



Editorial

Introduction: Wartime Ephemera and the Transmission of Diverse Family and Community Histories

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1. Introduction

This Special Issue seeks to broaden our understanding of the role of ephemera and material culture in preserving conflict experiences and memories, with particular focus on the diverse—and potentially subversive—nature of family history, community narration, and generational transmission. We work with a definition of ephemera that acknowledges its transient nature, often relating to material—printed and written—that is generally not meant to last but that also incorporates other small, easily portable items that were important to people in the past (Foster 2019; Reichard 2012; Russell 2020; Twyman 2008). This means that items as diverse as identity tags, knives, mirrors, lucky charms, and buttons are included in our definition of ephemera. Influenced by the existing scholarship on the objects created or kept by some white British and Dominion soldiers of the First World War, this Special Issue aims to expand our understanding of the emotional value and mnemonic purpose of wartime ephemera and objects across time and space and from a variety of disciplinary and practitioner perspectives (Cook 2018; Pagnotta 2021; Saunders 2003, 2004b; Smyth 2018). In an effort to push discussions beyond the temporal boundaries of the First World War, this Special Issue incorporates a range of conflicts from 1914 to the present. Our overarching aim is to provoke reflection and debate about the potential and purpose of wartime ephemera and material culture to tell different, diverse, lesser-known, bottom-up stories of war.

Family history and, in particular, experiences of war and military service, are often inextricably linked with specific examples of ephemera and material culture that act as tools or transmitters for this history. For those who have found themselves under-represented or excluded from the narrative of mainstream national commemorative events, these objects can represent a key aspect in the sharing and preservation of counter-cultural family, cultural, social, and community histories, or those that run in parallel to official narratives but deviate from them in significant ways. The work of photographer Wendel A. White is a good example of this. He uses both ordinary relics from the lives of Black Americans (a drum, a class ring, a spoon) and objects that illustrate how America has waged war on Black bodies (shackles, a slave bill of sale, a women's Ku Klux Klan hood) to tell otherwise hidden stories of Black history that are not normally placed centre stage in museum and archive collections (White 2024). Having 'ownership' of histories that are not dictated by either national commemorations or, effectively, authorised and curated by the state can be an empowering and subversive position and one that is of great interest to historians, particularly since the socio-cultural and material 'turn' in conflict studies—emanating out of historiography of the First World War but now extending into analysis of other global conflicts, such as the Second World War (Pennell and Ribeiro de Meneses 2019). Additionally, the 'absence' or 'silence' of material from these groups is equally worth our attention, shining a light on underlying issues surrounding the survival (or not) of certain stories and experiences. Cooperation between these groups and academics can lead to new forms of community ownership of the past and co-production endeavours to platform these histories (Lloyd and Moore 2015; Evans and De Groot 2019; Hammett et al. 2020;



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King and Hammett 2020). This fully open access Special Issue of *Genealogy*, produced as part of the AHRC-funded project 'Ephemera and writing about war in Britain, 1914 to the present', explores the ways in which family histories of war within diverse communities are understood and shared through specific objects.

