composition is eerily still. A strikingly similar motif also features in *German Pillbox on Upper Sector* (1918). Significantly, both works are oil paintings that were most likely

926 Welch, *German Pillbox on Upper Section*, 1918.
composed at the London studio assigned to Welch by the War Records Section from sketches he made in the field. Greater time and attention has been paid to the construction of these images and the explosions appear to be added intentionally to increase the overall drama of the scenes.

![Figure 166 – Paul Nash, *We are Making a New World* (1918).](image)

In terms of compositional structure and thematic content, *The Butte de Polygon* is comparable to Paul Nash’s *We are Making a New World* (1918). Both pictures share a striking simplicity of design. The dark stumps of maimed trees that rise crookedly out of the churned earth of No Man’s Land like broken human limbs, dominate Nash’s composition just as the deforested Butte looms menacingly in the centre of Welch’s painting. Like *The Butte*, the vista in *New World* is seen from a low angle that deliberately mimics the perspective of a soldier looking out tentatively from

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927 Nash, *We are making a New World*, 1918.
928 Ibid.
Nash’s succinct description of the gratuitous ecological destruction that occurred in France and Belgium between 1914 and 1918 remains one of the most acclaimed and recognisable images made during the Great War. Welch’s strikingly eerie, moonlike landscape of *The Butte de Polygon* is arguably its equal.

The most revealing and poignant feature of the thirty-two artworks that comprise Welch’s official war art production is their direct avoidance of figurative subjects or images of battle. The majority of his artworks are set well behind the front lines of battle, in areas of relative calm and stillness. When soldiers do appear in his works, they are typically pictured in miniature from a wide angle, giving the impression of their individual insignificance amongst the vastness of their surroundings and the scale of the destruction caused by the conflict. This approach was most likely...
influenced by his personal experience of being a small pawn in the midst of the massive army fighting on the Western Front.

![Image](image_url)

Figure 168 – Paul Nash, *The Menin Road* (1919)

Although their representational styles are markedly different, Welch and Nash took a very similar to the approach the depiction of men within the war landscape. When soldiers do appear in their artworks, they both typically chose to picture them in miniature from a wide angle. As seen in Nash’s hellish tableau of *The Menin Road* (1918—1919) and Welch’s subtle rendering of *Scene behind the Line in the Snow* (1918), this compositional approach makes the human figures appear appropriately small, fragile, and virtually insignificant amongst the scale of the war’s destruction.

Significantly, neither artist was particularly confident at rendering the figure. In spite of this weakness in their artistic practice, Nash and Welch's landscape-focused technique was to prove extremely successful when applied to their official war artworks. Although Welch was an obviously passionate artist, T.D.H. Hall notes that Welch’s essentially self-trained skills at rendering and his “avoidance of the figure”

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were a source of criticism in his career. "Greater mastery in drawing would probably have freed his technique... yet one would not like to imperil that individual outlook and freshness, that absorbing passion for the beauty exhibited in the land of his birth. Technical problems and theories so easily usurp the place of keen insight and understanding."}

Nash also famously had difficulty with his draughtsmanship. In an attempt to rectify this, he enrolled at the Slade School of Art, London in October 1910 but left after less than a year. "My own attempts to draw from life were still incompetent... Painfully I drew on. But the human figure as represented by the models at the Slade did not interest me. I could make nothing of it." In 1912 the British Royal Academian Sir William Richmond, viewed Nash’s work and advised him, "My boy, you should go in for nature." Nash duly followed this recommendation, making the natural world the major source of his artistic inspiration. This was reflected in his early solo exhibitions before the war, where nature and specifically the motif of the tree, were his central themes. Nash found this new direction extremely inspiring. "As I began to draw, I warmed to my task. For the first time, perhaps, I was tasting fully the savour of my own pursuit. The life of a landscape painter. What better life could there be – to work in open air... to get my living out of the land as much as my ancestors had ever done."

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933 Ibid., 10-12.  
935 Ibid., 24.  
936 Viney and Imperial War Museum (Great Britain), Images of Wartime: British art and artists of World War One, 44-48.  
Like Welch, Nash found it difficult to reconcile his passion for nature with the destruction he witnessed on the Western Front, as Cork explains, “Precisely because he had cherished nature with such visionary fervour in his pre war work, his outrage over her subsequent desecration knew no bounds.” Nash used the figure selectively in his war paintings – including them for specific compositional emphasis in works like *Nightfall: Zillebeke District*, where the tiny soldiers shown in the foreground weave their way through a precarious network of zigzagging duckboard walkways, their figures barely discernable from the broken trees that surround them as they creep forward on some night mission to repair wire or carry out a raid nearby. Richard Cork explains that the diminutive scale was “to ensure that Nash could draw them without any apparent difficulty” but also notes that, “their modest proportions also serve to emphasise man’s helplessness in the face of overwhelming hostile surroundings. They look just as broken and vulnerable as the stripped trees projecting so nakedly form the land beyond.”

939 This painting was displayed at Paul Nash’s May 1918 exhibition ‘Void of War’, arranged by the British Ministry of Information. Cork goes on to explain that, “When Nash carried out a lithographic version of the Zillebeke scene, he changed the name from *Nightfall* to *Rain* and reinforced the assault
Often the human form is eliminated altogether in Nash’s paintings and replaced by symbolic, figural elements. Nash was particularly drawn to the broken trees that littered the battlefields and No Man’s Land. In Wire (1918) Nash places the massive, twisted hulk of a shattered tree in the foreground of his composition. Its lifeless broken branches droop piteously at the sides of its solid trunk, which still stands firm within a sea of thick mud. This dramatic form is entirely surrounded by menacing barbed wire and fences. Although the scene is virtually monotone, Nash has left a shaft of brilliant white in the sky around the form of the tree. The overall effect is a subtle allusion to the Crucifixion. “Figures are no longer needed here, for the remains of this abused trunk are as pitiful as any human martyr. Enmeshed in barbed spirals, of each stroke. Instead of simply falling in one direction, they now form a crisscross structure of stabbing lines. A few more figures can be discerned too, but they do not appear any more capable of withstanding the storm on their exposed and unstable pathway.”


which circle around the tree like thorns crowning Christ’s head, the tree symbolises the degradation and extinction of all living things. If there are echoes of the cross on Calvary, Nash nevertheless makes sure that no hint of a future resurrection is allowed to counter the prevailing emphasis on death.”

Nugent Welch also often substituted the human figure within his war images. During his time working as an official war artist, Welch was able to apply his skills in depicting the natural environment to urban landscapes. Here too his avoidance of figurative subjects and obviously warlike themes continues. The focus of his production was rather, the destruction that the war left in its wake. His original sketches follow the activities of the New Zealand Division, observing what has gone ahead and offering subtle commentary on what has occurred. Analysis of these paintings suggests that Welch was quite sympathetic to the plight of the French and Belgian people. Many of his works draw the viewer’s attention to the impact that the war had on the local population whose towns, cities and farms were left devastated in the aftermath of battle. A large area of working farmland has been commandeered by the New Zealand forces in *Windmill, Somme* (June 1918), a colossal hole is shown ripped out of the centre of a village in *Mine Crater, Fontaine* (1918), the *Ruin of Cathedral Convent, Bapaume* is little more than a hulking mound of masonry, and the victorious trucks of the *New Zealand Transport passing through Ypres after capture by New Zealand Division* (October 1918) lumber along a road of devastation, past piles of rubble and the sorry wreckage of a two-storied house.

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945 Nugent Welch, *New Zealand Transport passing through Ypres after capture by NZ Division*, October 1918. Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, Wellington Office.
Welch’s watchful eye was repeatedly drawn to the structures of ruined buildings. T.D.H. Hall offers the interpretation that this was done often purely in the pursuit of aesthetics and technical compositional challenges. “Few felt so deeply the ugliness and miseries of war, yet when he [Welch] paints the ruined village or Y.M.C.A. hut he is moved to exhibit, not the horrors of war, but the beauty of form, the play of light and shade through gaping roof and shattered wall.” However, the particular subjects that Welch chose to place under his enquiring gaze often show signs of the artist's troubled thoughts. Perhaps unconsciously, Welch seems to have imposed anthropomorphic qualities on several of the inanimate objects he depicted. The *Shell-wrecked YMCA Hut* (c.1918) that Hall refers to is a mangled mess of exposed beams that Welch represents slumped woefully in the mud, like an abandoned carcass, its broken timber skeleton torn mercilessly through by shrapnel.

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946 Welch, *Shell-wrecked YMCA Hut*, c.1918.
947 Hall, ”The Art of Nugent Welch,” 12.
Similarly, in *Ypres, Winter* (1918) the buildings of the siege weary town are shown as disfigured nightmarish facades, the window openings like gaping wounds or screaming mouths, the debris of their carnage strewn about in the snow. The buildings in Welch’s paintings are as telling of the inhuman brutality of mechanised warfare as any image of the unburied dead in No Man’s Land.

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The British war artist Muirhead Bone also used destroyed structures, particularly grand chateau and churches in his works to represent the loss of history and culture caused during the destruction of war. However, due to their publication in Wellington House’s propaganda focused series *The Western Front*, Bone’s images of ruins also arouse a sense of abhorrence at the brutality of the enemy against France and the Allies. Although Welch’s paintings can easily be interpreted as anti-war images, as they were never displayed in a comparable context to Bone’s, they remain free of any imposed political overtones and are purely the unique personal response of the artist to the war environment.

Figure 173 – Muirhead Bone, *The Great Crater, Athies* (May 1917).\(^{949}\)


Memorialisation, religion and death in George Butler's official war paintings

Butler’s subject matter is often similar to that of Nugent Welch. Most of his works are landscapes, but Butler gives more emphasis to the destruction and desolation of war.\footnote{Colquhoun, "War Art at National Archives."}

Like Welch, George Butler was also interested in recording the places that the New Zealand Division passed through and the destruction of towns and the landscape. Butler’s approach to the landscape displays the same horrified fascination with the savage brutalisation of the natural environment. In Butler’s masterful painting \textit{The Menin Road and Chateau Wood with Ypres in the distance} (1918), he presents the Flemish countryside as a ruined abomination of what was once green and fertile. The pinkish-red and brown tones of his palette, increases the hellish or apocalyptic quality of this real, post-war scene. The armies that caused this destruction are no longer present. Only the debris left behind by their actions remain.

\footnote{Butler, \textit{Menin Road and Chateau Wood with Ypres in the distance}, 1918.}
Also like Welch, Butler’s war works bare close comparison with the unpopulated war landscapes seen in Nash’s paintings, particularly those that focus on the debris left by the battle like Void (1918). As Cork explains, this “most profound and despairing” of Nash’s paintings “concentrates on the violation of nature” the composition being “devoted to terrible stillness of a landscape already shattered and deserted by the opposing armies.” Nash’s choice of title for this work stresses “the obliteration of a land where everything has been abused, stricken and robbed of its former identity.”

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There is an intensity about *The church, Neuve Eglise* (c.1918) despite its subdued palette. All the subject matter has felt the presence of the surrounding war. It is the bloodless carnage: the church has been almost demolished, the trees are bare, the church graveyard has been badly battered and surrounded by barbed wire, the land has been pock marked by shell fire. It appears to be winter or perhaps it is just a fog or the gloom of rain that has filled up the holes in the ground with water. There is no obvious sign of life in the image but there is sense that the fighting has just past through and left this scene in its wake.

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Butler’s paintings do not shy away from depicting the harsh realities of the war that he witnessed. Butler’s *Burial party at Bellevue near Solesmes* (c.1918) is virtually unique among the official artworks produced within the British Empire. Despite it being a censored subject when he was creating these works, Butler frequently made images of New Zealand and Allied dead soldiers. His sketch of *a Burial party at Bellevue near Solesmes* (c.1918) is an intensely poignant image, made all the more special because of its unusual and perhaps unique subject matter.

