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Ephemera and the Construction of First World War Life Writing

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In the years following the First World War, memoirs of combatants and those who experienced war in other roles proliferated the print market with their autobiographies. People made sense of their war experiences through writing, describing where and how they had experienced the conflict, making sense of the war's place in their life narrative. This writing hinged on ephemera as a vehicle for expression – authors used this material to make sense of their narratives. When life writing about war is looked at through an ephemeral lens—how people related to ephemera, used it in their writing, and understood relatable moments in their life through it—it not only becomes clear just how frequently people imagined and explained the world around them using paper, but also how much paper influenced the everyday. The memoirs consulted for this research consist of approximately seventy pieces of life writing written and (mostly) published by British authors between 1915 and 2018 who had some experience of the First World War. In their life writing, the everyday was explained through common types of ephemera, from real items kept in personal archives to imagined imagery which helped explain the circumstances the authors found themselves in. Writers of memoirs used paper ephemera—whether described, imagined or actually reproduced—to engage their readers and connect with their wartime experiences. Far from being throwaway objects, ephemera structured and influenced life writing about war in ways that profoundly shaped how the British public encountered war narratives.

Introduction

Writing about his demobilisation from active service in the First World War, V.W. Garratt, a private in the Field Ambulance Corps, described his journey home through the ephemera he did, or did not, keep: 'the diaries I had faithfully written had the warmth of close companions, which I was determined to preserve at all costs' (Garratt, 1939: 252). Garratt travelled through Italy, where children 'sang [...] the souvenirs out of our pockets', before reaching London, where 'unscrupulous vultures', mobilization officers, demanded money 'for allowing the smallest [souvenir] items through' (Garratt, 1939: 252). For him, his war experience was summed up through tangible ephemera and small objects, their import—of a war witnessed—imbued on readers through their circulation in Garratt's autobiography *A Man in the Street* (1939). When such life writing about war is looked at through an ephemeral lens—namely how people related to ephemera, used it in their writing, and understood relatable moments in their life through it—it not only becomes clear just how frequently people imagined and explained the world around them through ephemera, but also how much it influenced the everyday. Ephemera are generally small, easily movable items, often printed and often made of or incorporating paper, that were generally designed for a specific short-term purpose, and often included an element of mass manufacture. Following this definition, ephemera from the First World War might include personal items such as postcards and letters, official items such as passports, tickets, and maps, or emblematic items such as medals and flags. Ephemera are a ubiquitous and useful a way of explaining the world, and people turned to these items to translate their recollections of the war into prose. The relationship between ephemera and life writing is present in most memory-writing associated with the First World War. Writers of autobiographical works used ephemera—whether described, imagined or reproduced—to engage their readers and connect with their wartime experiences.

The publication of life writing about war came in waves: in the mid-1910s, while the war was ongoing, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, in the 1970s and 1980s, and in the mid-2010s during the war's centenary. Within these broad periods, there were peaks and troughs. Painstaking work by Andrew Frayn and Fiona Houston has shown that there were two peaks of popularity, in 1928, and again in 1930, from which many memoir authors benefited (Frayn and Houston, 2022: 39). Ian Isherwood's authoritative work on the publishing of memoir in the interwar period reveals the tensions apparent in the publishing industry: between publishers and authors trying to discern 'quality' vs 'quantity', the act of writing as a form of memorialisation, and the role of catharsis within this process (Isherwood, 2017). Subtleties in publishing cultures also dictated how life writing was received. Christine Hallett has noted that while nurses' memoirs

were published during wartime, by the end of the 1920s, very few were widely available, whereas Alison Fell suggests women's war memoirs followed the same waves of publication as men's (Hallett, 2016: 2; Fell, 2018: 136). Not all of these manuscripts were originally meant for print, and some were published posthumously by the authors' children (Meyer, 2009: 128).

Broadly speaking, different groups of people published at different times—exciting accounts by nurses and mid-ranking officers came during the war years, while working-class men, who had perhaps reached a respectable middle-class occupation, published alongside officers in the 1930s. Further working-class accounts were published in a wave in the 1970s and 1980s after many writers had retired and later passed away, which included writing by Black British authors and members of Traveller communities about histories that were obfuscated in earlier accounts. It was generally not until the 2010s that families published the accounts of working-class women, although some were collected in unpublished (although publicly available) form in the 1980s as part of the eponymous collection of working-class autobiography assembled by John Burnett (*Burnett Collection of Working Class Autobiographies*, Brunel University London Archives, 1984–1989).