This volume is also rooted in ongoing and emerging reflections on the national commemorative activities undertaken in the United Kingdom during the 2014–2018 First World War centenary. Even as our project unfolded, the extent of Muslim involvement in the two World Wars, and its potential commemoration, remained a contentious political issue (Courea 2024; Tinsley 2022). Reports on the centenary commemorations in the UK highlighted various important lessons in terms of understanding the successes and shortcomings of national commemorations of past conflicts (Hanna et al. 2021). Key amongst these was how different communities and groups interacted with varying levels of collective memory and shared experiences. What is clear from this recent experience is that there are communities within Britain that were, at best, under-represented in this process or, at worst, excluded or alienated by it. Despite being described as 'the largest public history project ever seen in the country' (Noakes and Wallis 2022), the centenary left the public relatively ignorant of the war's impact on Black and ethnic minority British subjects. Pennell and Todman noted, in 2020, that 'diversity was the exception rather than the rule in commemorative representations and that where it did exist, it was confined primarily to military service rather than the range of experiences from across an empire at war, many of which would have been much more difficult to contain within commemorative conventions' (Pennell and Todman 2020, p. 147). Although First World War centenary commemorations in the UK made it more likely for people to be aware, for instance, that there were Indian soldiers involved in the war, the centenary left them, by and large, as ignorant as before of the war's impact on Black and ethnic minority British citizens, and on non-combatants in particular. Within much of the public domain, the stories of Black and ethnic minority people in the war were represented in a tokenistic fashion, rather than integrated holistically into all aspects of commemoration (Das 2014). More worryingly, many members of these communities continue to feel excluded from national commemorative discourses. This is especially true regarding non-combatants. The contributors to this Special Issue argue that ephemera and wartime objects can help to empower communities that have been overlooked in remembrance practices to tell the stories that matter to them. Equally, they can serve to open dialogue between community stakeholders and those in power, as well as conversations within and across these communities. The need to broaden or eliminate the boundaries that exist between mainstream recollection and commemoration to provide space and opportunity for those previously forced to the periphery was a driving motivator behind our own endeavours. As Britain moves towards key anniversaries of other military conflicts, such as the approaching centenary of the Second World War, it is important to reframe, contextualise, and interrogate the diverse nature of wartime memory, experiences, and community narration, placing ephemera and material culture at the centre of these enquiries.

As Daniel Miller articulated in *The Comfort of Things* (Miller 2008), people's possessions—the things they hold dear—are a window into their lives and what matters to them. Objects—or the loss of them—help us to understand how people make sense of their lives, in the past, present, and future. As first-hand memory of the two World Wars disappears, our views 'are inevitably shaped by the physical remains themselves, and by the interpretations of those who had no part in their design, production or original purpose' (Saunders 2004a, p. 5). Placed alongside Jackson and Tomkins' emphasis on the significance of ephemera 'as a hitherto overlooked medium vital for the dissemination of information regarding the imperial and wider world', these observations indicate that there is clearly an interactive significance between objects and people in the context of conflict and empire. As a result, the editors of this Special Issue believe that both family history and the study of ephemera and material culture can provide useful ways of understanding the types of diverse histories that have either failed to be recognised within more mainstream commemorations or

been actively suppressed (Jackson and Tomkins 2015, p. 143). Ann-Marie Foster notes the following:

There are two main ways that families have attempted to link their memory of the object with the physical item: when they donate an item to a museum they pass on their stories about family life and the importance of the object, or, when items remain in the family, they keep memorial narratives alive through the transmission of family memory. (Foster 2019, p. 19)

Here, Foster highlights the links between objects and the family connections to them as creating a joint means of transmitting memory and experience. It is therefore of clear benefit for historians to consider the ways in which genealogy as a field can act as a gateway to understanding the diverse and marginalised histories that exist within families and are based around specific objects.

It was with this objective that this Special Issue was launched. To achieve it, we have grouped the articles into four primary themes:

- (1) Museums and archives;
- (2) Poetry as ephemera;
- (3) Marginalised, transient, and outsider histories;
- (4) Family and gender.

Together, these themes enable us to explore the different ways in which family histories and their related objects can be used: firstly, to understand experiences relating to war and conflict, and secondly, by historians as a series of analytical frameworks through which to advance our understandings of these moments. This is achieved through a variety of groups (prisoners of war, military deserters, indigenous peoples, victims of genocide, and refugees), conflicts (the First and Second World Wars, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Turkish invasion of Cyprus), and geographical spaces (America, Canada, Britain, France, Poland, Australia, Cyprus, Germany, and Austria).