It is not clear why Butler chose to record this scene. It seems an unnecessarily gruesome and certainly inappropriate subject to turn into a large oil painting to hang in the New Zealand War Museum in London. It probably would also have not been well received were it to have been placed in one of the planned Dominion War

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Museums in New Zealand. It seems more likely that Butler produced the sketch as a manner of respect, not only for the dead men but also for the living soldiers who had to continue on with their duty in the face of constant hardships. In the random lottery of warfare, a man could lose his best friends and comrades at any stage. Through his experience of the life with the New Zealand soldiers, Butler seems to have recognised the true courage of the men to meet this harsh reality. This work was not a casual rough drawing of a scene but may well have been constructed over a prolonged period. The compositional structure of this sketch has been carefully laid out by the artist. The image is constructed of several small vignettes that join together to create a neat circular flow across the picture plane. The transition between each vignette juxtaposes contrasting scenes of action and inactivity. In the background, a group of horses pull several supply carts. These are following behind a large contingent of soldiers, wearing their kit bags, who march smartly in formation toward another battle. The strong diagonal line linking the horses to the soldiers is broken by a group of three New Zealand diggers wearing their distinguishing lemon-squeezer hats. These men stand at their ease, with hands in pockets or arms crossed and appear to be taking animatedly to each other. This group is echoed by the two soldiers in regulation tin hats leaning against the rubble of a destroyed structure. Unlike the other group, these two men are not talking but appear absorbed watching the group of gravediggers working below them. Dressed in their shirtsleeves, the four diggers form a shifting pattern: one digging, the next leaning on his shovel. Beside the entrance to the pit the row of dead curves round and up towards the horses, the inert bodies are punctuated by two workers recording the details of the deceased before they are put in the ground. This description will hopefully illustrate the intense compositional complexity of this seemingly simple scene. As with many of Butler’s paintings, this positioning of figures is done purposefully to evoke symbolic meaning. Far from being gruesome, this is Butler’s attempt to convey to his audience his new understanding and appreciation for the work done by the soldiers who he had lived with and befriended. Burial party at Bellevue near Solesmes is a statement about the continuous circle of life and death that accompanies the daily routine of a soldier in war. It is a bitter truth but one which Butler found the New Zealand men to take, admirably, in their stride.
Although images of graves, burial processions and wounded men were a common subject, the depiction of dead (Allied) soldiers was strictly censored during the war. However, some artists did produce them – the most well-known and controversial example was Nevinson’s *Paths of Glory* (1917). William Orpen’s *Dead Germans in a Trench* (1918) also caused considerable controversy with the censor Major Lee when it was marked for display at Orpen’s official London war art exhibition Agnew’s in May 1918. It was eventually decided to lift the ban, owing to the fact that the corpses it depicted were German and not Allies. However, as Cork explains, Orpen was still punished for daring to portray such content, “the government’s failure to publish Orpen’s substantial body of war pictures probably reflects official unease over this readiness to depict gruesome scenes.” Although Orpen, as a well-known and highly popular artist was an ideal choice to be included in the series *British Artists at the Front* alongside his up-and-coming artist colleagues Nash, Nevinson

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and Kennington, the British Government chose to publish Lavery's work instead as this was "more palatable, for its particular purposes, than Orpen's feeling for the macabre." It was their opinion that, "No purpose could be served, from the official point of view, by stressing the obscenity of war. Orpen's attempt to acknowledge the conflict's worst aspects counted against him in political circles."959

Outside of the British art programme, the work *For What?* (1918) by Canadian artist F.H. Varley is a rare example of a piece of official war art that depicts the burial of dead Allied soldiers.961 The scene depicted in *For What?*, is summarised in a letter Varley wrote to his wife in October 1918 while working for the Canadian war artists scheme stating that, “You in Canada... cannot realise at all what war is like. You

must see...your own country men unidentified, thrown in to a cart, their coats over
them, boys digging a grave in a land of yellow slimy mud and green pools of water
under a weeping sky.\footnote{Cork, A Bitter Truth: Avant-Garde Art and the Great War, 204.} This is, arguably, one of the most moving images produced
during the First World War. Executed the a rough impressionistic style that typified
the work of Varley and the Group of Seven, the composition is dominated by a
cartload of corpses, piled ignobly in a heap, their faces hidden by sheet. In Varley’s
thick application of paint, the tangled mess of their legs makes one almost
indiscernible from the other; the khaki brown of their uniforms echoes the colouration
of the heavily broken and muddy soil of the battlefield that will soon become their
final resting place. Behind the cart a pair of soldiers prepare the ground for their
burial. Like the diggers depicted in Butler’s painting, they are caught in the process
of adding to the rows of crosses that already line the landscape. One of the men
stands for a moment against the skyline. Resting from this toil on his shovel, he, like
the viewer, contemplates the desolation of his surroundings and the futility of this
war.
Another notable subject in Butler’s war oeuvre is his series of compositions exploring the pictorial qualities of the Butte in Polygon Wood. The last version, *Butte de Polygon*, painted in 1920, addresses the tragedy of the war and the overwhelming grief it caused, specifically amongst the civilian population, while also offering spiritual consolation to those who had suffered. The silver haired father and black veiled mother are generic emblems of mourning parenthood. They stand in the midst of a typically desolate battlefield of the Western Front, their heads bowed above the sight of a hastily made grave. However, the composition is a constructed fantasy. Most parents, especially those in New Zealand, would never have been able to visit the gravesite of their child or know exactly where they might have died. The grieving parents stand symbolically in the area of shadow that dominates the canvas. The palette here is deliberately dark and the brushwork heavy and appropriately muddy.

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963 Butler, *Butte de Polygon, Thy Father and I have Sought Thee Sorrowing*, 1920.
in its application to express the churned quality of the earth. The mood conveyed in this section is of an immense misery at the futility of this war from which there is no relief for those left behind. In contrast to this, the upper portion of the composition is bathed in the hopeful and restorative glow of warm amber sunlight, a traditional symbol of spiritual strength and God’s healing power that reaches towards the mourning couple across the horizon.

Significantly, the painting has the secondary title *Thy Father and I have sought thee sorrowing, Luke II 48*. This biblical passage deals with an episode in the boyhood of Jesus when Mary and Joseph realise that they have lost their son in Jerusalem but eventually find him in the Temple conversing with the Rabbis. In response to the words of Mary in the title, Jesus said, “How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?” A similar scene occurs later in the Christian story when Mary Magdalen and the other women look for the crucified Jesus at his tomb. In this context, the painting’s title offers a sense of hope and reconciliation to all the families whose sons died in First World War as it implies that, although their children may be physically lost from the world, their deaths in the defence of freedom were part of God’s work. In *Images of War* Tony Martin follows Wayne Stagg’s thesis in asserting that, “Butler consciously painted to realise this ‘museum-memorial’ purpose in his paintings.” Butler and Welch’s works “represented a testimony of the wastage and melancholy of the War. As images, they serve a memorial function. They do not exploit the heroic code, nor can they be viewed as war propaganda. Instead, the viewer is confronted with a manifestation of Christian pathos.”

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965 Martin and Manawatu Art Gallery., *New Zealand Images of War*, 92.
The composition and theme of *Butte de Polygon* is similar to his 1917 work *Dawn, For we have seen His Star in the East*. The primary difference is the setting, particularly the importance of the location in England, the place defined regularly as Home, the essential base of English culture and the British Empire. The implicit location of *Butte de Polygon* establishes an important juxtaposition between Home and Abroad. The soldiers buried in the field are eternally displaced from their native

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967 Butler, *Dawn, For we have seen His Star in the East*, 1917.
country, in foreign soil. A similar concept is constructed in Byam Shaw’s 1901 painting *Boer War 1900*, which shows a woman distraught with grief standing amidst the luscious high summer foliage of a quintessentially English meadow and brook.968

Byam Shaw’s subtitle for the work was *Last Summer green things were greener, Brambles fewer, the blue skies bluer*. Tim Barringer explains that the work strategically draws from the visual language of the Pre-Raphaelites to construct the epitomisation of ‘Home’ in the landscape, making careful reference to Millais’ *Ophelia*. The intensity of this Englishness sets up an evocative contrast to “the otherness of the South African Veldt, dry, hostile and dangerous, where we might imagine the body of the loved one to have been buried.”969

*Boer War 1900* dwells on two of Byam Shaw’s main thematic preoccupations, the separation (and growing tension) between the spheres of male and female identity in late Victorian and Edwardian society and British Imperialism, a concept towards which the artist was proud and frequently celebratory. Both topics were inextricably joined in wartime. “The masculine is absent, but imperial manhood is nonetheless the ultimate subject of the image. The terrible human cost of war is figured through a feminine personification of loss.” In *Butte de Polygon*, Butler also addresses these social issues though his resolution is informed by the particular circumstances of his upbringing and his position as an official war artist. Byam Shaw’s life bears an interesting inverse to that of Butler: both were born in the same year but whereas Butler was born in England, Byam Shaw was born in Madras, India where his father was Registrar at the local High Court of the British Raj. At a young age both boys were relocated with their families: Butler to New Zealand, another important British colony, and Shaw to England. It was to these respective countries that both artists would feel inextricably tied for the rest of their lives.


969 Barringer, “Not as “modern” as the word is now understood? Byam Shaw, imperialism and the poetics of professional society,” 80.
In the First World War Byam Shaw was employed by the Canadian war art programme to produce the memorial image *The Flag* (1918). Like *Boer War 1900*, this work focuses on effect that war had on the civilian population. Women, children and old men gather round the corpse of Canadian soldier, slumped in between the paws of a giant lion statue, his hands still clutching hold of a Canadian flag. The inclusion of the statue is a reference to the four lions that guard the base of Nelson’s Column in London’s Trafalgar Square, a highly patriotic and symbolic monument to the glory and might of the British Empire. Within this ‘lap of Britannia’ the figure of the dead soldier evokes the image of the *pietà* – where Mary caresses the body of her deceased son who has just been brought down from the Cross. A Canadian art critic who reviewed the work in *Saturday Night* (1919) declared, “Classical it is in the fullest sense; whether in the simple beauty of line or arrangement; or the manner in which the poignant facts of death, grief and sacrifice are harmonised into an expression of the mystery of Fate. Its very reticence and quietude heightens its emotional sense.” Although it was obviously popular shortly after the war, Laura Brandon explains that the work fell out of favour with the Canadian public and art community in the early 1960s and was not exhibited at the Canadian War Museum again until 1998. Interestingly, between the same time periods, the New Zealand

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First World War Art Collection suffered a similar phase of pronounced neglect and public disinterest.971

Charles Sims also used more overt Christian iconography in his painting *Sacrifice* (1918). The composition is reminiscent of a (gothic) altarpiece – a complex narrative picture is broken into two panels by a Crucifix, creating an illusion of three-dimensional depth, as if the Crucifix is a wooden frame that sits on top of the flat panel of a Bruegel-like scene. Instead of facing forward however, the image of Christ

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971 Brandon, *Art or Memorial?: The Forgotten History of Canada’s War Art*, 30, 150-51.
is reversed to face the war scene. Allusions to a Lamentation scene are accentuated by a collection of civilian mourners in lower portion of the background image. Significantly again, this work seems to have fallen out of favour with the Canadian War Museum. It was kept in storage, hidden from public view from 1924 until it was rehung in the Regeneration Hall of the new Canadian War Museum (and included in Brandon’s 2000 exhibition Canvas of War).

Brandon offers a simple, moralistic explanation of the meaning behind this work, “In Christian theology the Cross and Crucifixion represent reconciliation, peace and harmony between God, man and creation, just as the death of Canada’s young soldiers was to herald a new era of peace and harmony between nations following the Armistice. The Cross and Crucifixion are equally symbolic of triumph and victory. Christians triumph over sin through their acceptance of and belief in the redemptive Crucifixion of Christ. The death of Canadian soldiers secured victory over something just as momentous: German militarism. Just as Christ died for the greater good of man the soldiers’ deaths depicted in the painting ensured peace.” These sentiments may have had some credence in an environment of short-lived post-war euphoria but the statement reeks of patriotic jingoism. The human and economic cost to both sides was an undeniable enormous burden that no amount of political spin could hide and, even as early as the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, it was clear to the astute that the Allied victory would come with the exploitation of the defeated peoples and their resources. There is certainly little triumph in the work itself. The imagery of Sacrifice speaks rather to the contemplation of suffering – both of Christ, the dead and wounded soldiers who fought through the horror of the war and their grieving loved ones left with the burden of loss. It equates this with the selfless suffering of Christ on the Cross. Sims’ Sacrifice attempts to create the illusion of a religious icon of memorial for a non-secular environment. In the context of the proposed New Zealand War Museum, Butler’s Butte de Polygon would have offered a similar immersive commemorative and contemplative space that could have functioned as both a (Christian) place of worship and a site of national memorial.

Brandon, *Art or Memorial?: The Forgotten History of Canada’s War Art*, 29-30, 119.
New Zealand's Collection of Unfinished Work

With respect to... the artist's method – While at the Front, he [Butler] carried a small sketchbook in which he made rough pencil sketches, often under fire, of actual operations and war scenes. His aim was a faithful detailed representation of the scene. These small sketches are only valuable to the artist. On returning to Camp he amplified these notes and painted sketches on a large scale. These he sent to New Zealand as the property of the New Zealand Government... When he was demobilised he retained these rough sketchbooks, and with their assistance, and the help of the sketches belonging to the Government, and his memory, was able to complete a number of other sketches and pictures, some of which he sold.  

In spite of the best efforts of the artists involved, the bulk of New Zealand's Collection of First World War Art is comprised of sketches and studies for larger paintings that were planned but never completed. It is a collection of preliminary work rather than a group of finished paintings ready for display in a museum. This, in part, led to the collection's inability to obtain significance in the post-war era.

Both Butler and Welch produced sketches of the Western Front in media that favoured the rapid recording of detail. Welch especially favoured watercolour paints and occasionally oils while Butler used a wider variety of media including watercolour, pencil, charcoal, pastel and sometimes oil paint when there was more time to contemplate a subject. Their use of the *plein air* style was appropriate style considering their duties as war artists required them to work in the field and to move quickly with the advancing New Zealand soldiers.

Butler in particular produced a large quantity of rough field sketches that show New Zealand troops in action. These give a sense of how far behind the frontlines of the action Butler was typically placed when sketching. On first inspection, many of the works do not contain any overt references to the war. Artillery explosions are visible

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974 Letter from Mr W.H. Montgomery to Sir James Allen, 24.09.1920. Also see the letter detailing this report from James Allen to the Right Honorable Prime Minister of New Zealand [Massey], 01.11.1920. ACGO, IA. 8333, 1. Bx 1651. 29/119, Part 3. Wellington Office: Archives NZ
in the distance but the soldiers are usually beyond his view. Indeed, Butler’s rendering of these scenes verges on the picturesque, harking back to the idyllic rural scenes of France and Belgium he produced during his student days at the turn of the century. These sketches capture only the essential elements of the environment in which the battles Butler witnessed took place.