Autobiographical writing fit into a wider cannon of non-fiction, fiction, poetry and other print works which heavily influenced British cultures of wartime remembrance (see Fussell, 1975; Meyer, 2007; Einhaus, 2011; Isherwood, 2016; and Allitt, 2023). Common autobiographical forms of life writing in relation to war differ slightly, though all share the unifying theme of writing about the self. The term memoir relates to a specific wartime experience the author was describing; autobiography suggests a longer-term look at a person's life, in which war often features heavily; and life writing, broadly defined, constitutes all forms of writing about the self, although it can be explicitly used to describe a genre that was sometimes unpublished but often written for a small audience, such as the children of the author or for public collectors of everyday histories.

Despite the popularity of war books, there remains the paradox that 'out of such an abundance of war writing has come such a limited understanding of how veterans of the Great War interpreted their experiences' (Isherwood, 2017: 159). Nuance in autobiography—which covers genders, non-combatants, and a broad geographical scope—has broadly escaped cultural memory of the conflict, with the white soldier tale, told from the Western Front, remaining prevalent.

Work on the cultural turn within histories of the First World War understands how various forms of print culture have influenced one another. Samuel Hynes described

the dialogue between men's personal narratives of war and literary imaginings: 'So the stories that Sassoon and Graves tell shape and colour the recollections of Private Smith, who never wrote a word about them' (Hynes, 1999: 207). Michael Roper has emphasised that, while there are cultural overlays that influence autobiographical writing, the individual contexts in which life writing was produced deeply affected its composition, with 're-remembering' linked by the 'psychic needs of the past and the present' of the individual (Roper, 2000: 184). The act of re-remembering reveals 'clues about the enduring effects of war' through a reading of life writing focused on how wartime events were described, not necessarily for their 'accuracy', but through their re-telling of important moments funnelled through both the self and the cultural memories of war circulating at the time of authorship, which very often was decades after the events described (Roper, 2000: 200). This complex restructuring of experience through writing is reflected on by Síobhra Aiken, who highlights the sometimes confused nature of autobiographical writing, as fact and fiction merge within literary memoirs, arguing that such works should be read alongside more easily parsed life writing as testimony (Aiken, 2022: 13–14). If we take this cultural and personal melding to be the crucible in which life writing about war was written, liable to influence and change, we can see broad cultural understandings of warfare and the self seep into one another, influencing the way that ephemera were used in each of them. The self-knowing and fragmentary nature of the personal archive from which life writing emerged, as well as the archive's conception on the page, emphasise the nature of ephemera in regulating the self. These pieces of paper and small objects are often personalised enough that a strong memory can be found within them, but they often retain enough of their mass-manufactured nature that the personal melds with a popular whole. While imagery is shared, specific personal meanings are often tied to individual emotions.

Scholarly arguments over authenticity, influence, and the value of memoir, autobiography, and life writing as historical document have obscured the ways these forms of self-description can help illuminate other forms of print culture and their role in shaping everyday life in wartime (Todman, 2005: 159-160; Hallett, 2016: 6). In a rare focus on the possibilities afforded by this cross-print fertilisation, Ann-Marie Einhaus has shown that reading wartime print culture through an ephemeral lens creates rich understandings of how print cultures interacted with one another. Using Julian Barnes's story 'Evermore' as a case study, Einhaus shows how three postcards owned by Barnes's protagonist Miss Moss, sent to the family by her deceased brother, stand in as objects of grief, personal relationship, and fear for the future of military graves. In the story the ephemera act as a narrative device, a hook which links the reader to an emotional world which allows for broader themes to emerge, such as grief, memory

and commemoration (Einhaus, 2021: 29, 41–45). While Barnes's story is fictional, in a similar vein, people who witnessed and wrote about war used ephemera in a way that allowed people into their interior worlds, taking well-known items and imbuing them with personal meaning.