2. Museums and Archives

The collections, holdings, and exhibits within museums and archives can often provide a starting point for sourcing ephemera and material relating to wartime experiences. The collection and display of assorted objects, including ephemera, have long represented a staple practice in a broad range of heritage institutions. As Jennifer Wellington argues in her work relating to the First World War, 'How groups curated and exhibited war for an audience of their countrymen and women is an essential part of the story of how different societies constructed images and thus conceptions of war during and after the conflict of 1914–18' (Wellington 2017, p. 1). However, museum exhibits and archival holdings are not neutral spaces. As Adrienne Rich reminds us, silence should not be confused with absence (Rich 1978, p. 17). Philosophical and theoretical approaches to museums and archives have underscored their vested interests and inherent power dynamics. They have the power to allow voices to be heard, but they also have the power to exclude (Carter 2006). The first two articles in this Special Issue reflect the important considerations and understandings to be taken from the ways in which museums and archives aim to transmit knowledge.

In her article 'Curating Community behind Barbed Wire: Canadian Prisoner of War Art from the Second World War' (<https://www.mdpi.com/2313-5778/8/2/54>, accessed on 10 May 2024), Sarafina Pagnotta argues that '[T]he histories of POWs and their collective experiences are usually only tangentially included in broader military histories of Canadian involvement in the Second World War'. They have often been overlooked because stories of 'defeat and captivity do not fit easily into either the military or social histories of the countries they served'. Though often under-represented in the official and national narratives, and in Canadian military historiography more generally, the experiences of Canadian prisoners of war during the Second World War can be found in the accumulation of war art (illustrations, sketches, and paintings) and handwritten diaries and letters carefully kept or sent home to loved ones that have found their way into the thousands of

boxes in the George Metcalf Archival Collection at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa. The sense that these types of military experience do not work well within mainstream memory and, as a result, have effectively been exiled to the fringes speaks directly to the central themes of this Special Issue and the war ephemera project that inspired it. As Pagnotta argues, if we wish to understand these ‘alternative’ experiences, then we must look at ephemera, such as wartime log books, that are not usually found on public display, because it is here ‘that the stories of non-combatant men and women who spent their war as POWs, can be told’. By doing so, oversimplified, redacted, and sometimes mythical histories of Allied prisoners during the Second World War can be juxtaposed with the complex and nuanced stories that ‘often start in old boxes, with the lid more or less firmly stuck down, full of papers turning yellow with age’ (Pathé and Théofilakis 2016, p. 1).

Moving from Northern America to Central Europe, and from a victorious nation to two defeated in war, Chloe Paver, in her article ‘“Wartime” Ephemera from the Family Home in German and Austrian History Museums: A Counterexample to the British Case’ (<https://www.mdpi.com/2313-5778/8/2/70>, accessed on 3 June 2024), explores the types of wartime ephemera passed down through German and Austrian families. In their relatively privileged position as victims not of National Socialism but of the war that the Nazis inflicted on their nations, these people tended to hide and forget such ‘non-persecuted majority’ objects and ephemera—badges, flags, and photographs—in the family home. Mundane Nazi-era objects of ‘little material value’ survived in their millions but with limited space within national discourses of reparation and redress to discuss them. Paver argues that their endurance and the ways in which they have been donated to, and used by, German and Austrian museums to convey the ‘transmission’ of ‘family memory’ is a ‘key element in the formation of German and Austrian society after 1945’, serving to illustrate a history of mentalities during and after the Nazi regime. Moreover, it enables insights into ‘how the millions of German and Austrian citizens and residents with no family connection to the Second World War. . .[can] be included in a form of national family storytelling that arguably “re-ethnicizes” memory’. It explores what young Germans and Austrians think they are doing in giving up these items to museums now, and what museums think they are doing in collecting and displaying them.