Figure 184 – George Butler, *Outside Lesdain* (1918) – above; *The dump outside Bapaume* (1918) – below.975

Butler often reused visual motifs from his original sketches across multiple works. This is particularly evident through a comparison of his pastel sketch *Outside Lesdain* (1918) and his oil study of the battle at *The dump outside Bapaume* (1918). The composition of the former work focuses on the bodies of two dead German soldiers whose fresh corpses remain on a recent battlefield. This piteous vista was almost certainly observed by Butler as he travelled along behind the fast advance of the New Zealand Division. Although he may have been close to the ‘action scene’ of the shown in latter work, Butler would have constructed this painting after the fact, using sketches of the area and by interviewing the soldiers who participated in the fighting. Careful observation of *The dump* also reveals that Butler repeated the tableau of the two German corpses in the centre of his battle sketch.

When Butler developed his sketches into larger oil paintings marked differences in their content often occurred. As previously stated, this type of change is present in the sketch and enlargement documenting the New Zealand Division’s capture of the town of Solesmes, where additional historical elements have been added to the original composition to heighten the drama of the scene and make it more suitable for its placement in the New Zealand War Museum.\(^{976}\)

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\(^{976}\) Butler, *Church at Solesmes used as a hospital by Germans*, November 1918; Butler, *Entry of New Zealand troops into Solesmes*, 1919.
Figure 185 – George Butler, *A sunken road near Solesmes*, (October 1918) – above; and the 1920 version – below.977

A variation also occurs in Butler’s two portrayals of *A sunken road near Solesmes* (October 1918; 1920). The original charcoal and wash sketch is a relatively nondescript scene of a road scattered with debris. Butler used seemingly innocuous work to create the second, larger rendition of the same location. While the composition remains virtually identical, the second work includes several dead German soldiers, their bodies scattered about the roadside in their distinctive grey-blue uniforms. The New Zealand Division encountered several such ‘sunken roads’ in the action around Solesmes in October. It is likely that this work records an area near Belle Vue where the New Zealanders met with one of the last remaining elite German Jager Divisions still occupying territory in Northern France.

Belle Vue was a name with sinister associations. Now, again, as a year previously, Belle Vue machine guns bade our artillery fire defiance. From the station itself and from buildings on the Solesmes road, occupied in unexpected strength, they swept the low ground with a dense sheet of lead. The defences were held by troops of the German Jager Division, that had contested so stubbornly with us the possession of the Trescault Ridge, and the garrison was at once powerful in numbers and of stout morale… Our artillery fire was generally most effective, and in the 100 yards of railway line north of the level crossing at Belle Vue the foremost troops found on the permanent way itself 38 German dead. But in places the barrage fell somewhat short, or the attackers pushed into it too soon, most of our casualties being caused by our own guns. Despite the continued day’s bombardment the Jägers fought with their traditional stubbornness, and lost heavily before they yielded the ground.978

In his brief analysis of Butler’s work Wayne Stagg asserts that the artist’s “images and motifs are strongly idiomatic” – that they are “images in [a] contemporary currency” that are deliberately “easy to understand” and prepared specifically “in an English cultural background.” He suggests that *A sunken road near Solesmes* can be used to illustrate what Paul Fussell describes, in his seminal text *The Great War and Modern Memory*, as the tendency of artists during this conflict to search for familiar visual motifs from which to “evolve a response that would have some degree

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of adequacy to the unparalleled situation in which they were involved.” Stagg proposes that Butler’s composition evokes the English literary and visual fascination with the Biblical conception of the ‘Valley of the Shadow of Death.’ As seen in the photographic work of Roger Fenton, the powerful connotations attached to this particular imagery could easily be used in a war context to “describe the indescribable.” With Stagg’s theory in mind, Butler’s work is transformed into a patriotic image – the roadside ‘valley’ becoming a site of the horrors of a high pitched battle that the New Zealand Division was forced to pass through on their ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’ towards victory.

![Image of a roadside cemetery](image)

**Figure 186 – George Butler, *A roadside cemetery near Neuve Eglise* (c.1918).**

While such emotive subjects are entirely appropriate for a series of works that Butler envisioned within the solemn environment of the proposed (but never completed) New Zealand War Memorial Museum, under the weight of such densely loaded metaphorical symbolism, Butler’s larger commissioned works can, in some cases,

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lack the emotive immediacy and verve of his original sketches. They are weighed down by the heavy subject matter they contain. A comparison of Butler’s watercolour and charcoal sketch of *A roadside cemetery near Neuve Eglise* (c.1918) and the finished oil painting, *Butte de Polygon* (1920) clearly illustrates the formalising process that Butler went through between the field and the studio. Both works deal with the subject of civilian grief and the overwhelming loss of human life caused by the Great War. They acknowledge that suffering and hardships were endured not only by the soldiers that fought but also by the families of these young men and by the occupied peoples for whom they were fighting. However, the simple sketch of *A roadside cemetery* is arguably a more successful of the two works – its simple composition and lightness of execution has a quiet dignity that encapsulates the universal grief brought about by this war.

Figure 187 – George Clausen, *Youth Mourning* (1916).

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The sense of civilian despair felt in this work is reminiscent of one of the great memorials of the First World War, Kathe Kollwitz’s *The Grieving Parents* that watch over the graves of hundreds of German dead in the Vladslo cemetery of West Flanders. The work is based on Kollwitz’s own experience of grief following the loss her son Peter whose body is amongst those interred at this site. Butler’s sketch also evokes comparison with Sir George Clausen’s *Youth Mourning* (1916), a highly emotive painting showing a naked young woman doubled over in grief in front of a wooden cross. In 1929 Charles Aitken speculated that this painting “was inspired by the death in the war of his [Clausen’s] daughter’s fiancé.” Although based on a personal tragedy, Clausen’s exclusion of any distinctive features gives the work a transcendent quality, “She becomes instead a universal embodiment of the grief caused by the war, and her nakedness adds to the feeling that this disconsolate mourner has no defence against her anguish.”

Although there is a similar feeling of bleakness permeates through Butler’s work, as seen in many of his war and pre-war images, the promise of rebirth through religious faith underpins *A roadside cemetery near Neuve Eglise*. This is simply conveyed through Butler’s sparing use of colour in this bleak winter scene – the green being suggestive of the regeneration of spring that these young men will never see but which will eventually restore the ruined environment, just as the barbed wire that surrounds their graves has already been topped.

While the works Butler produced as commissioned enlargements are generally excellent, in many cases it is his smaller works that give the most perceptive insights into the events that he witnessed while working as an official artist. Although Butler was certainly keen to portray the New Zealand experience of the war, as Stagg keenly observed, to Butler, these “war pictures were not simply to be records of observed scenes. They were also to be conceptual – incorporating ideas – visual records in which the artist himself could articulate his own sense of meaning and interpretation of scenes witnessed… It is War and Death – universals – which Butler

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982 Viney and Imperial War Museum (Great Britain), *Images of Wartime: British art and artists of World War One*, 81.
984 Ibid., 129-30.
is interested in."\(^985\) While Stagg’s hypothesis suggests that Butler was less interested in “the effort and sacrifice of a particular nation in the war” this seems a slightly shortsighted statement given the official context within which Butler was producing these images. Instead, I would argue that Butler’s official war works are both provincial and universal. Like many other official war artists, Butler understood the greater meaning of his role in documenting this war for posterity. Although he may not have always been successful, his paintings illustrate that he strove to adequately fulfil the commemorative duality of his official commission for the war museum – to create a lasting memorial that could both resonate with his local New Zealand audience and transcend the narrow confines of nationalism to touch upon the fundamental and often bitter truths that lay at the heart of the international experience of this war.

5) After the War Ended – the fate of New Zealand’s war art

As the previous chapter has argued, the official war art produced by the New Zealand Expeditionary Force’s War Artists’ Section, particularly the paintings and sketches of Butler and Welch, are of a notably high standard. Favourable comparisons can easily be made between the official New Zealand works and some of the most acclaimed international war art made during the First World War for Britain, Australia and Canada. As was expected of an official record, New Zealand’s war art captures the significant military triumphs of the New Zealand Division. However, the works also acknowledge and uphold the often overlooked, everyday aspects of life within the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. These works were made to be exhibited in a New Zealand War Museum before a national and international audience. The themes and subject matter utilised by New Zealand’s official war artists deliberately reflect the commemorative purpose of such a Museum. Unfortunately, the grand plans of the Expeditionary Force's War Museum Executive Committee began to disintegrate in early 1919 as the Expeditionary Force was demobilised.

Hope remained for several years after the end of the war that the planned national War Memorial Museum in New Zealand would eventually be built but, for various reasons, this venture was never fully realised. As a result, the official war art collection was left languishing for around sixty years without a proper home. New Zealand’s lack of a dedicated national war museum still remains a point of contention almost a century after the idea was first entertained. This chapter will examine what happened to the artists involved in the War Artists’ Section after the war ended and describe the fate of the art they produced. It shall then conclude by offering an explanation of why New Zealand’s official collection of First World War art has been so pointedly overlooked and underestimated for so many years.
Demobilisation and the disintegration of the New Zealand War Artists’ Section

The declaration of the Armistice on the 11 November 1918 marked the end of hostilities on the Western Front and brought the First World War to its official conclusion after four years of bitter fighting. This event also marked the beginning of the end for New Zealand’s official war art programme and the New Zealand War Museum. The main organisational force behind these initiatives, Major Gambrill, left his role at the War Records Section on 31 December 1918 and returned to New Zealand. Major Westmacott, who replaced Gambrill, managed the disestablishment of the War Artists’ Section and collation of the works it had produced. At the end of November 1918 it was proposed that “an artists’ section consisting of any men able to sketch” should be formed by the War Records Section “in order to produce pictures during demobilisation, but the work of these men would be subsidiary to that produced by Mr. Butler and Mr. Pearse.” Presumably this group would have been composed of the soldier-artists already associated with the war art programme. However, the rapid demobilisation of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force soon made this proposal obsolete.

Following Germany’s surrender to the Allied Forces, the New Zealand Division was assigned to garrison the city of Cologne as part of the Allied Army of Occupation of Germany. On 28 November 1918 the Division began a 150 mile march from Beauvois-en-Cambrésis (just west of the Forest of Mormal in France) through Belgium and over the Rhine River into Germany. On the 20 December, when the first unit of the Division was crossing the Rhine, the New Zealand (Maori) Pioneer Battalion was ordered to return to England. By March 1919 this Battalion was aboard

986 The official end of the war between Germany and the Allied Forces was confirmed with the Signing of the Treaty of Versailles on 28 June 1919 at the Paris Peace Conference. There were several other treaties signed and mandates created over the course this event to deal with all the belligerant parties involved in the conflict. The Conference also resulted in the establishment of the League of Nations. The Armistice on 11 November 1918 however marks the end of armed hostilities on the Western Front and therefore the end of the armed conflict (other fronts having already surrendered to the Allies by this date).

987 ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 5. ZWR9/57. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.

the S.S. *Westmoreland* heading back to New Zealand. When the rest of the Division reached Cologne, the Expeditionary Force began organising the demobilisation of the remainder of its troops back to New Zealand. As Colonel Stewart comments in his official history of the New Zealand Division, “No effort was spared to expedite demobilisation.” From the end of December 1918 the ranks of the Division were gradually depleted, beginning with married men and those who had enlisted in 1914–1915. After this, “the first regular draft left on 14 January 1919, and from 28 January onwards drafts, varying from 700 to 1000 all ranks, were dispatched weekly” back to the New Zealand military camps in England. This process of demobilisation was also followed by the other New Zealand units of the Expeditionary Force based in France and Belgium that were not formally associated with the New Zealand Division such as the Tunnelling Company, Cyclist Battalion and the Stationary Hospitals. The New Zealand Division was eventually disbanded on 25 March 1919 when the last of its troops left Cologne.

With the exception of Butler and Pearse, the artists employed by the War Records Section had all been drawn from out of the ranks of the Expeditionary Force. In the eyes of the Section these men had only been seconded temporarily from their soldiering duties because they possessed a particular skill that the Expeditionary Force could utilise. Once they had completed their assignments, these men were required, where possible, to rejoin their units and wait to be repatriated back to New Zealand. While they were waiting, all members of the Expeditionary Force undertook compulsory training workshops. When transport ships became available the men continued this training on the six-week voyage back to New Zealand. These classes were designed to give the returning servicemen useful skills and trades that they could apply in their post-war civilian lives. The New Zealand Expeditionary Force had a particularly strong record of this kind of skill training. Through his role as Officer Commanding the Expeditionary Force in England, Brigadier General

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990 Except for the Maori (Pioneer) Battalion who were repatriated as a unit. Ibid., 609.
991 Ibid., 604-6.
Richardson, the champion of the New Zealand War Artists’ Section, also had a particular devotion to this education project. “Of his many services [to the administration of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force] not the least valuable perhaps was a passionate zeal for the cause of education generally in the Force, and for the training of disabled soldiers in particular.”\(^992\) Colonel Stewart’s official history records that the New Zealand YMCA established educational training workshops for convalescent soldiers at New Zealand’s military hospitals in England in March 1917. The New Zealand Expeditionary Force built on this programme, setting up a school for disabled soldiers in August 1917 and eventually implementing a compulsory education system in mid 1918.\(^993\) Richardson continued his advocacy of these men throughout his career and even in his retirement “he worked hard on behalf of returned servicemen, especially those who had been disabled.”\(^994\)

Unfortunately, Richardson’s devotion to the cause of the War Artists’ Section was not so long serving but his interest in education did benefit the official artists. From the end of the war until the early 1920s, Richardson remained one of the chief advocates of the programme and the artists he commissioned did receive a certain level of special treatment. In particular, some of the artists who had worked for the War Artists’ Section were able to use the Expeditionary Force’s educational programme to their advantage. This is evidenced by a letter, written by Major Westmacott to the Expeditionary Force Headquarters in London, recommending that two of the artists who remained under his command should be allowed to further their artistic education while they remained in England.