The majority of life writings consulted for this article are by people with little or no publication experience. They all adopted a realist style and produced highly readable narratives of their experiences; some started right in the middle of wartime, while others narrated a whole life history that went from childhood to retirement. Life writing consulted for this research consists of approximately seventy pieces written in relation to experiences of the First World War, and predominantly published by British publishing houses between 1915 and 2018.[1] Many, although by no means all, of the corpus authors explicitly identified as working-class, taking great pains to discuss their childhood and upbringing. If we follow Helen Rogers and Emily Cuming's understanding of working-class life writing as fragments in and of themselves, given their tendency to survive as isolated snippets of print or manuscript kept by family members, the ephemeral nature of these accounts is underpinned by the very mode of their production (Rogers and Cuming, 2018: 183–185). As many of the life writings reveal, they are based on other fragmentary forms, such as letters, diaries, and ephemera, revealing the nature of these items as stitched, adapted, and edited into longer print formats. The very format of these life writings, often personal archives made sense of and laid bare, lends itself to a consideration of how the writers used ephemera to explain their experiences to their reader. Three common devices are used as a way of engaging the reader through ephemera: explaining their war experiences, taking advantage of improvements in print technology to reproduce ephemera, and constructing timelines through its presence in the pages of their life writing. These authors' collective writing reveals the sociocultural construction of how paper ephemera influenced daily life, providing a language and rhythm to experiences of war in the early twentieth century.

Showing Ephemera

Many authors included photographs, maps, and the reproduction of other ephemera in their life writing, which formed important visual and textual additions to the life

1 The memoirs were broadly found through their inclusion in either in the annotated bibliographies by John Burnett, David Vincent and David Mayall or William Matthew's *British Autobiographies*, although some have come from the dataset produced for the 'War Books Boom' project, or through serendipity in the archives. See John Burnett, David Vincent, and David Mayall, *The Autobiography of the Working Class* (Brighton, 1984–1989); William Matthews, *British Autobiographies: An annotated bibliography of British Autobiographies published or written before 1951* (California, 1968).

history being told. The effect of taking the reader on a physical journey with the writer was heightened by the act of including reproductions of certain ephemera, such as important letters or found images. In nearly all autobiographies of officers, a photograph of them in uniform was included as part of the front matter. Ephemera contained within the writing helped the reader visualise a place, person, or a particular experience. These inclusions point towards an authority of experience that allowed readers to imagine the weight of the author, visually consolidating their war experience. In the case of Captain Flora Sandes, a British officer in the Serbian Army, this was quite literal, with their memoir including a photograph of them in their officer uniform wearing awarded medals (Sandes, 1927). Others indicated their authenticity of experience through the inclusion of other ephemera. Captain Angus Buchanan included a number of reproduced sketches and maps of his time in east Africa (Buchanan, 1919). Similarly, the battalion scout Bernard Blaser included photographs, sketches, and maps in his memoir of his time fighting on the Eastern Front (Blaser, 1926). A trend among the autobiographies of wartime bureaucrats was to include ephemera that they had a hand in drafting, or that illustrated a major event they had to deal with while in post. An extreme example of this is a facsimile reproduction of an order to hand over a spy for execution that was included in the memoir of Joseph Broadhurst, Assistant Provost Marshall in Cairo (Broadhurst, 1936). The inclusion of facsimile works was, on the whole, reserved for authors with publishing houses who allowed and had the budget to support their inclusion. There were also the material considerations of possessing ephemera, and the right kind of ephemera, to be published. A collection of personal photographs of professional experiences, for example, was more likely to be included than photographs of working-class privates, presumably due to publishers valuing of certain narratives over others.

Working-class men and middle-class women more commonly included images and reproductions of ephemera when they produced life writing in later life. Arthur Gair, a colliery engineer, published his autobiography in the early 1980s. In it, he included facsimiles of his discharge papers and a letter confirming his war experience from Armstrong Whitworth, the manufacturing company where he had been assigned to undertake war work (Gair, [1982]: 36–9). Similarly, the family of Ishobel Ross, a middle-class woman from Skye, who worked as a cook in the Scottish Women's Hospitals in Serbia in 1916, found her diary and photographs at the 'back of her desk' after she died (Ross, 1988: xv). Her daughter published her diary with accompanying photographs, maps, excerpts from newspaper clippings, and a single facsimile of a letter sent by a Captain she had met while abroad.