3. Poetry as Ephemera

This Special Issue is richly influenced by the socio-cultural and material ‘turn’ in conflict studies. This has meant an increasing emphasis on everyday experiences, placing them at the heart of understanding the conflict, and the role of the material and ephemeral in recording—however fleetingly—such experiences. Santanu Das’s work on preserving the war experience of illiterate sepoys in India highlights the importance of fragile physical mementos, like notes scrawled on a page or a crinkled postcard folded and kept in a pocket. These are ‘the hand-prints and face-prints of war in the act of writing its own violent life’, which we can use to reconstruct ‘piecemeal narratives’ of the experience of conflict (Das 2018, p. 9). However, this practice is not confined to cultures where oral traditions dominated. Equal attention should be paid to the insubstantial physical traces of war in Western societies, as Foster has highlighted, particularly in relation to working-class family memorial practices during the interwar period (Foster 2024). Definitions of ephemera are not static and can be more flexible than initial definitions suggest. Ann-Marie Einhaus has argued for a new way of reading short fiction about the First World War, through the lens of ephemera as an archival category. She explores the ways in which short fiction both preserves and embodies the humble, mundane aspects of war experience through its shared characteristics of a confined scope and built-in sense of fleetingness in both practical and conceptual terms (Einhaus 2021). This next section takes this provocation and expands it into the realm of poetry. It makes the case for a reworking and reimagining of the boundaries of ephemera to include the creation and writing of poetry.

In ‘The Case for Reading War Poetry as Ephemera’ (<https://www.mdpi.com/2313-5778/8/2/55>, accessed on 10 May 2024), Julia Ribeiro Thomaz argues that there is ‘a lot to

be gained from reading war poetry as ephemera' because 'poetry has always done and will always do things that go beyond literature and literary value'. In times of conflict, the lines between 'ordinary' life-writing practices and literary poetry become blurred and lead to a reconsideration of poems written simply as 'traces of experience'. Many introductions to First World War poetry collections attest to this; bereaved families and friends admit they had no knowledge of their loved one's writing practices until they discovered a journal full of poems after their death and published these as a posthumous tribute. In her article, Thomaz reconsiders the nature of French poems from the First World War to explore 'this permeability' between war poetry and ephemera. With this conceptual framing, Thomaz argues for 'a shift in perspective' and 'acknowledgement of the fact that, before they became books. . . some poems were simply traces of everyday life in the trenches'. By framing poetry as ephemera, Thomaz shows that the nature of writing, recording, and reading these pieces is also a temporal and ephemeral activity and that 'diverse histories. . . can emerge from this shift in perspective'. In a challenge to traditional and elite-level narrations of conflict, she asks, 'whose stories get told when poetry is studied not as literature to be judged as accomplished or failed art but as a way of writing to make sense of the world?'

The idea that poetry can be ephemera is also taken up by Yael Hacoeh in her article: "'This Is How/You'll End": Holocaust Poems as War Ephemera' (<https://www.mdpi.com/2313-5778/8/2/53>, accessed on 10 May 2024). In this piece, Hacoeh explains how 'many Holocaust poets went to unspeakable lengths to write their last poems and transfer them to the world'. Because these poets wrote with an awareness that their poems may never be read, uncertainty permeates the texts, locking them into an ephemeral state of potentially only existing in the immediate aftermath of their creation. Hacoeh focuses on the final poems of four Holocaust poets—Władysław Szlengel, Selma Meerbaum-Eisingerb, Hannah Szenes, and Abramek Koplłowicz—in their attempts 'to 'capture memory', tracing how each of these poets 'creates, explores, and expands new narratives of what it means to write a poem as a last will and testament'. Like Thomaz, Hacoeh focuses on a moment, the Holocaust, that has a firm place within popular consciousness and an accompanying series of dominant (and long-held) narratives. By exploring the ways in which these poems are partly frozen in time, she helps uncover experiences around the Holocaust that are not as widely recognised. However, her article also raises questions around the work of transference of these poem objects. The desperate circumstances in which these poems were written are like a 'message in a bottle', washing up on land with 'their survival. . . accomplished by many hands'. The very act of exhumation 'is itself no less part of poems than the poems themselves', with family members, friends, and, in some cases, an entire community working together to transfer the poems across time and space. The journey is as much a part of these poems as their content and origins.

4. Marginalised, Transient, and Outsider Histories

A key objective of this Special Issue—and the 'Ephemera and Writing about War in Britain, 1914 to the Present' project that inspired it—is to highlight histories, experiences, and material from marginalised and under-represented communities. The objects held or preserved by these groups can act as transmitters for histories that have been either overlooked or suppressed by mainstream recognition or commemoration. However, ephemera and material culture in this context comprise more than simply a vehicle to tell 'lesser known' stories of war. This concept addresses the relationship between people traditionally on the margins of society and the items and objects that they value, the processes undertaken (and obstacles overcome) in order to tell more diverse stories of peripheral wartime experiences through ephemera and material culture, and the disruptive and regenerative potential of indigenous and refugee community-based cultural resurgence activities undertaken publicly (via museums) and privately (through familial journeys).