25/1208 Sergeant E.H. Thompson and 5/509 Sergeant G.E. Finey have been attached to my Section for some time and their artistic talent has been utilised to a considerable extent in various directions... We are cutting short the activities of the Section in view of demobilisation and the above two men could be released. They are both men who show much promise and they are keen to take advantage of facilities here for improving themselves. The educational programme mapped out is rather elementary for them. I recommend that they be granted leave and the usual ration allowance so that

\(^{992}\) Ibid., 610-11.
\(^{993}\) Ibid.
they maybe free to take courses and get in touch with artists who can assist them. If they go back to camp they would have to maintained by the NZEF.

The proposal if agreed to would be of benefit to the men, to the NZEF and eventually to the Dominion. They could be recalled for demobilisation.995

As a result of Westmacott’s request, George Finey was able to attend a three-month course in life, pen and pencil drawing at the Polytechnic School of Art, London in mid 1919.996 Ernest Heber Thompson was awarded an army (art) scholarship by the Expeditionary Force’s Education Department in early 1919.997 Thompson’s studies had been cut short by the war. He had wanted to continue his training overseas, like his mentor Alfred O’Keeffe, who had trained in Paris with C.F. Goldie in 1894–95.998 The scholarship Thompson received made it possible for him to continue his studies at the prestigious Slade School of Art and the Royal College of Art in London. The training and opportunities Thompson gained at that these institutions had an enormous effect on his career. He was a finalist in the engraving section of the extremely competitive and distinguished Prix de Rome competition in 1923. The following year he was made an Associate of the Royal Society of Painter-etchers. He exhibited regularly at the Royal Academy and Royal Portrait Society and gained himself membership with the British School in Rome. Thompson became an internationally successful artist and had an excellent career as a teacher. He never returned to New Zealand after the war but his work is represented in several major New Zealand public collections. Paintings by Thompson were included in the National Centennial Exhibition of New Zealand Art in 1940 and he was made the

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995 Letter from Major S.Westmacott, War Records Section to NZEF Headquarters in London, 07.01.1919.
ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/11. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
996 Letters from Lieutenant Colonel, Director of Education NZEF to C.O. War Records Section (8.04.1919) and to the O.C. Educational Wing, NZEF, 23.04.1919.
ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 5. ZWR9/50. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
997 ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 3. ZWR5/33. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.

There are no documents yet discovered that confirm that Ernest Thompson was also given special leave in London by the War Records Section. In late December 1918 the New Zealand Rifle Brigade Reserve Depot at Brocton Camp wrote to the War Records Section requesting that Sergeant Thompson be sent to the camp to make caricatures. However Major Westmacott replied in early January that Thompson was no longer available “owing to his early discharge being in train.” However, according to his NZDF personnel file, Thompson was not discharged from the NZEF until the 28 September 1919. There are no records of his movements between January and September but it appears that he was still working with the War Records Section in June 1919 when he assisted with the framing of George Butler’s exhibition at the Offices of the New Zealand High Commission in London. He remained in England and was not sent back to New Zealand by the NZEF.
AABK. 18805. Acc W5553. bx 112. 0113682. Wellington Office: Archives NZ
National Art Gallery's first overseas representative with the task of advising the Gallery on new acquisitions of British art.\(^{999}\)

The War Records section gave all the members of the War Artists' Section priority treatment. Frederick Cumberworth spent a period of almost six months attached to a higher education wing at Hornchurch between January and July 1919.\(^{1000}\) In February he complained of aching eyes as a consequence of the drawing work he was undertaking, was quickly assessed and supplied with glasses.\(^{1001}\) In December 1918 Cecil Trevithick was instructed to call on Expeditionary Force's Director of Education regarding a position with the Education Department.\(^{1002}\) While serving overseas Percy Reid met Nellie Robinson who he married in March 1919.\(^{1003}\) George Woolley, who had married during the war, was allowed to return to New Zealand in an early shipment of troops in February 1919.\(^{1004}\) Welch was also granted special early leave to return to New Zealand in March 1919, "partly by reason of his presence being required in connection with the death of his father and partly in connection with the housing of pictures acquired for a National War Museum."\(^{1005}\)

In spite of all this special treatment, Butler and Pearse were the only artists to be given honorary officer's commissions for the duration of their work as New Zealand's official artists. None of the other artists in the War Artists’ Section ever received a commission with the associated rank, pay and privileges. In the interest of simplicity and, most importantly, to keep the cost of the programme to a manageable minimum "the number of Artists allowed with each formation in France was regulated by special instructions issued by General Headquarters."\(^{1006}\) Although there were

\(^{999}\) \textit{New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs and McLintock, National Centennial Exhibition of New Zealand Art: Catalogue,} 68. Also see Te Papa collection of letters etc by Ernest Heber Thompson (donated by his daughter), and lecture by Vicki Robson and the Christchurch Art Gallery's catalogue listing on Thompson.

\(^{1000}\) AABK. 18805. Acc W5537. bx 4. 0030812. Wellington Office: Archives NZ

\(^{1001}\) AABK. 18805. Acc W5562. bx 86. 0129579. Wellington Office: Archives NZ

\(^{1002}\) ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 5. ZWR9/8. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.

\(^{1003}\) AABK. 18805. Acc W5550. bx 65. 0096901. Wellington Office: Archives NZ

\(^{1004}\) George Woolley married Florence Hardwick (spinsters) on 27.9.1917 at the Holborn Registry Office, London. See correspondence between Major Westmacott, NZ War Records Section and O.C. Demobilisation, 23.01.1919.


\(^{1006}\) Letter from J. Allen, the Honorable Minister of Defence to H.M. Gore, President, New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, Wellington, 11.10.1919.
several other civilian artists involved in negotiations to join the Section in the final months of 1918, none of these could be employed until Butler and Pearse had been decommissioned. When the Armistice occurred in November, the New Zealand Government finally had a justifiable excuse to discontinue further funding of the war art project. No new official artists could be appointed from this time. This included Welch who was promoted to the rank of Sergeant for his work as a war artist but never offered an officer's rank.

The tensions that this caused were revealed in August 1919 when H.M. Gore, the President of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, lobbied the Minister of Defence behalf of Welch. This correspondence explains that, in addition to his meagre pay rate of “7/- a day (4/- only of which was available to him on service)” Welch had been offered “a small living allowance of 4/- a day, about the least an artist should be expected to exist upon in London, where most of the studio work had to be done.” In his capacity as a high level representative within the New Zealand art community, Gore made it clear that this amount was well below acceptable standards and it indicated that the Government was clearly dismissive of the professional status of artists. If other “professional men, such as Doctors, Dentists, Journalists etc.” were typically appointed as officers to compensate for their skilled work, why could New Zealand not apply the same principle to its official artists when “As far as can be gathered the Divisional Artists of all other countries received Commissioned rank with the pay attached.” Gore certainly believed Welch’s work worthy of professional respect, “The Council of the Academy have had the opportunity of seeing the work executed by Mr Welch in his capacity of Divisional Artist and they consider it excellent. If offered for sale it would undoubtedly realise a considerable sum.” Gore’s letter also reveals that both Welch and William Robert Johnson had never been awarded their 100franc prizes for having their designs reproduced on the covers of the 1917 and 1918 issues of New Zealand at the Front. Welch’s payment had been denied “on the grounds that at the time the work was judged Welch had been notified of his appointment as Divisional Artist, although he had not then entered upon his duties, nor was he drawing any higher pay than that of a Lance-Corporal.” Gore felt particularly obliged “to see that justice is done to one of our leading New Zealand...
artists” as Welch “is of a retiring disposition and unfortunately [has] refrained from pressing his own claims. He was not slow however to volunteer for service early in the war and to do his bit whenever duty called.”1007

In response, James Allen contended that his staff had believed that Welch was employed as a war artist when he made the prize-winning work. As a result they had decreed that “it would be unfair to those men in the trenches or on other regular military duty and who were compelled to compete in their spare time, if the prize was awarded to Mr Welch, consequently the prize was given to the next best competitor.” While this seems a logical and fair argument, it did not, however, stop the magazine’s publishers from using Welch’s work without paying him. It also does not explain why Johnston too was not paid despite his not ever being officially part of the war art programme. This strange situation instead suggests that some gross oversight had been made which Allen, to his credit, was happy to rectify, referring the matter onto General Russell who promptly arranged the payment with “regrets that there should have been any misunderstanding in the matter.”

Although the eventual outcome was positive, the circumstances of this incident closely echo the close-minded bureaucratic mentality that Horace Moore-Jones met when he attempted to sell his Gallipoli paintings to the Government. This adds further circumstantial weight to the claim that this administration had a strict aversion to, and potentially even an (informal) policy in place, preventing their association with any artist who could been seen as profiteering from the war.

Allen was also keen to explain and justify Gore’s allegation that Welch had been unfairly treated in relation to this rank and pay, stating that, “The number of Artists allowed with each formation in France was regulated by special instructions issued by General Headquarters.” With the official engagements of Butler and Pearse meant that, “consequently Mr Welch could not be granted a commission without exceeding the authorised establishment laid down by General Headquarters.” It is unclear from the available records whether this statement is supposed to refer to the

1007 Letter from H.M. Gore, President, New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, Wellington to the Hon., The Minister of Defence, 18.08.1919. Ibid.
New Zealand General Headquarters or the British General Headquarters. In the case of the British, this study was unaware that there were any such restrictions placed on the New Zealand war art programme by this authority. Those officials associated with the New Zealand General Headquarters and in the War Records Section were certainly keen to extend the scope of their art scheme. Their inability to arrange this appears rather, to have come from the New Zealand Government’s unwillingness to pay any further artists’ salaries – an hypothesis that directly contradicts Allen’s statement. In any case, New Zealand War Artists’ Section seems to have only been restricted to recruiting two official civilian artists with associated rank and pay as there were several other soldier-artists seconded to the scheme to work on various projects. None of these soldier-artists did ever received a promotion for their work with the Section above the rank of Sergeant so Allen is probably correct in his assertion that “had the war continued until after the termination of Mr Butler’s agreement, Mr Welch would probably have been gazetted as an official Artist to the NZEF and given commissioned rank.” However, by the time of this correspondence it was already late 1919. As Welch had long since been demobilised, Allen was regretfully “unable to reward him either by promotion or by increase in salary.” While the Minister shows an admirable personal appreciation for the work done by Welch, his letter ends on a note of wry historical irony, with the comment – “I trust that Mr Welch will feel adequately rewarded by the fact that his paintings will be ultimately used in a Dominion War Museum Art Gallery as a permanent record of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in the Great War.”

As the following analysis will show, the slow collapse of all the plans associated with this museum ensured that Nugent Welch would never receive such an honour.

The War Artists’ Section was officially demobilised in March 1919. Correspondence however, continued throughout the early months of 1919 between Major Westmacott, George Butler and the other artists who were working towards producing finished paintings from their sketches. Although Butler had certainly

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1008 Letter from J, Allen, the Honorable The Minister of Defence to H.M. Gore, President, New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, Wellington 11.10.1919.

1009 Ibid.

not managed to complete the development of his large body of sketches by this time, a note from Major Westmacott makes it abundantly clear that his official appointment had come to an abrupt and definitive end with his official discharge on 31 December 1918. “Captain Butler is not now under this Department and whilst every assistance will be given, it must be understood that the work he is now doing is a matter of private arrangement, New Zealand having refused to purchase further work.” Nevertheless Heaton Rhodes and Major Generals Russell and Richardson remained supportive of Butler following his discharge. 

Russell had been particularly keen for Butler to paint a series of formal portraits as part of his official duties. Russell met with Butler while he was serving on the Western Front and made arrangements to sit for a portrait in early November 1918 but it is likely that the rush of activity in the New Zealand Division leading up to the Armistice prevented him from fulfilling this engagement. Russell’s portrait was certainly painted by Butler at some stage before he departed England on HMNZT Arawa in May 1919. Rhodes, Richardson and Godley also sat for portraits in the early months of the year. The records surrounding exactly when this occurred are limited but the result was a series of eight elegant works that each illustrate Butler’s keen ability to capture the individual personalities of his subjects.

1011 The letter states, “From Mr Butler’s letters he seems to have been led to expect a number of commissions, portraits of V.C.’s etc. Who is attending to this? It would be well to avoid a repetition of the Pearse episode and have the matter in writing.” Correspondence between Major S. Westmacott and unknown person, 10.02.19 in - ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/12. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
1012 Rice, Heaton Rhodes of Otahuna: the illustrated biography, 222.
1013 Letter from George Butler to Captain Gambrill, 27.10.18 – written in France; and undated letter from Butler to Gambrill written c. 10.10.1918.
1014 AABK. 18805. Acc W5922. bx 65. 0100773. Wellington Office: Archives NZ
The portraits of Russell and Richardson clearly illustrate the close professional relationship Butler had with these two men. Both Generals appear at ease in the presence of the artist. Richardson in particular seems to be enjoying himself – he stares directly out of the canvas, his expression engagingly assertive and jovial, the slight cock of his head and the forward thrust of his cane giving him an air of confidence and swagger. Russell’s portrait is less demonstrative and more intimate. His gloved hands rest sedately at his lap and his expression is kind and thoughtful, with a slight strain around the eyes that reflects the heavy toll the war took on the health of this great military commander. It took several years for Russell to recover his health but his labours had gained much respect. “Russell was one of the few generals in the British armies to display innovation and tactical skill in the First World War. He brought to his command the practical experience of a working farm manager combined with an understanding of men, and a broad study of military

history and tactics... He took the same risks as his soldiers and knew their capabilities. Under his leadership the New Zealand Division grew in professionalism. Its survival and outstanding success on the Western Front was his achievement.” Butler’s genuine admiration for the many talents of this man comes through in this portrait. The artist of course had good reason to admire Russell as it was his belief in the importance of documenting the war that led to the creation of the New Zealand war art programme. “Thinking things through was one of his strengths and his range of interests gave him the ability always to see the bigger picture... He always thought in terms of what was good for his country and for the generation of New Zealanders that he commanded.”