Alternatively, people could reproduce textual ephemera in writing, which they did across the class spectrum. Writers often acknowledged the letters and diaries which helped jog their memory, providing opportunity for direct quotation. Life writing of all kinds was often informed by letter writing and other forms of self-narration which occurred during wartime (Hynes, 2000: 208–209; Meyer, 2009: 128–130). Ian Isherwood argues that the very act of rifling through old letters and other items became a 'vital way to show the reader [...] a physical process of remembering' (Isherwood, 2017: 28). For example, Sandes makes reference to their 'very scrappy diary' and 'little notebook' that allowed them to write their autobiography (Sandes, 1927: 16, 19). Jack Jones, a miner from South Wales, devoted a whole chapter of his 1937 autobiography to reproducing letters and postcards he sent to his wife and mother while he was on active service. These were kept, although, as Jones claims, 'they are not what can be called illuminating' (Jones, 1937: 154). His written narrative before and after each letter provides a self-analysis of his mental state through the printed material. Because this analysis is present, it does beg the question why Jones decided to reproduce the letters in full. He seems to include them as a personal testimony to his experiences, a way of authenticating what he went through and how he communicated this to his family – a microcosm of wartime experience. As he writes of the final letter in the chapter, sent while undergoing treatment in hospital for war wounds, it 'is only useful [...] as a reminder of my state of mind about the time it was written. There are unfinished words, and there are gaps, and the punctuation is more slovenly than ever. I write and advise with the authority of one speaking from beyond the grave' (Jones, 1937: 166). The polished and unpolished narratives, evidence of his present self connecting with his past, highlights the construction of autobiography as a form of self-narrativization, an oscillation between the wartime self and the person who is able to write in peacetime. In Jones's case, his autobiography was written on the eve of another European war, twenty years distant from his experiences of the first; his awareness of his mental state through the gaps left in his letters points to a moment where he is writing from what he thought was his deathbed, a moment he now must rationalise as part of a longer life history.

Other pieces of life writing are so heavily interspersed with excerpts from varied ephemera that they almost seem to be more quotation than life writing. In contrast to some of the personal material in life writing which focuses on personal archives, political writers could draw on more official forms of paperwork to seek legitimacy and cement themselves as part of a wider group movement. Writing his memoir in the late 1920s, an administrator of the fleet based in China during the First World War wrote, 'I have a lot of papers [...] from that time—dossiers of episodes, my weekly letters to

the Inspectorate, and others' (Tyler, 1929: 259). Margaret Bondfield, the first woman to become a member of the King's Privy Council, the Cabinet, and chair the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, was asked to write a book about her life for the benefit of the 'younger generation'. In the preface of her memoir she thanks her private secretaries in the Trade Union office, Gottsman and Holmes, noting that 'The latter, in particular, was responsible for preserving large quantities of the data which have made this book possible' (Bondfield, [1948], 9–10). In her chapters about the war years, Bondfield quotes heavily from ephemeral paperwork, including missives by the Independent Labour Party, The Workers' War Emergency Committee, pamphlets published by the International Socialist Bureau, and statements by politicians such as Ramsey MacDonald and J. R. Clynes. For Bondfield, the ephemera she produced as part of her work, and encountered in her professional life, form the backbone of her reminiscences. Her memoir, in part, reads as a way of preserving these ephemeral documents in a public space, a pressing concern given the circulation of ephemera and the fact that, as temporary pieces of paper, they were on the verge of being lost or relegated to obscure political archives by the late 1940s, when she was preparing her manuscript.

The act of taking ephemera during wartime was not a peculiarity in and of itself. Throughout the war there was a tendency among British soldiers to take items they sometimes euphemistically referred to as 'souvenirs'. Often these were taken from the dugouts of retreating troops, although there were accounts of people scavenging from the dead. Occasionally, the two converged. Arthur Simpson, a working-class private from York, later recalled his disgust that a British soldier had robbed the war dead. Simpson recounted that in 1916 he helped capture the Schwaben Redoubt. After it was captured, he found one of their men, killed by a shell, at the entrance to a dugout:

> His pockets were found to be full of German souvenirs, all sorts of personal possessions which men cherished, and going down into the dugout we found that all the German wounded appeared to have been robbed. This, to us, was something new in meanness, and some of us felt there was something like retribution in the way our man had met his death as he emerged from the dugout (Simpson, [1970]: 75).