As Sandra Dudley has explored in the context of the Karenni refugee population living in camps on the Thailand–Burma border, 'becoming displaced by definition changes one's relationships with the material world to which we belong: the world of places,

things and other people' (Dudley 2010, p. 1). Displacement is an embodied experience; refugees and migrants simultaneously seek connection to the place they have left and try to create a sense of home and belonging in their new location. Material objects are important in these processes, contributing to contradictory feelings of being at home and of loss and longing. In the first of two articles featured in this Special Issue on refugees displaced by war, Kasia Tomaszewicz, in 'The Mystery of the Tanganyika Knife and the Rediscovery of the Polish Refugee Experience of Britain's Wartime Empire' (<https://www.mdpi.com/2313-5778/8/3/89>, accessed on 8 July 2024), explores the experience of transitory Polish refugees during and after the Second World War. Inspired by the stories shared with her by her grandmother, a Polish immigrant in Britain, she explores what happened to Polish individuals moved to displaced-person camps across the British Empire during the Second World War and their place in British cultural memory of this war. Through an exploration of these traditionally overlooked wartime travels and experiences, Tomaszewicz puts 'scholarship around refugee experiences, family histories, and material culture into conversation' to highlight the importance of family—even between people who are not blood relatives—and memory, as well as the connections between them. She reflects on how so many conversations about this topic had gone 'unrecorded', with the only physical reminder of them being a carved knife ostensibly carried from Tanganyika. Through this knife, Tomaszewicz explores the concept of material culture borne of wartime experience while also raising significant questions about the role such objects play as both the recipients and transmitters of highly ephemeral memories. She presents a framework for thinking about material culture based around origins, aesthetics, context, and relevance that, as a whole, provides 'a language through which to explore this challenging, under-represented history of the Second World War'.

In her article, "'A Return, a Mirror, a Photograph": Return Journeys, Material Culture and Intergenerational Transmission in a Greek Cypriot Refugee Family' (<https://www.mdpi.com/2313-5778/8/2/57>, accessed on 10 May 2024), Christakis Peristianis explores wartime displacement from the point of origin rather than the destination, through her Greek Cypriot refugee family's return journey to their place of exile. In 2003, as a family, they travelled from the south of Cyprus to the north, to the place that her maternal family escaped from almost three decades earlier. Like Tomaszewicz, she examines an object intimately linked to the unfolding process of her maternal family's displacement: 'a handmade mirror piece that [her] grandfather received as a gift but which the family had to leave behind during their escape in 1974'. During the return journey, they discover the mirror hanging in another house—that of a Turkish Cypriot family. In the absence of the object itself, a photograph is taken and stored in the family's photographic archive. Understood as a 'new (memorial) object' it provides her mother with 'an immediate link to the past', and one that she can take with her back to her new home in the south. The mirror in question—and its subsequent photograph—represents a profoundly complicated example of an ephemeral object and the intergenerational transmission of memories associated with it. While her mother saw the story attached to the mirror as one of rediscovery and reconnection, Peristianis focused on 'a politics of memory emphasizing loss and the anticipation of recovery'. A single familial object (and its photograph) foregrounds the intergenerational interpretation of a divided island's history and embodies 'the negotiation between continuity and change which lies at the heart of the refugee experience'.