Butler produced two portraits of his other great advocate, Sir Robert Heaton Rhodes. The first is a rare example of an unconvincing likeness; the facial features in

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1016 Pugsley, “Russell, Andrew Hamilton (1868-1960).”
particular are clumsily executed. The second ¾ length portrait is a much more careful study, and better likeness, of this distinguished gentleman and former cabinet minister. The upright rigidity of his seated posture is indicative of his privileged upbringing in one of the wealthiest and most influential families in New Zealand. But his bearing is portrayed as refined rather than snobbish – his hands rest with poise atop his gloves and cane as he stares thoughtfully out of the picture plane. The delicately modelled, slightly care-worn features of his profile head give an insight into the character of the man with a reputation for being “able and energetic... hard working and honest but not forceful or ruthless enough to make a big impact in politics.” Instead, as his biographer Geoffrey Rice asserts, Rhodes had resigned from cabinet to devote himself to improving conditions for New Zealand soldiers in the war.

Butler states that this small portrait was commissioned by Lady Rhodes and was separate from the official works he produced for the War Museum Committee. The painting was however sent back together with these other portraits in February 1920 (arriving in July). Its current status as part of the National Collection of War Art suggests that Lady Rhodes may have been less than satisfied with the likeness and donated the work to the collection instead of keeping it for herself. Letter from George Butler to Sir James Allen, [Minister of Defence], 06.08.1920. ACGO, IA. 8333, 1. Bx 1651. 29/119, Part 3. Wellington Office: Archives NZ

Among his many achievements Rhodes was successful in improving the transport and treatment of wounded men in the Gallipoli Campaign. He also established a scholarship for the sons of returned wounded soldiers and worked tirelessly as Commissioner for the New Zealand Branch of the British Red Cross to monitor the conditions of hospitals in France and England. Geoffrey Rice, "Rhodes, Robert Heaton (1861–1956)." Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, ed. New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs, vol. 3: 1901-1920 (Auckland and Wellington, N.Z.: Auckland University Press and the Department of Internal Affairs, 1996).
Butler’s portrait of Lieutenant General Godley gives a fair impression of a man well known for his difficult reputation. Godley had been selected by the New Zealand Government to manage and develop New Zealand’s territorial force in 1911 and when war was declared he was charged with command of the Expeditionary Force. His organisational skills were highly regarded and he had excellent connections within the British army, which he used to New Zealand’s advantage throughout the war. But as Ray Grover explains, “He was not well fitted to lead in the field, more than once being out of touch with the front. He admired the [New Zealand] men he led but unfortunately did not communicate this; to them he was aloof and unfeeling. Those who worked with him closely, however, saw him as a decent, fair, courageous and supportive man who let them perform their duties without undue

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Figure 190 – George Butler, Lieutenant General Sir Alexander John Godley, KCB (1919). 1020

interference.” In keeping with this assessment of his character, Butler has presented Godley as prim and stiff with an almost withering expression. Godley was a tall lean man and Butler has chosen to emphasise this quality by picturing him from a slight upward angle. Contemporary photographs show that the portrait is good likeness and, rather than being unkind, the overall effect is of a leader of great authority and responsibility for whom Butler would have had considerable respect.

Figure 191 – George Butler, *Miss Mabel Thurston, CBE, RRC* (1919).

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The series included the portraits of General Young and General Melville. These paintings are of a lesser quality than rest – the facial details appear almost cartoonish and their modelling is executed rapidly, probably due to the time constraints within which Butler was tasked with completing this series. This deficiency is not present in Butler’s striking portrait of the most senior female member of the Expeditionary Force, 22/342 Mabel Thurston, Matron-in-Chief of the New Zealand Army Nursing Service (NZANS) overseas. Thurston is shown in full profile; a pose Butler likely chose to best display the elegant lines of her formal veil headdress. This composition had its disadvantages. Thurston’s military medal ribbons are carefully illustrated on the left side of her cape but unfortunately, the ‘NZ’ buttons that were a prominent feature of the uniform are hidden at this angle and her NZANS badge is not visible as this was usually worn on the right. This somewhat diminishes her affiliation to New Zealand, however this was surely not intentional as the overall effect of the work is extremely complimentary. Thurston is presented as a handsome woman in her middle-years, with a composed and authoritative demeanour befitting her status and position.


1024 The eight portrait in this series is of Brigadier General A E Stewart but this work remained restricted at the time this thesis was completed.
Butler also produced a group portrait of New Zealand *Red Cross Workers*. Records explaining exactly who these women were and what they did have yet to be uncovered.\textsuperscript{1026} It is likely that Colonel Rhodes commissioned the painting in his capacity as Commissioner for the New Zealand Branch of the British Red Cross Society. Correspondence between Rhodes and James Allen reveals that he was happy to take responsibility for the cost of the work once it was sent back to New Zealand “if it is not required by the War Museum Committee.”\textsuperscript{1027} Rhodes would certainly have been familiar with these women and their work. The dignified appearance of the older women seated in the foreground suggests that are possibly of a high social status. Some may even be the wives of senior officials within the Expeditionary Force (as many women followed their husbands to London when it became apparent that the war would continue for several years). The identities of the subjects could likely be deduced with further careful research.


\textsuperscript{1026} It is possible that further enquiries with the British and New Zealand branches of the Red Cross may reveal further information but this avenue of research has yet to be pursued.

\textsuperscript{1027} Excerpt from letter from Colonel Heaton Rhodes to James Allen, 14.10.1920. ACGO, IA. 8333, 1. Bx 1651. 29/119, Part 3. Wellington Office: Archives NZ
The women are all dressed in the blue uniform associated with British VADs (or Voluntary Aid Detachments). They each wear the badge of the Red Cross but their nationality is identified by epaulettes emblazoned with ‘NZ.’ New Zealand did not have a specific national VAD unit or uniform nor did the British Red Cross have one particular female uniform (as many women associated with this institution worked as

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1028 Photographs provided courtesy of the Matt Pomeroy Collection (left) and the Stout Family Collection (right).
nurses attached to a variety of national and private services). This distinguishes these women as a unique group. While they may not necessarily had been nurses it is possible that some may have assisted in New Zealand’s hospital facilities. They are a range of ages which suggests they may have been involved in a variety of volunteering roles such as administration, fundraising or even some of the more active duties given to VADs such as driving transport vehicles and ambulances or carrying messages via motorcycle.  

Butler seems to have struggled to unify this complex composition of this work. Individually, each of the ten portraits are quite charming. Butler took time to capture the unique personalities of each woman and to carefully position them in a manner that would help accentuate their character. Unfortunately, the overall effect is unsuccessful – giving the impression that it was been pieced together from a series of portraits done in separate sittings. The light source is inconsistent across the painting and the scale between each figure is inaccurately rendered, confusing the overall illusion of depth. The women second and third from the left in particular are too large for the narrow space they occupy, giving this section the unconvincing appearance of being shallowly ‘stacked’ without proper consideration for perspective. Butler was not unaccustomed to producing challenging and elaborate multi-figure compositions. When comparisons are drawn with works such as The Golden Dustman or The Shining Pathway it becomes evident that this painting is almost certainly unfinished. Indeed there are several passages, such as the panelled skirt of

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1029 Drawing on its large international membership and wide network of community support the British Red Cross, in conjunction with the Order of St John form the Joint War Committee in 1914. This conducted massive fundraising drives throughout the war to supplement the medical equipment and supplies of the British Army, Navy and hospital ship services, as well as providing food and comfort parcels to British soldiers and prisoners of war, aid for refugees and grants for struggling families. In October 1915, the New Zealand Governor Lord Liverpool established the New Zealand Branch of the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St John. This functioned throughout the war both within New Zealand and overseas. Across the various theatres of the war, the Red Cross also established a series of Auxiliary Hospitals and Convalescent Homes staffed by professional medical personnel and civilian volunteers nurses (VADs), orderlies and ambulance drivers. These facilities provided expert care and rehabilitation to wounded soldiers when the British and Dominion Medical Corps were overwhelmed.


http://www.nzans.org/Uniforms/WW1nzansuniform.html
the woman standing second on the left, that have just been roughly sketched in and never completed.

Figure 194 – George Butler, General GN Johnston, CMG, DSO (1919).  

Figure 195 – George Butler, The Menin Road and Chateau Wood with Ypres in the distance (1918).


1031 Butler, Menin Road and Chateau Wood with Ypres in the distance, 1918.
The backgrounds of all of these portraits are almost entirely plain, consisting of a simple muddy brown or grey toned surface. In some of the works Butler has roughly sketched in a ‘war’ vista in the lower portion, the most successful being his portrait of General Johnston where the landscape is reminiscent of *The Menin Road and Chateau Wood with Ypres in the distance* (1918), which Butler had recently completed. As proven by *Dawn* and *The Supreme Sacrifice*, Butler was capable of constructing imaginative compositional scenarios from within the confines of his studio. The overall simplicity of these portraits further indicates that Butler made these works quickly and possibly not in his own Bristol studio, which would have been fitted with a variety of props and furniture. Instead, the same solid wooden chair appears to have been used in every painting. After being demobilised, Butler returned to his home in Bristol. Although this city was well connected with London, General Richardson agreed with Butler that he would make better progress on his portraits if his subjects did not have to travel outside of the capital and promised Butler a room for this purpose within the London premises of the War Records Section. Major Westmacott was surprised when Butler informed him to “look around Headquarters to see if there is a room available as a temporary studio. It need not be too big but if it faced East or North it would be an advantage. I thought that perhaps as they were closing some departments this might be a possibility.”

Although Butler had originally been employed with the expectation that he would complete a series of portraits for New Zealand, Westmacott was obliged to remind Richardson that the Government would be unwilling to pay the additional cost incurred for these works now that Butler’s official appointment had ceased. This advice proved disappointingly accurate.

As per the terms of his contract, all the original sketches Butler produced while following the New Zealanders in France became the property of the New Zealand Government when his employment ended. The intention was that Butler would use these small-scale works to create a series of at least ten enlargements at £250

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Ibid. 1032 Letter to Major Westmacott from George Butler in Bristol, 24.01.1919.
ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/12. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
1033 Correspondence between Major S. Westmacott and unknown person, 10.02.19 in - ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/12. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
pounds each that would be placed in the New Zealand war museum. A committee, which included Richardson, Russell and Rhodes, would select the pictures best suited for this purpose. On 25 January 1919 General Richardson wrote to the Minister of Defence, James Allen requesting that funding be supplied for Butler to complete this work. Richardson’s proposal was put before Cabinet later that month but it was decided in early February that no action should taken on the issue. Not to be dismayed, Richardson used an official report as Commanding Officer of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in United Kingdom to recommend that this action be sanctioned but again, no progress was made. Once back in New Zealand, General Richardson wrote again to the Minister of Defence in June, urging him to reconsider the notion of a war museum decorated with works by Butler. “I urge that this matter be again considered… and that this opportunity be not lost of producing these paintings which will be a great asset to the War Museum and of great interest to the members of the Expeditionary Force, as well as to the people of New Zealand of this and future generations. I would also recommend that a Dominion War Museum Committee be formed by the Government on which the Defence Department and the NZEF be represented.”

The Minister of Defence did appear to take note of Richardson's proposal. In July 1919 requested an investigation into Butler's credentials, “Seek advice from a competent authority about Butler's capacity to paint large battle picture which would worthily represent scenes or incidents of the war and which would serve to perpetuate the part played by the New Zealand Expeditionary Force... In my opinion the paintings to be a worthy of the resources should be the work of [a] first class

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1035 Correspondence between General Richardson and James Allen, Minister of Defence, 25.01.1919-06.02.1919. ACGO, IA. 8333, 1. Bx 1651. 29/119. *Battle Pictures.* Wellington Office: Archives NZ


Ibid.

1037 Letter from Brigadier General George S. Richardson to the Sir James Allen, the Hon. Minister of Defence, Wellington, 02.06.1919. The letter's recommendations were put before Cabinet on the 22.08.1919 and a response created as a Cabinet minute 13.10.1919.

Ibid.
artist.” H.M. Gore, President of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, was contacted to give an opinion. “He [Gore] says that Mr Butler is a splendid artist and that he is represented yearly in the Royal Academy Show by at least one picture. Mr Gore has no hesitation in recommending him as being a first class artist.”

The report given by W.A. Tripp of the New Zealand Press Association, regarding Butler’s work was slightly less enthusiastic. Tripp visited Butler’s studio at the request of General Godley and reported that, “Mr Butler’s sketches seem to me to be vigorously drawn, but I was not so favourably impressed with the portraits of General Godley and Colonel Heaton Rhodes, on which he was engaged. However, as these were not finished, it is perhaps hardly fair to judge from their present stage as to what he can do in this direction.” Tripp did however acknowledge that “steps should be taken without delay to secure good pictorial and artistic record of some of the chief incidents of the war especially associated with the New Zealanders. Not only will these be of great historical interest in the years to come, but such pictures cannot fail to have an inspiring influence on the young New Zealanders of future generations.” While he dismissed the portraits, Tripp believed that the sketches Butler had already produced in his capacity as a war artist “seemed to me to comprise most useful material to serve as the basis of a series of war pictures for the War Museum.” His recommendation was that the Government should commission Butler to produce one battle painting from his sketches and “a series of picture of types of the New Zealand soldiers engaged in this war.” Once this was complete “You would then be in a position to judge whether it would be desirable to make further use of Mr Butler’s services in this direction... Both in the interests of the soldiers to whom we owe so much and of future generations a really good pictorial record should be put in hand without delay, and that the best artists available be employed for this purpose.”