More broadly, ephemera were used as a point of cultural connection across different fighting troops. Recounted in his aforementioned autobiography *A Man on the Street*, private V.W. Garratt described his experience accompanying prisoners of war through the Levant. During this experience, he was struck by moments of shared humanity gained through showing each other ephemera. One prisoner of war 'showed me homely

photographs of his family with emotional pride' (Garratt, 1939: 211). Trekking with these men, they advanced over previously occupied ground, and searched abandoned dugouts routinely. This produced a certain emotional effect in Garratt, who wrote:

> I was moved by the sight of small articles that signified a common humanity. 'Letters from home,' snap photographs of smiling women and children, old socks and handkerchiefs, an empty purse, small mirrors, a shaving-brush, and a variety of oddments and clothing all lay strewn about as symbols of a once ordered life. How many of the owners were also now part of the universal wreckage? (Garratt, 1939: 211-2)

A special subset of reproduced ephemera includes items the authors collected during their travels and wished to reunite with their original owner. These items constitute a type of ephemera Alexandra Peat has described as a 'haptic travelling object', offering a tactility that drew people to take and recirculate them across borders (Peat, 2023). So powerful was their draw that descriptions and reproductions were included in some people's life writing, flattening the tactility of the ephemera that so enticed them in the first instance. For the ephemera that was reproduced, this created an echo of the items that so enticed its new custodian.

Garrett was so moved by the destruction wrought by war, symbolised by ephemera, that later, passing near Jerusalem, he picked up two photographs, one of a young boy and his mother, the other of a young boy standing alone. This in and of itself was not necessarily extraordinary. What was unusual is that these photographs were printed in his memoir with the caption 'I found these Photographs outside Jerusalem in 1918' and 'If identified please write to me at the publishers'. There is a deliberate ambiguity in Garrett's reproduction of the photographs—no details are given about them beyond those on the page they are printed on. The photographs could have come from a soldier, Allied or Belligerent, or been lost by a family fleeing the violence of war; there are few visual clues in the photographs themselves. One photograph is of a mother and son, the corner torn off, the other of a young boy, the bottom of the photograph ripped. Both photographs may not even be from the same family group. There may have been writing on the reverse of the images, although clearly no address, but the rips in both of them suggest that, at some point, something identifying might have been written at the bottom.

Almost in direct opposition is the inclusion in Henry Fitch's memoir of a message to a Turkish family, whom he entrusted with personal items during a retreat from Serbia in 1915. In preparation for the retreat Fitch and his troops reduced their gear to a

minimum, 'each member of the party being allowed what he could pack into one third of a kit bag. We shall take the rest as far as possible then dump it' (Fitch, 1937: 202). That time duly came, and he had to leave half his kit with a Turkish man, who 'swore it would be quite safe with him' and said it would be there when he returned. Following this account of the practicalities of the retreat is a small aside in a page break in the memoir: 'The address was 81 Karageorge Street, and if he or his should read this book I would like them to know that there were many private treasures among my kit and I shall hope one day to call and recover it' (Fitch, 1937: 206–7). What is particularly striking about the two accounts, which directly reach out to very specific readers, is how this direct address acts as an invitation to active dialogue. This manner of speaking directly to an imagined, but highly specific, reader forces a type of intimacy.

In these two accounts by Garratt and Fitch, the intimacy shared is created by a direct violation of the personal details of effective strangers, which are publicly shared, be this in the form of a photograph or an address. This is a remarkable violation of the privacy of the people affected—the Turkish family and the unknown individual who left photographs outside Jerusalem. While these accounts increase an intimacy between reader and author, they do so at the expense of a family who are unlikely to ever see the printed evidence of this. The inclusion of their ephemera also offers a titillating experience for the reader, who is privy to these private intimacies created between people and the keepers of their ephemera.

Ephemera as Gateway

Describing landscape through ephemera—real or imagined—constituted a second mechanism for authors drawing their readers in to share their experiences. In his 1970 autobiography, dictated to and written by J. Seymour, Silvester Gordon Boswell directly addressed his readers. In the middle of describing his work with horses as part of the Veterinary Corps during the early days of the Battle of the Somme, he suddenly stopped, changing his line of thought, asking:

> that cathedral at Albert—I don't know whether you've ever seen a postcard of it- but when they shelled it-there's a big angel on the top of Albert Cathedral—and somehow she was hit in the feet and she tipped over. And she was looking down on the cemetery yard and when you looked up—especially a boy like me that was away from home, I never met any Gypsy boys, nobody belonging to me, I felt a lonely man-and when I looked up I used to think of my mother, when she used to say: "Close your eyes my children. Let's bless the Lord for our daily bread today, the bread that's sent us." And then my mind used to fly back to my mother (Boswell, 1970: 73).