Like many indigenous cultures, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples have been written into history as binary oppositions to the West and conflated—despite their heterogeneous range of groups, traditions, and languages—into a unitary and homogenous grouping (Gapps and Smith 2015, p. 96). Rachel Caines, in her article, 'Working Backwards, Moving Forwards: Ephemera and Diversity in Australian Stories of Indigenous Second World War Service' (<https://www.mdpi.com/2313-5778/8/2/61>, accessed on 16 May 2024), uses examples of ephemera from the Australian War Memorial's National Collection to push back against this trend by evidencing the multiple, diverse, and dynamic conceptualisations of what it meant to be Indigenous during the Second World War. She demonstrates the role

of these objects in ‘recovering, recording, and recounting stories of Indigenous military service’ and how those memories and stories have evolved up to the present. The absence of reliable information regarding indigenous soldiers within the Australian army, as well as the contested place of Aboriginals in white Australian national narratives more generally, has resulted in diverse military experiences being obscured within official documents. This causes a significant challenge for museums, even when they want to add nuance to overly simplistic and broadbrush exhibits. Caines argues ‘that ephemera are an important, tangible way for museums to explore the individual wartime experiences of Indigenous peoples and acknowledge their cultural and linguistic diversity’. Rather than presenting an anonymous, generalised perspective of Indigenous war service, Caines posits that the solution lies within ephemeral objects. It is these small items that can offer ‘connections to individual stories, identifying Indigenous personnel, recovering their wartime experiences, and, more broadly, fostering connections between communities, museum staff, and visitors’.

5. Family and Gender

As Marianne Hirsch outlines, family history can provide a powerful way for people to engage with the past owing to its ability to reduce distance and abstraction and due to the emotional resonance that it carries (Hirsch 2008). Recent work with community groups during the centenary of the First World War in Britain has demonstrated how ‘family history has emerged as one of the key ways in which individuals are connecting to commemorative activities’ (Noakes 2017, p. 611). As befits this journal, *Genealogy*, family history, along with the ephemera and material culture that people collect and pass down through different generations, is a central component for understanding experiences of war and informs the final section of this Special Issue. As Bart Ziino notes, the publication of family histories and of the diaries, letters, and autobiographies left by these who experienced both World Wars has become a widespread phenomenon in Europe, Australia, and the United States; it is therefore imperative that we explore this in the context of material culture (Ziino 2010). Furthermore, as discussed by Lucy Noakes (2017), Michael Roper (2009), and Anne Blue Wills (2010), the transmission of family memories of war experience is highly gendered, particularly in terms of the way in which it is often male stories of war that are transmitted across generations by female family members. The articles in this section offer important insights into the multiple roles played by both men and women in the guardianship and curation of family memory and its associated objects.

In Andrew Milne’s article, ‘The Typography of Forgetting: The Unsettling of Dominant Social Narratives in the Resurfacing of a Military Deserter in Family Memory’ (<https://www.mdpi.com/2313-5778/8/2/60>, accessed on 14 May 2024), he confronts the history of a family member who appeared to carve out a successful career in the armed forces but who, on closer examination of his military service record, ‘deserted on numerous occasions (while at home), lost his kit, and was imprisoned and detained for desertion’. The divergence between the shared and accepted version of this man’s military record and the reality, as manifested through a photograph of him in uniform, gives Milne the opportunity to ‘to move away from both the catch-all universal narratives of what it meant to be in the British Army, through the questioning of how individuals, families, societies, and, indeed, nations, remember their pasts’. Milne notes how ‘unsettling’ it can be ‘when it is discovered that an ancestor was not the person they purported to be’. As a result, his article asks important questions regarding the complexity of family memory, the different ways in which soldiers experienced military service, and how dominant ideas of what it meant to be a soldier in the First World War can be contradicted by evidence.

Bruce Scates returns our focus to Australia in his article ‘Making the Memory Book: War-Time Loss and Memorialization through Ephemera’ (<https://www.mdpi.com/2313-5778/8/2/64>, accessed on 20 May 2024). He examines ‘the way the Roberts family drew on wartime ephemera to fashion their own distinctive memorial to Frank [their son]—welding their private loss in more public narratives of sacrifice and remembrance’. As Scates explores, a soldier’s father documents his grief through diaries, letters, ‘and above all else,