Ibid.
1039 Letter to James Allen, the Hon. Minister of Defence, 11.07.1919.
Ibid.
Ibid.
These recommendations had some effect on Minister Allen’s willingness to support Richardson’s lobby to commission a series of works from Butler. By August 1919, Allen was at least properly familiar with Butler and his qualifications, “I have ascertained that Butler was employed as an Artist by the authority of the General Officer Commanding, New Zealand Expeditionary Force, and that the work he produced is of considerable merit.”\textsuperscript{1041} However, Allen was still reluctant to pay the full amount of £250 pounds per image, as originally proposed by Butler and the War Records Section for these enlargements. Rhodes generously offered to pay for the majority of the works himself if the New Zealand Government was not forthcoming in footing the bill.

With reference to Butler’s pictures... I could never when in England obtain any definite policy with regard to pictures of battlefields or portraits of V.C.’s and others but I was asked by Richardson to arrange with Butler to paint all Brigadiers and V.C.’s also Miss Thurston as Matron-in-Chief. Richardson had an idea that all those who took a prominent part in the War in New Zealand and elsewhere should have either their portraits or photographs placed in the War Museum. Many of Butler’s sketches are good, and I think the country will be wise to secure some of these, or paintings from them. … As regards the portraits, I made up my mind that I would be liable for these and if the country did not take them I would give them away to the Officers’ Club in Christchurch, if the Art Society there did not care to take them over.\textsuperscript{1042}

In the meantime, the first shipment of 53 sketches by Butler and 10 portraits along with 5 enlargements were sent back to New Zealand on the 20 February 1920 aboard the \textit{Otaki} care of Colonel Rhodes.\textsuperscript{1043} These arrived in the possession of Butler’s agent in Christchurch, Fisher and Sons, on 14 July and were then sent on to General Richardson in Wellington to be housed temporarily in the Dominion

\textsuperscript{1041} The five enlargements sent back in this initial delivery were \textit{The Catacombs, Hyde Park Corner} (1918); \textit{Entry of New Zealand troops into Solesmes} (1919); \textit{The Butte, Polygon Wood} (1918); \textit{The Catacombs, Road to Neuve Eglise} (1919); \textit{The Scaling of the walls of Le Quesnoy} (1920). Letter from J, Allen, the Honorable The Minister of Defence to H.M. Gore, President, New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, Wellington 11.10.1919.

\textsuperscript{1042} Excerpt from letter from Colonel Heaton Rhodes to James Allen, 14.10.1920.

\textsuperscript{1043} Cablegram from High Commissioner, London to Defence (HQ) Wellington, 08.07.1920.


Also see - Rice, \textit{Heaton Rhodes of Otahuna : the illustrated biography}, 222.
Butler continued work on a series of 26 smaller works and a small group of further enlargements: *A Sunken Road near Solesmes* (1920); *The Menin Road and Chateau Wood with Ypres in the distance* (1918) and *The Butte de Polygon* (1920) which the artist would eventually donate to New Zealand. At Allen’s request, a Mr W.H. Montgomery visited Butler’s studio in late 1920 to check on his progress. Montgomery reported that Butler was producing these additional works at the request of Rhodes and Richardson and that “he understood that no Government authority existed for such a purpose, but that it was possible that they might be taken over by the Government on arrival at New Zealand.” From viewing Butler’s work, Montgomery believed that “if he sent 50 sketches it is probable that he gave very good value for the outlay.” His report describes the 26 new sketches as “executed in a similar manner to those already sent to New Zealand. They are excellent sketches of war scenery and the subjects are well chosen. They would be suitable for a war museum” and he adds that because of their scale and medium, “If framed they should be placed in light frames only.”

At the beginning of 1921, James Allen met with Butler during an official visit to the United Kingdom and Europe. He was suitably impressed by what he saw and seems to have been particularly touched by Butler’s gesture to donate *The Butte de Polygon*. “I am pleased to be able to state that… Mr. Butler informed me that he desired to make a gift of his oil painting entitled ‘Polygon Wood’, provided that in the event of New Zealand gathering together a collection of pictures and trophies to commemorate the war, his gift should be a part of the collection. I advised him that when I left New Zealand such a collection was in contemplation, and that I had no doubt it would be made. I added that I felt sure that New Zealand would appreciate the gift.”

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1044 Letter from George Butler to Sir James Allen, [Minister of Defence], 06.08.1920.
1046 Letter titled ‘Defence Department – Mr G.E. Butler’s War Pictures’ from James Allen to the Right Honorable Prime Minister of New Zealand [Massey], 07.11.1921.
However Allen was still anxious to save money on his deal with Butler. Instead of the £1,950 pounds that had been initially suggested, Allen decided that “in view... that the Government had already purchased not only the two pictures and twenty-six sketches which I recommended it should purchase, but the portraits and other pictures which have already been in New Zealand for so long a time, I thought that Mr. Butler would be generously treated if he were offered a sum rather less than that agreed to by the Cabinet, and after carefully considering the matter in all its aspects I wrote offering him £1,500 pounds. This offer he agreed to accept, thus effecting a saving of £450 pounds.” An enormous debate between agencies over which departmental account should finance this cost followed Allen’s decision. By late 1921 the New Zealand Government finally delivered Butler a cheque of payment for the additional works he had created – an astonishing three years after his official commission with the Expeditionary Force had concluded.

The Return to New Zealand – what happened to the proposed National War Museum and the official war art?

The central objective of the National War Museum planned by the War Museum Executive Committee in July 1918 was to promote New Zealand’s achievements in the First World War to an international audience. Most importantly, the Executive Committee wanted their museum to impress the British and to distinguish New Zealand’s contribution from that of its fellow self-governing Dominions, Australia and Canada. Aside from commemoration, the War Museum Executive Committee was also motivated by business objectives. To gain approval of their proposal by the New Zealand Government, the Executive Committee had claimed that their New Zealand

1047 Letter titled ‘Defence Department – Mr G.E. Butler’s War Pictures’ from James Allen to the Right Honorable Prime Minister [Massey], 07.11.1921.
Ibid.
1048 Ibid.
War Museum and art exhibition in London could function successfully as a profitable commercial venture.

The work created by the New Zealand war artists was intended to play a key part in the marketing and public promotion of the museum project. As already discussed, the administrative team working behind the War Artists’ Section were certainly keen to embrace any opportunity to obtain positive publicity for the work being carried out by their official artists – allowing Pearse to submit his work to the *Sphere* and *Illustrated London News* and encouraging George Finey to do the same.1049

The Executive Committee calculated that the continued work of the War Records Section and the maintenance of its collection could be funded by the combination of profits received from ticket sales and the revenue collected by selling publications and reproductions of the artworks in the collection. The profits would also be put towards creating similar war museums throughout New Zealand.1050 This positive forecast of the commercial viability of this project was constructed on the basis of the proven success of the Australian, British and Canadian war art programmes. Brigadier General Richardson cited the financial achievements gained by the former two countries in particular, when he proposed the New Zealand museum project to the Prime Minister in June 1918.1051 Australia had held an exhibition of the work made by their first official war artist William Dyson in January 1918, which had been very well received by the public and the press. The content of this exhibition was developed into a successful commercial publication over the course of 1918.1052 The British war art programme had also achieved generally positive commercial results from exhibitions, publications and reproductions of their official war art. Other New Zealand war related material such as the two issues of *New Zealand at the Front*

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1049 See letter from Captain Gambrill to Captain McClure, the Officer in Charge of War Trophies with the New Zealand Division in France, 31.10.18; and letter from Captain Gambrill to The Officer i/c War Trophies c/o D.A.D.O.S. N.Z. Division B.E.F. France, 31.09.18. ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/11. Wellington Office: Archives NZ. Also in file: ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 3. ZWR6/15. Wellington Office: Archives NZ; ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 4. ZWR9/2. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.

1050 Details included in the Minutes recording the proceeding of the first meeting held of the New Zealand War Museums Committee, Monday 15.07.18, 3.30 p.m. ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 4. ZWR7/1. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.

1051 Extract from the letter sent to Prime Minister, the Honourable William Massey from Brigadier General Richardson, drafted 24.06.18. Ibid.

and The Chronicles of the N.Z.E.F had already sold well amongst the troops and other interested parties, as had Light Diet, which was published around September 1918.\textsuperscript{1053}

An exhibition of New Zealand war art did occur in London in 1919 but it was downgraded to such an extent that it became virtually insignificant. The idea of an exhibition of Butler’s work had been mooted for December 1918 by Captain Gambrill while Butler was still following the New Zealand Division on the Western Front but it was soon realised that a “lack of material will probably render this impossible.”\textsuperscript{1054}

The subject of an exhibition was raised again in May 1919. Richardson and High Commissioner Mackenzie agreed that the entrance hall to the offices of the New Zealand High Commission on the Strand in central London would be a suitable location. Major Westmacott was tasked with gaining approval for this event from the New Zealand Expeditionary Force Headquarters. “I have long thought that in common with other Dominions we should have had an exhibition and the pictures in our possession with others belonging to Mr Butler would make quite a good display. New Zealand would get a good advertisement and the interest created might lead to more pictures being added to the National Collection. I recommend that you formally approve of our pictures being shown and of my arranging with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force to put the rough framework to carry the pictures. The cost will be trifling.”\textsuperscript{1055} Westmacott’s proposal was approval by General C.W. Melville and preparations were put in place to have Butler’s work framed for display in accordance with the specification that the artist had provided to Major Westmacott. “I am sending you with this a rough drawing of the frames if will be necessary to make to exhibit the sketches at the High Commissioners… I think the sketch will explain itself to any practical man. I have been working on the portraits and when I come up

\textsuperscript{1053} Like Light Diet, the humorous caricatures created by Percy Gower Reid for Dial Sights: sketches of the New Zealand Field Artillery, was another initiative of the War Artists’ Section programme. Produced by the New Zealand War Records Section, this book was not published until 1919 and went on to be a commercial success.


\textsuperscript{1054} Letter from Captain Gambrill to Captain McClure, the Officer in Charge of War Trophies with the New Zealand Division in France, 31.10.18.

ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/11. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.

\textsuperscript{1055} Major Westmacott to the New Zealand Expeditionary Force’s Headquarters in London, 06.05.1919.
on the 17 June shall bring them up practically finished so that they can be exhibited with the sketches."\textsuperscript{1056}

![Figure 196 – George Butler, Neuve Eglise (1919) – Archives New Zealand version.\textsuperscript{1057}

The exhibition of Butler's war paintings ran between 23 June and 6 July 1919 at the High Commission. Details of its success are missing from the New Zealand Expeditionary Force's files but it appears that exhibition included a series of work made specifically for sale. The Aigantighe Art Museum in Timaru holds a work in its collection, which is framed and labelled on the reverse with a sticker stating "War Pictures by Captain Geo. E. Butler held at the NZ Government Offices, London in 1919." The work is a version of Neuve Eglise and is almost identical to the original sketch held by Archives New Zealand as part of the National Collection of First World War Art. Major G. Ferguson purchased the painting from the London

\textsuperscript{1056} Correspondence, 07.05.19 and letter from Butler to Westmacott, 08.05.19. ACID, WA. 10/1. bx 2. ZWR5/11. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.

\textsuperscript{1057} George Edmund Butler, Neuve Eglise, 1919. Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, Wellington Office; George Edmund Butler, The Cross Roads, Neuve Eglise, c.1919. Aigantighe Art Gallery Collection, Timaru. This work has not been reproduced due to the reproduction costs involved.
exhibition and later donated it to the Timaru gallery.\textsuperscript{1058} Although the exhibition appears to have been a success, the New Zealand Government had little interest in the making use of the war art made by Butler or the other official artists.

The business plan of the War Museum Executive Committee had been based on the premise that the war would continue for some time past 1918 and that, even when it did finally end, that the public would be still be consistently interested in viewing war related subject matter. The reality of the situation was rather different. For economic and political reasons and because of the strain being placed on the country by the Influenza Pandemic, the New Zealand Government was eager to bring to a close the major operations of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force overseas. This included the War Records Section, which was the main body in charge of the practical organisation of the proposed national War Museum and its resources. The effect of the loss of this Section was compounded by the concurrent preoccupation of key members of the War Museum Executive Committee, such as Brigadier General Richardson, who was placed in charge of Expeditionary Force’s demobilisation procedures in Britain and Major General Russell, whose ill health had forced him to stand down from his post commanding the New Zealand Division in February 1919.\textsuperscript{1059} Without adequate leadership, management or facilities, the plans for the proposed New Zealand War Museum in London and its accompanying art exhibition slowly disintegrated.

Had circumstances been different and the War Records Section been given more time to develop their commercial strategy and implement their plans, it is highly likely that the museum and exhibition would have been a resoundingly successful venture. In the short time available to them, the War Records Section had managed to amass a large quantity of trophies and other materials intended for display in the London museum. The quality of these artefacts and in particular, the pieces of official New Zealand war art created by the War Artists’ Section for exhibition, were of an arguably high standard. This was all achieved in spite of the recruitment and funding difficulties that the Section had faced.