In this moment, Boswell used the ubiquity of wartime postcards that showed the destruction of religious and cultural sites as a vehicle for placing his imagined reader into communion with him. The dual nature of the postcard—a public image beset with a private message—is particularly apt here. These imagined postcards created such a strong mental image that the very rhythm of the storytelling was altered, the only time a direct-to-reader address was used in the book.

What is particularly striking about this example is the assumption that ephemera could act as a shorthand for place-based experience. Albert Cathedral was the subject of a range wartime postcards, including an official photograph published in postcard form by the *Daily Mail*, and was recreated as a model in postwar exhibitions which showed the toppled statue standing on top of the ruin, hanging poised to drop at seemingly any moment. The 'angel' that Boswell refers to was in fact a statue of the Virgin Mary carrying her child, offering even more of a connection between the front, the home, and the family than Boswell himself realised in his autobiography. There is both a familiar point of reference for the image, and the invitation to better understand Boswell's emotional turmoil when seeing this alien landscape, changed through a destructive act. As Boswell describes elsewhere in his autobiography, his idea of home focused on a few key towns, such as Blackpool and Skegness, with his family providing an emotional attachment to these places, as thoughts of his mother were prompted by and juxtaposed with Mary looking earthwards.

Boswell was not alone among the life writers considered in this study in using ephemera as a way of linking people and place. Ephemera became an imaginary companion on journeys through foreign lands, a shorthand to describe the landscapes that people engaged in war work were encountering for the first time, and exemplars of these new places to readers who had little frame of reference for the events described in life writing. These ephemera were, in general, less specific than items which represented the destroyed cathedral. Instead, there is a notable contrast between the specific form of the destruction of Albert and the much broader imagining of the landscape in other life writing.

Several life writers used common types of ephemera to explain their surroundings. In 1915 Lady Muriel Herbert, who was part of a medical relief operation, published a memoir of her time in Serbia, based wholly on excerpts of letters sent to her sister. Blurring the line between memoir and epistolary collection, the immediacy of using ephemera to explain experiences comes to the fore. When Herbert tries to explain the landscape she had been travelling through to her sister, she wrote: 'as far as the eye could see, were mountains and mountains and still mountains, a wonderful panorama, looking like one of those raised maps' (Herbert, 1915: 47). The maps in question were glazed tactile

models of mountain ranges, popular in museums in the early twentieth century, a piece of ephemera made less ephemeral through its preservation and display. This understanding of Serbian mountain ranges through raised maps was one that, Herbert hoped, would allow her sister to grasp the scale of a landscape she would never see.

This use of ephemera to articulate landscapes was not limited to maps; Christmas cards were often used to describe particularly notable landscapes. One officer, Frank Harley James, escorting prisoners near Dasht-e Lut in modern-day Iran, claimed 'no Christmas card of the old days could suggest the amazing brightness of the moon and stars, the incredible beauty of the jagged, snow-covered hills' (James, 1934: 97). Similarly, a doctor who met her brother in Paris on the way back to her hospital in France described Boulogne, a city visibly marked by war, as a place 'where everything was like a snow [sic] Christmas card' (Hutton, 1928: 132). The business of the city and its military significance as a port town were wiped clean by the snow, evoking a soft and peaceful landscape. As readers who could only understand viewpoints from the authors' descriptions, this provocation of a special type of idealistic paper reproduction offered a sense of the magic of the moment the writer experienced.

Further into his memoirs, James once again uses ephemera as a way of articulating his memories. James's memoir begins in 1916, in France, with only scant information about his previous army experience. All the reader knows is that, at some point prior to 1916, James served in the colonial forces in India. He explained that his previous garrison had 'faded into a collection of picture postcards' (James, 1934: 97). Perhaps picking up on the idea of the postcard as a form of tourist ephemera, he articulated his colonial service through these travel-based items. Postcards were popularly used in the early 1900s, so this visual metaphor of fading used a trope that was, at best, thirty years old. For James, place itself faded into the flatness of a postcard—nostalgic, perhaps important to keep hold of, but ultimately detached from the present. Instead, his memories had become a series of items that could be metaphorically picked up, flicked through, and put away again.