the monument of ephemera he assembled'. This enables us 'to chart the contours of that emotional landscape, re-live the moment of loss, and enter an "intimate world" of loss and mourning'. Through this process, the objects accumulated by Garry Roberts relating to his son's death become both a method of reconciling family grief and a temporal monument to the specific moments of his wartime service and subsequent death. Across multiple volumes of scrapbooks, Scates shows how, for the father collecting and collating them, '[E]very moment mattered, every word, every incident, a bulwark against forgetting'. The rationale behind this dedication and the existence of these books is highly complex. They 'may have been a private undertaking—undertaken in domestic space, and confined (for the most part) to a close familial circle. Paradoxically, they reminded Garry Roberts he was never alone in his loss'. Through this, Scates shows how personal loss in wartime existed in both the personal and the public spheres. It was both traumatic and unique to each family and yet also a shared experience amongst thousands of others.

Finally, Susan Grayzel, in her article, 'The Memory-Keeping Daughter: Exploring Object Stories and Family Legacies from America's Modern Wars' (<https://www.mdpi.com/2313-5778/8/3/96>, accessed on 25 July 2024), explains 'how wartime objects can have a special resonance in families as keepers of memory', with a special focus on 'the role of daughters of military participants in preserving the artifacts of their veteran fathers'. Grayzel argues that 'a focus on daughters as caretakers of family military history offers a new way to engage with descendants' histories by showing how the work of such women can contribute to our understanding of modern war and its legacies'. By reframing who we perceive to be the keepers of historical and wartime memory through the guardianship or curating of ephemeral objects, Grayzel's article allows us to reconsider 'what such memory keeping means rather than focusing on these wartime items themselves'. As argued in other works in this Special Issue, the 'value' of ephemeral objects is often linked to the memories associated with them, but it is important to consider what they also tell us about those who choose to preserve them and the often gendered nature of that custodianship and curation.

6. Epilogue

The articles within this Special Issue have highlighted the varied ways in which the ephemera and material culture left behind by war can be used to study the complexity of conflict experiences. This Special Issue offers pertinent examples of how museums and archives have attempted to explain marginalised experiences through objects and the difficulties encountered in that process. It explores how poetry can be reconsidered and reconceptualised as ephemera to help us consider the specific moments of its creation and the transmission of extraordinary 'everyday' moments within and beyond war and genocide and how the histories of those who have been marginalised or become transient through displacement or migration can be uncovered through the understanding of a specific object. Finally, our Special Issue examines how families have constructed histories around the military service of their loved ones, the gendered ways in which they have sought to commemorate their losses, and the tension between the constructed version of history and reality. Our editorial intention is that this Special Issue acts as a manifesto for scholars of conflict regarding the importance of understanding ephemera and the benefits of doing so to offer adequate representation to those people and histories that have been either neglected, forgotten, or suppressed. However, it is equally important to understand that any attempt to connect with these communities and discover more about how they use objects to transmit their histories will be a complex undertaking.

In their co-written article, 'Waiting to Be Discovered? Community Partnerships, the Facilitation of Diverse Memory, and Reflections on Academic Success and Failure' (<https://www.mdpi.com/2313-5778/8/2/62>, accessed on 17 May 2024), Chris Kempshall, Catriona Pennell, and Felicity Tattersall explain their attempts to organise a series of creative writing workshops as a method of working with marginalised communities to 'form a relationship that was mutually enriching and equitable'. Their aim was to 'platform

ephemeral objects that existed within people’s homes (such as photographs, letters, medals, war art, or other physical items) that could be used to convey or transmit a story to be recorded and published through a sensitively managed process of co-production’. However, these attempts were only partially successful, and numerous challenges were encountered along the way. The article, which forms the epilogue of this Special Issue, serves as a moment of contemplation for those who wish to undertake community engagement and co-production. But it also highlights the importance of this work and the need to keep seeking out equitable and transparent ways of engaging with communities to understand the objects that they value, the memories that they help to preserve, and the ways in which they wish to tell these stories. Failure does not change this, and it is the hope of the Guest Editors that this Special Issue, when considered as a whole, reinforces the importance of the material culture of war, the necessity of understanding its role in the transmission of diverse histories of conflict, and the value of approaching the history of conflict through the lens of ephemera.

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