\textsuperscript{1058} Details provided through correspondence with Frances Husband, Collection Curator, Aigantighe Art Gallery, Timaru, 04.03.2010.
At the beginning of 1919 Major Westmacott wrote a report on the Expeditionary Force's collection of War Trophies, which included the art collection. He urged the Government to consider the historical legacy of the items. "It should be stated that the intention... was to obtain exhibits for a national war museum which would be a worthy memorial of the part played by New Zealand in the war, and an object lessons and source of inspiration to future generations. Practically all the British Dominions and most of the Allied countries have schemes for a War Museum and Memorial well in hand. Canada and Australia in particular have this planned on most praiseworthy lines. It would be unfortunate if New Zealand, whose war effort has been in no way inferior, should show herself niggardly or lacking in imagination as regards the memorial of her people's achievement." Westmacott pointedly stresses the lengths that he and his colleagues at the War Records Section went through to obtain the best materials for the New Zealand war trophy collection. "In principle no private right to war trophies is recognised and the Imperial Government insists strongly on this, especially as regards the right of the Imperial War Museum for first claim on all trophies... The Imperial Government handed over its right to trophies captured by overseas troops to the respective Dominions Government, but rather unwillingly as regards the claims of the Imperial War Museum and only after strong representation had been made by Dominion statesmen." As Westmacott elegantly remarks, "It would be a pity if after this concession New Zealand deals with trophies in a parochial rather than a national spirit." This, he goes on to say, "raises the question of how the trophies being sent back are being dealt with in the Dominion."

Westmacott's report aims to convince the New Zealand Government of the pressing need to establish a national War Trophies Committee, based on the British example, that would manage the imminent arrival of the New Zealand war collection following the disestablishment of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force's facilities in England. This committee would select key pieces for the national (war) museum and distribute the remaining items to the regional museums and other interested facilities. "My Section has had to deal with the matter of a museum under difficulties of lack of staff and funds. We have attempted nothing further than a rough classification of the
material and a catalogue. A permanent classification and catalogues are being left for museum experts in New Zealand.¹⁰⁶⁰

Unsurprisingly, Westmacott's entreaties were not given proper consideration. The task of processing the incoming war trophies seems to have fallen predominantly on the Dominion Museum. With limited resources, this influx of material put a severe strain on the capacity of this institution to adequately process the war trophies that had been foisted upon on it. Records for this transitional stage in the history of the war art collection are patchy but it seems that the relatively small Museum facility struggled to cope with the influx of artefacts and the artworks that formed a part of this larger collection failed to receive a level of care and attention befitting their quality.

The War Museum Committee led by Richardson struggled for several years to establish the facility they envisioned but by mid 1920 they had become collectively disheartened by the lack of progress. “In view of the present-day economic position, my Committee has no thought of urging the Government to enter into any elaborate scheme, or to erect expensive buildings, but it certainly does feel that unless the Government can give a definitive assurance that at some future date, however far off, a War Museum will be provided, its work of collecting, cataloguing and keeping in custody the large number of rare and unique trophies... is practically valueless and without object, and the members feel it incumbent upon them to ask their release from service on the Committee.”¹⁰⁶¹ They suggested several options for storage and display of the war collection they had amassed, including purchasing a building in Lambton Quay and utilising the empty Alexandra Barracks. However, the Committee abandoned hope that they would ever get the financial assistance of the Government to follow through with their plans. Some of the trophies they collected were distributed throughout New Zealand but the First World War artworks remained at

¹⁰⁶⁰ Westmacott states that these "exhibits are to be divided roughly into the following classes: Navy; Army; Air Services; Munitions; Art (Sculpture, paintings, Cartoons); Models; Broadsheets, posters, etc.; Photographs; Library; Miscellaneous.” Report from Major S. Westmacott, NZEF War Records Section, to Defence Department Headquarters, Wellington, 28.01.1919. ACGO, IA. 8333, 1. Bx 1651. 29/119, Part 1. Wellington Office: Archives NZ

¹⁰⁶¹ Letter from Brigadier General Richardson on behalf of the War Museum Committee to the Hon. Minister of Internal Affairs, 24.06.1920. ACGO, IA. 8333, 1. Bx 1651. 29/119, Part 2. Wellington Office: Archives NZ
the premises of the old Dominion Museum and its storage facilities in Sydney Street, near the grounds of Parliament until the whole museum was moved to its new location in Buckle Street in the 1930s.

Although storage space for the art collection was limited, as David Colquhoun notes in his brief history of the First World War art collection, “the War Museum Committee did have time to instigate one further war art project. This was a series of commissions for New Zealand artists to paint portraits of New Zealand Victoria Cross winners.” Even this was not without controversy. A quarrel broke out between the artist Francis McCracken and the Director of the Dominion Museum over the quality of McCracken’s portraits of Private James Crichton, VC and Sergeant R S Judson, VC, DCM, MM. After being discharged as unfit for further service, McCracken decided to continue his artistic studies by enrolling at the Edinburgh College of Art. When assigning commissions for the Victoria Cross portraits, the Dominion Museum gave preference to artists with a particular connection to the First World War, especially returned servicemen, making McCracken an ideal candidate. Adding to his qualifications, McCracken had just completed the successful national tour of the “Soldiers Exhibition” with two other returned servicemen William Robert Johnson and John Weeks. \[1063\]

\[1062\] The file referenced in regard to McCracken’s portraits is DM 12/1/42 ‘Portraits of winners Victoria Cross’, National Museum (probably now in the Te Papa Archives?). Colquhoun, “War Art at National Archives,” 59.  
\[1063\] An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand.
However, upon completion of his portraits, Director Thomson judged McCracken’s work to be inferior to the other commissioned portraits, citing their “flatness’, ‘uncertain modelling’ and ‘indistinct features.” This spat quickly turned litigious, “McCracken sued and the files reveal the director’s chagrin as he found that artists and critics disagreed with his judgements. The Department of Internal Affairs finally settled the dispute out of court.”

Although the legal proceedings were dropped, McCracken refused to repaint the works so they were left in marginal storage conditions along with all the other paintings and not exhibited when the other portraits were put on display.

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The First World War artworks were not exhibited properly in New Zealand upon their arrival. A 1968 letter from the Acting Director of the National Art Gallery regarding the history of the First World War artworks states that, “We know that the ‘Butlers’ were exhibited in the old Museum Building, Museum Street,” referring to the old Dominion Museum (formerly the Colonial Museum before 1907) located near the Parliament Buildings in Wellington. Assuming the accuracy of this statement, this implies that at least some works by Butler, most likely his portraits, were exhibited publicly sometime between 1920 and 1936 before the Dominion Museum was relocated to its new premises at Buckle Street. Even given the improved facilities and increased size of this new building, the Dominion Museum could not assign an adequate storage location for the works and they were placed in the basement, allegedly directly on the floor. This ignominious fate reveals much about the Museum’s general lack of interest in the majority of the First World War art collection.

It is known that selected works from the collection were loaned for the exhibition at the 1925 South Seas Exhibition in Dunedin and for the opening of the Auckland War Memorial Museum in 1929. When the new National Art Gallery opened in 1936 beside the Dominion Museum, the whole war art collection was transferred to the custody of this facility. Some of the paintings were displayed there but most remained in storage.

Over the years, the works that remained at the National Art Gallery suffered badly from neglect and the structural integrity of many of the paintings was compromised. During the Second World War an inventory and condition report was conducted of the First World War art collection that judged the works to be in a very poor state. Some remedial restoration and reframing was undertaken. In January 1941, L.C.L. Averill contacted the Department of Internal Affairs to request that pictures from the First World War art collection, including Butler’s painting of The Scaling of the Walls of Le Quesnoy (1920), be loaned to the Provincial Galleries in Christchurch. “It has been ascertained from the Director, Dominion Museum, that all the paintings in connection with the war of 1914–1918 originally hanging in the library of the old

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1066 Letter from E.W. Northmore Secretary and Acting Director of the National Art Gallery to Mr C.J. Read, Group Executive Officer, Department of Internal Affair, 24.07.1968. ACGO, IA. 8333, 1. bx 2842. 124/52/8. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
museum are now stored in the present building.” The National Art Gallery’s Committee of Management advised their Board of Trustees that, “the pictures are in a bad state of disrepair owing to their having been stored in the old Dominion Museum for a number of years and that a report is being obtained as to their condition and to the expense and possibility of putting them into good order.” The Hanging Committee was asked to compile a report on the state of the war pictures. In April 1942, Mr Heenan, Under Secretary, Department of Internal Affairs wrote again to Secretary of the National Art Gallery and Dominion Museum Board of Trustees to see if any progress had been made on L.C.L. Averill’s suggestion. The Hanging Committee’s report was finally sent on the 25 June 1942. This stated that:

Examination of these pictures showed that much damage had occurred through neglect while in the care of the Museum. The V.C portraits were extremely dirty. Most have responded to treatment but one by Mrs. Elizabeth Kelly is badly spotted. All portraits have been cleaned. I would suggest that the frames of these portraits which are of a particularly heavy timber stained black be painted in a light colour and have a touch of gold brushed on. This will save reframing. The smaller oils and water colours by Butler and Welch are themselves in fairly good order but many glasses are broken and the mounts dirty and discoloured. Some of the greens used in painting the watercolour have faded, this being due to the use of disinfectant in the water. At least 100 of these could be made ready for exhibition if remounted, glazed and framed. They would prove excellent and interesting material for exhibitions to be held in the new premises. The cost will be approximately

1067 J.W. Heenan, under-Secretary, Department of Internal Affairs to F.H. Bass, Secretary, Dominion Museum and National Art Gallery, Board of Trustees, 06.01.1941. Rec MU000003. Bx 0012. Item 0008. War Pictures (1914-1918). Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Archives, Wellington.
1068 National Art Gallery and Dominion Museum Memorandum, from E.D. Gore, Secretary Committee of Management, national Art Gallery to Secretary, Board of Trustees, National Art Gallery, 26.03.1941.
1069 Correspondence between J.W. Heenan, under-Secretary, Department of Internal Affairs to F.H. Bass, Secretary, Dominion Museum and National Art Gallery, Board of Trustees, 29 April - 25 June 1942.
£100. The Hanging Committee recommended this expenditure to preserve the works from further deterioration.\textsuperscript{1070}

Though the Hanging Committee did approve this expenditure and went ahead with the necessary conservation measures suggested, it took until 1952 before a major public exhibition was held at the National Art Gallery to showcase the First World War art collection. However, the 'Exhibition of Official War Paintings by New Zealand artists' also included works by official and unofficial war artists from the Second World War. The works from the two world wars were exhibited separately. The Second World War works were shown first, opening on the 25 June until Sunday 13 July. The First World War works were then exhibited between Wednesday 16 July and Sunday 3 August. The First World War paintings were grouped into five galleries by artist and the work of each artist was divided into oil and watercolour works. Their display was accompanied by the following caveat in the exhibition catalogue:

These pictures for many years were kept in storage but some years ago the Management Committee of the National Gallery obtained the custody of them, and after having some necessary restoration done, they have been from time to time exhibited in the National Gallery…. It is hoped that arrangements will be concluded for the satisfactory permanent custody of these pictures so that they will be adequately safeguarded and made available for periodic exhibition at the National Gallery and other Galleries in New Zealand. A National War Museum on the lines of those in England and Australia would be the most fitting institution to have the care of these works which have a high value both as history and as works of art. In the meantime the National Gallery is willing to accept the custody of as many as can be stored in the Gallery Building. The thanks of the Management Committee of the National Art Gallery are due to all those who have so willingly given

\textsuperscript{1070} Report of the Hanging Committee, National Art Gallery: War Pictures 1914-1918 written by M. Murray Fuller, Convener Hanging Committee for NAG Board of Trustees and the Department of Internal Affairs. Undated - between October 1941 and June 1942. Also see - National Art Gallery and Dominion Museum Memorandum, from E.D. Gore, Secretary on behalf of Mrs Murray Fuller to Mr. F.H. Bass, Secretary, Board of Trustees, 11.08.1942 War Pictures 1914-1918, The Secretary, Board of Trustees to The Acting Secretary, Art Gallery Management Committee, 05.09.1942. Ibid.
assistance to the project of holding this representative Exhibition of the work of the artists of both the Great World Wars.\textsuperscript{1071}

Although there were far fewer official war artists in the Second World War, the artists were hired much earlier into the conflict. In 1941 Peter McIntyre was employed to follow the Expeditionary Force through Crete, North Africa and Italy and Maurice Conly was assigned to document the activities of the Royal New Zealand Air Force. New Zealand’s operations in the Pacific were covered by Allan Barns-Graham (from March 1943) and Russell Clark (early 1944). This gave them more time to produce high quality works of art that provide a sound representation of what this war was like for the New Zealanders who fought in it. The Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force and the New Zealand Government also made full use of the publicity value of the war art they had at their disposal. Peter McIntyre in particular had several exhibitions of his work and was featured in official cinematic newsreels talking about his work (it also helped that he was a great self promoter and made several books about his war experience). Unofficial war art was also widely exhibited such as the Patriotic Fund fundraiser show \textit{New Zealand Artists in Uniform} held in 1943, from which several works were purchased to add to the war art collection.

In contrast to the bold graphic styles of the Second World War paintings, the predominantly brown and ochre toned First World War works would have appeared quite drab and their Edwardian emphasis on intricate detail would likely have seemed fussy to a viewer in the 1950s. The Great War works also represented a conflict that was not as fresh in the minds of their audience as the war that had just occurred, and would therefore have been less engaging. In general, the works were also suffering from having been kept in a damp basement for several decades – some of the original colours had faded and the paper discoloured. In addition several works had been given new, modern plain, frames that would not have complemented their style or accentuated their details to full effect. All this did not bode well for the immediate future of the artworks.