Here, ephemera allows authors trying to locate feeling in a particular place, real or imagined. For one man, having images of locations on walls was a way of expressing place-based nostalgia, longing, and aspiration in interwar Britain. Francis Anthony, a career soldier, was captured. In the prisoner of war camp he found himself in, he lamented his lack of anyone to send a letter to in England. He was an orphan, and all of his friends were in the military, on active service abroad. He felt this loss of connection to England very keenly. He describes how, after the war, when he had left the Army, he used ephemera to add refinement to his rented room, by creating cardboard frames for pictures of rural scenes, with red-roofed houses and tidy gardens (Anthony, 1932:

142, 148). These pastoral scenes tied him to an idealised, almost fabricated, version of England with which he could not connect during his time abroad in the Army. Although highly constructed, place-based nostalgia mingled with feelings of being an outsider which were funnelled through visual representations of an imagined England.

These understandings of ephemera as points of emotional connection between author and reader indicate the powerful role the material could play in communication about war. Here, ephemera were used as a way of bridging experience and emotion in a way that helped the reader picture the surroundings which prompted the writer's deeper introspective thoughts. As a nexus of memory making, ephemera had the power to act as powerful personal locators of significant moments. This was born out of the subject material as visual, material, and common, but also of how ephemera generally allowed for people to imprint upon them. As semi-mass manufactured material, they contained emotional memories in a way that was both personal and public, private and shared. As a literary device, this recognisable ephemera allowed readers to journey with the writers, into real and emotional landscapes that, for many, could only be imagined.

Ephemera as Mechanism

The final and perhaps most practical element of ephemera's use in life writing, is how it creates rhythm and structure. Like authors using ephemera to indicate place, ephemera were used to denote movement or emotional change. A letter, for example, might precipitate the writer changing location, deliver earth-shattering news, or create a moment of interpersonal connectedness across continents. In these accounts, ephemera are of transient importance for the everyday movement of people in wartime. T.R. Cambridge's account of his time in Kenya, for example, started with a 'chit' calling him to his Camp Commandant's office, shortly followed by a travel warrant and travel tickets (Cambridge, 1921: 9–14). At the most basic level, the paper orders received prompted Cambridge's movement, facilitated by ephemera which allowed him to access transport.

There can be tension in reading ephemera in this manner, for as much as the ephemera prompts a reaction it could be said that it is the message and not the paper item which produces these active effects. This tension has been drawn out in other work about ephemera and documents. Lisa Gitelman emphasises the dual nature of items such as tickets, as 'patterns of expression and reception discernible amid a jumble of discourse', yet noting that 'they are also familiar material objects to be handled — to be shown and saved, saved and shown — in different ways' (Gitelman, 2014: 3). In a related vein, Gillian Russell argues that some forms of ephemera are performative, allowing particular social events to take place, which elevates the item into an active

object (Russell, 2020: 21). This paper changed and adapted how people related to the world, and how they were able to move in it.

There is something in the materiality of *how* ephemera was encountered in First World War life writing that makes it worth taking seriously as a subject in its own right. For instance, one life writer recalled a soldier she was housing telling her all about his fiancée, and how he 'showed me her first letter to him which was almost worn out with constant folding and unfolding' (Scales, 2014: 158). In this example, the sentiments in the letter and the letter itself are fused, the object providing an anchor for an expression of love that crossed continents. The tactile reminder, as well as the words included, helped situate this ephemera in the physical world, as a point of memory and also as a symbol of time and space.

Passports constituted a particular difficulty for writers who crossed borders. Although they had been in use prior to the First World War, passports across Europe were heavily used during the war, as governments sought to understand who was in their territory and control the movement of people across the continent (Torpey, 2000: 111). Passports could be turned into living documents which visualised temporary agreements between travellers and nation states (Cannon, 2017: 143). These practices developed unevenly, and resulted in some states that were slower to impose travel documentation than others (Torpey, 2001: 257–264). During the first few months of the war, Percy Brown, a working-class war photographer originally from rural Shrewsbury, had his passport taken away from him by the British General Headquarters in St. Omer, after he had been taking photographs in Belgium without an official permit. This did not deter him, and after a few months had passed, 'it was not a difficult matter to get a new passport at the Foreign Office and cross the channel again'. Some time later, he was tricked into boarding a train to Germany and captured. Despite his protests to the contrary, given his camera, photographic slides, and sketches, he was treated as a spy. During questioning his ephemera were used against him. In one interrogation his passport was laid out in front of him, and, combined with other paperwork, the officer 'picked out a stamp, a visa, initials, a paragraph in the papers, and built up my journeys' (Brown, [1934]: 192, 195).