In 1969, the Secretary of New Zealand’s Department of Internal Affairs declared that, “Because of the difficulty of obtaining suitable accommodation for the paintings, it is possible that some of them may have to be destroyed.”\(^{1072}\) The artworks in question had been stored for years on the dirt floor in the basement of the National Art Gallery because they were not considered suitable for display. As a result, they had fallen into a severe state of decay and were in serious need of immediate restoration and relocation to a climate controlled facility. However, the logistics and cost of achieving this were far beyond the interests of the Department of Internal Affairs. The attitude of those charged with deciding the future of the collection can be summarised by the handwritten postscript on the condition report that noted, "I do not entirely agree with" the belief that it was unthinkable that the paintings be deliberately destroyed, "My impression is that there are some paintings which no one would miss."\(^{1073}\)

It would be difficult to conceive of the Great War production by prestigious, internationally acclaimed artists like John Singer Sargent, Paul Nash, Arthur Streeton, Wyndham Lewis or F. H. Varley being treated with such disregard by the official custodians of the Imperial War Museum, the Australian War Memorial or the Canadian War Museum. This is essentially because the war work produced by these artists has continued to be treated with respect, not only by the institutions that house them but also by the general public.

By contrast, the official artworks produced by New Zealand War Artists’ Section lost their artistic and cultural relevance shortly after the end of the First World War. It is therefore unsurprising that there was very little objection raised when the Department of Internal Affairs put forward a proposal to destroy a large proportion of the New Zealand Collection of First World War Artworks in 1969. Authorities in the Department were only interested in preserving those works that contained significant descriptive and historical content that could act as records of New Zealand’s martial contribution to the First World War. Instead of requesting an assessment of the overall quality of the works by an expert from an art institution, the Department asked

\(^{1072}\) Letter from the Secretary, New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs to the Secretary, New Zealand Ministry of Defence, ‘Official Collection of World War I Paintings’, 15.10.1969.
ACGO, IA. 8333, 1. bx 2842. 124/52/8. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.

\(^{1073}\) Report by Mr. C. Litt, Group Executive Officer (Culture) from the Department of Internal Affairs, c. August 1969.
Ibid.
the advice of the Ministry of Defence who based their decision on the relevance of the works to New Zealand's military history. “In addition to the three paintings which are still held at the National Art Gallery (262, Military Race Meeting and HMS New Zealand number not known and another large World War I work by Butler) should be restored, if possible. The other works of Mr Butler at present stored in the basement of the Art Gallery could, we believe, be discarded.”

There is no record that any such drastic action was ever considered for the official war art created during the Second World War. This comparison is extremely important as it illustrates the different level of value that was allotted to the art from the two World Wars. The events of the Second World War were, of course, more recent and fresh in the minds of the public at that time. However, many New Zealanders were still alive in the late 1960s that had lived through the First World War and since these people were growing older, preserving the visual memories of this earlier war should have been an important priority. However, in the case of the First World War artworks, the National Art Gallery, the Department of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Defence collectively made the decision to dismiss their artistic and cultural relevance to New Zealanders. By contrast, the art from the Second World War was and still is, held in high regard by the large majority of New Zealanders. For many years, a large proportion of these works were housed in Returned Services Associations around New Zealand where they were held as prized objects. New Zealanders and particularly, veteran soldiers felt that they could relate easily to these war images. Artists such as Peter McIntyre, Austin Deans and Russell Clark were praised for having been able to capture the essence of the war they experienced in a style that successfully and recognisably reflected the artistic trends of the early 1940’s in New Zealand.

There was also a general perception in the late 1960s that artwork from the early twentieth century and the First World War period in New Zealand was dismissable and generally inferior to the work produced at beginning of the 1930s. This attitude is upheld by the major figures in New Zealand art history and in several seminal survey

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texts, such as Gordon Brown and Hamish Keith's *An introduction to New Zealand painting 1839–1967* who state that, “Between 1890 and the First World War the place occupied by landscape painting was challenged as painters began to give greater emphasis to portraiture and still-life painting. With the First World War this changed was checked and the interest in contemporary overseas art movements waned until, by the early nineteen-twenties, painters ceased to show any real interest in developments abroad, and those who did, removed themselves from New Zealand. Although still-life and portraiture remained popular, the overall quality of these works declined, and of such paintings only a handful can now be seem to have possessed genuine artist merit.”

Conversely, the 1930’s are universally acknowledged as the flowering of New Zealand art. According to A.H. McLintock this was the period when a new generation of New Zealand artists worked towards the creation of a definitive national style in art by “interpreting the characteristics of their country without undue reliance upon European styles and methods.” This suggests that the First World War artworks were perceived as lacking a particular stylistic quality that would have linked them seamlessly into New Zealand’s visual culture.

Following the 1952 exhibition, the National Art Gallery and the Dominion Museum did not have resources or the desire to maintain the combined collection of the First and Second World War artworks. Approximately two-thirds of the works were delegated out to regional council facilities, including art galleries, Returned Services Clubs, Defence Force branches, and to the Auckland War Memorial Museum where they remained for several decades. The works that remained went back into storage at the National Art Gallery. It was during this stage in the history of the collection that many works seem to have disappeared.

In 1970, after deciding to refrain from destroying the most badly damaged works from the First World War collection, the Department of Internal Affairs conducted a major inventory of all the works that had been given to public collections for

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1076 New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs and McLintock, *National Centennial Exhibition of New Zealand Art: Catalogue*, 16.
This attempted to locate the artworks that had been loaned out by the National Art Gallery in the 1950s. By the end of 1971 it was discovered that some of these works had gone missing over the years or were in sore need of repair and conservation. Fortunately, however, most of the works were traceable and in a reasonable condition. Following this, the works remained for another decade in substandard storage at the National Art Gallery. Eventually, when preparations were being made to develop a new national gallery facility, the Department of Internal Affairs decided it was best to transfer the problematic war art collection into the care of the National Archives (later Archives New Zealand). Unlike the National Museum and National Art Gallery, the Archives could provide quality, climate controlled, storage conditions for the works and could accommodate the continued growth of the collection as new donations and purchases occurred. In 1981 the collection was moved into the vaults of this institution. After 60 years, the First World War artworks had finally found a home willing to treat them with a level of dignity befitting their original commemorative purpose. Archival conservators were able to halt their continued deterioration and historians began to take interest in their content.

Without wanting to diminish the good work done by the Archives, it must be noted that within the relative seclusion of this facility, the First World War art collection underwent an important transformation. Upon losing their connection with the Museum and Art Gallery, the works quickly lost their status as 'art' and became archival documents. This is not to say that the collection has been hidden from the public since the 1980s. Archives New Zealand has exhibited selected works from the First World War component of the national war art collection on several occasions at its onsite gallery War Art (2007) and An Impressive Silence (2009). They have also been loaned for various external exhibitions, most notably around the 1990 New Zealand sesquicentennial celebrations, when works featured in both Christopher Pugsley’s The Honorary Rank of Captain and Tony Martin's New Zealand Images of

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1077 Letters from M.J. McMillan, Secretary to Internal Affairs, to various art institutions and RSA’s around New Zealand, Wellington, Department of Internal Affairs, 19 February 1971. Also see letter in this file dated 26 November 1970 on allocation of restoration funds to this project. ACGO, IA. 8333, 1. bx 2842. 124/52/5. Part 4. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.

1078 War Art: An exhibition of oil paintings from the National Collection of War Art, Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, (Wellington Archives New Zealand, 2007); An Impressive Silence – Public Memory and Personal Experience of the Great War, Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, (Wellington: Archives New Zealand, 2008).
All the works in the war art collection have been digitised in recent years and can be now viewed as an online ‘virtual’ exhibition on Archives New Zealand’s website. For some of the works this is the first time in over ninety years that they have been made visible to the public. While these measures are certainly commendable they still fall well short of the original intention behind the production of these artworks – to act as a permanent memorial to commemorate New Zealand's sacrifice in the First World War.

1079 Pugsley and National Archives of New Zealand., The Honorary Rank of Captain: Artists of the Great War, 1914-1918; Martin and Manawatu Art Gallery., New Zealand Images of War.
6) Unique & Important? New Zealand’s (forgotten) contribution to the visual history of the First World War

If New Zealand is to make her own contribution to the spiritual achievements of mankind, her people must display an intelligent and sympathetic interest in the culture of their country. If this is done and the people become the true patrons of the arts, there is no reason to doubt that in New Zealand’s second century its native art will become its national pride.  

When compared to the scale, scope and stylistic breath of the work produced for the official Australian, British and Canadian war art programmes, the quality of the works created by the New Zealand War Artists’ Section could, at first, appear rather meagre and unworthy. Although I would argue that this value judgement is extremely shortsighted and decidedly untrue, this attitude was precisely that expressed by the Secretary of New Zealand’s Department of Internal Affairs in 1969 when he was charged with the duty of assessing the importance of these artworks to New Zealand’s cultural history. This report sealed the fate of the collection when it declared that no “interest would be shown in them today [and] the style of the painting is not much appreciated these days.” Its suggestion that the works be stripped of their original frames and made “available perhaps as archival material” was prophetic.  

When the collection finally found its current home in Archives New Zealand the works did indeed become archival documents rather than artworks.

The official First World War artists were done a great disservice by New Zealand when the plans fell through for the National War Memorial Museum. The New

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1080  New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs and McLintock, National Centennial Exhibition of New Zealand Art: Catalogue, 16.
1081  Report by Mr. C. Litt, Group Executive Officer (Culture) from the Department of Internal Affairs, c. August 1969.
ACGO, IA. 8333, 1. bx 2842. 124/52/8. Wellington Office: Archives NZ.
Zealand War Artists Section produced a mixed assortment of work that represents New Zealand’s involvement in the First World War from a variety of perspectives. On the whole these works are not ‘abstract’ and do not employ the cutting-edge styles used by other well known official war artists like Wyndham Lewis, Paul Nash or Christopher Nevinson. However, it is important to note that only a few artists in England actually participated in the Vorticist or Futurist abstraction movements and even the techniques of Impressionism were not completely acceptable within the British Royal Art Academy. It was an age of flux and upheaval – where a jumbled mix of new conflicting stylistic trends and ideas vied for currency against the traditions of the Royal Academy.

The New Zealand official war works therefore cannot be accusing of using outmoded styles for their time. The visual language they used is consistent with the art styles used in New Zealand around the First World War period. However, because of New Zealand’s strong reliance on British culture in the late Victorian and Edwardian period, New Zealand artists looked to British art for inspiration. But the world that they looked to was itself in a period of transition. Admittedly, there was a delay of several decades between the emergence of avant-garde art fashions in London and their adoption in Wellington. New Zealand’s displacement from Britain meant that these new methodologies were slow to arrive and even slower to be accepted by artists and then by society. The case of New Zealand is an even more prolonged example of the British resistance to French modern art epitomised by the intense reaction to Roger Fry’s Manet and the Post-Impressionists exhibition in 1910. It was therefore difficult for the New Zealand public to understand that Butler’s war works, in particular, were attempting to respond to the conditions of modern life.

Another major reason behind the dismissal of New Zealand’s art from the First World War period was the issue of artistic expatriatism, a phenomenon that consistently plagued the New Zealand art community throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century. This trend resulted in the nation lacking a substantial pool of talented young and mature artists who could form a recognisable stylistic language during this period. Many of the soldier-artists selected to act as New Zealand’s official artists did not have the benefit of receiving art training in London or Europe as this was very expensive, and so their work reflects their limited artistic training in
New Zealand. Welch and Butler on the other hand did have the opportunity to familiarise themselves with contemporary English art fashions but both of them seem to have preferred to paint their official artworks using the techniques they had been taught in New Zealand by Nairn. These artists wanted their paintings to show not only New Zealand content but also to reflect a New Zealand aesthetic. They chose to represent the landscape of the war using a visual language that would be recognisable to New Zealanders by evoking the work of contemporary art practitioners such as Nairn and Petrus van der Velden. This, arguably, makes their production stand out from the styles of war art produced for other nations. But most importantly, it meant their work should have been more relevant to their New Zealand audience at home. Butler and Welch wanted to show the issues, events and places that they knew would resonate with New Zealanders and this comes across in their careful choices of subject matter. Together their works contain a truthful emotional response to the war from both the civilian and soldier’s perspective. It is however, a great misfortune that none of New Zealand’s official war artists were ever given sufficient time, opportunity or facilities to properly develop their vision for the War Museum. The sketches that remain in the National Collection of War Art are nonetheless still important as they show what was planned and give us an indication of what these artists had intended.

As has been shown throughout this thesis, George Butler, Nugent Welch and all the other soldier-artists and administrators working for the New Zealand War Records Section and War Museum Committee believed that the official war art they were creating would function as a worthy public memorial to the First World War. The collection was formed with the intention of documenting the events of this conflict for a community physically disconnected from the war environment. When housed permanently within the proposed New Zealand War Museum, these paintings would have commemorated the great sacrifices made by New Zealand men and women. The content of the works was also intended to celebrate the extraordinary achievements of the ordinary New Zealand soldiers who fought and the officers of the Expeditionary Force who led them to their ultimate victory in 1918. Although the New Zealand Collection of First World War Art is yet to find a home where these ambitions can be completely realised, it is hoped that, one day, the works produced
by this forgotten group of artists, will finally receive the recognition they so rightfully deserve.
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