One British writer minutely detailed the effect of these bureaucratic papers on everyday life when he became stranded in German-occupied Belgium. Talbot Baines Bruce was a young pilot who accidentally became trapped 120 miles south of the German-Dutch border. Almost immediately, a Belgian man helping him escape told him that if someone asked him for his papers, he should say he was 'only fifteen and had not got a passport' (Bruce, 1930: 14). Further trouble came when he needed to pass a bridge into a town where his companion told him further help would be forthcoming.

Sentries on the bridge asked 'about 20 per cent of the passengers crossing to show their passports' (Bruce, 1930: 40).

The issue of the missing passport became such a problem for Bruce that he forged one. At first, he and a family helping him decided to try and steal the passport of a family friend who resembled Bruce. Its loss, he was told, 'would only be a small matter to the owner, as he could procure another on payment of a few marks' (Bruce, 1930: 118). This attempt to procure a passport led to nothing, and so Bruce was told he would have to forge one. In order to do so, he had to have his photograph taken. Bruce recalled:

> The photograph was the difficulty. When a passport was issued the local authorities put their stamp half on the portrait and half on the paper itself, and this meant tearing off the photo on the passport and replacing it with my own. This could be easily done: the delicate part of the business would be forging the stamp (Bruce, 1930: 119).

Replacing the half stamp over the photograph on the stolen passport his friends produced proved the hardest bit of the exercise:

> there was no suitable ink in the house, and it was hard to discover the right thing. We must have spent at least ten marks on ink and pens before getting materials that would answer properly. However, after two or three days' experimenting, and spoiling three of the photographs, we completed the passport to my satisfaction. Honestly, it was the best forgery ever seen; I would have defied any German official, other than those at the office itself, to regard it as otherwise than genuine (Bruce, 1930: 122-123).

Over the course of his rather novelistic memoir, the passport almost takes on the role of a talisman, as the paperwork necessary to ensure his safe passage through Belgium. Leaving the safety of his friend's house to attempt a border crossing, he recalled 'With passport and pistol I felt certain of getting home' (Bruce, 1930: 155).

In Bruce's writing, passports, or lack thereof, dictated his ability to physically move through towns and villages, but also acted in more abstract ways through national borders. He wrote his memoir based on some 'rough notes' he scribbled after his return to England in 1918. Despite the issues there may be with recall, the prominent role that a Belgian passport plays in his memoirs speaks to the overwhelming importance of the document as a way of moving about the country. His lack of official ephemera was, in many ways, more important in the account than his use of ephemera after he had forged the document. The passport was a means of moving around Belgium

unnoticed, and through the German-Dutch border without repercussions. Encounters with officials who demanded to see identification documentation, attempts to find a passport, and the stress of interactions with sentries after the forgery had been made, created a temporal rhythm to Bruce's account. The ephemera of identification here, although a practical one, also provided a narrative structure to the memoir, one which was bound in the very real effects the ephemera of bureaucracy had on people living in occupied states.

The absence of certain kinds of ephemera, or the experience of brushing up against the need for documents at odd moments, can also offer a kind of temporal punctuation to life writing. In some ways similarly to Bruce, a lack of ephemera distinctly marked the account of Ernest Marke, a Sierra Leonean boy who travelled to Liverpool in 1917. He had stowed away on the SS Adansi and travelled to England, later trying to find work on ships. Although he had experience working on the SS Adansi, he had no formal papers, and so had to lie about the paperwork he had which proved his age and experience. Marke was only 15 when he was asked to take up a post as an officer's steward on his next ship, the SS Prahsu, and had to lie about his age, saying he was 17 years old. The clerk asked 'for my discharge book. I told him I had lost it' (Marke, 1975: 21). The same happened to him when he later tried to join the Army. His friend Tommy, with whom he enlisted, explained how to go about tricking the recruitment officer:

> "I was eighteen last week," remarked Tommy, who had now accepted his fate. "I have papers to prove it. I'll go first. If they take me they'll take you since I'm smaller than you; if I can be eighteen so can you—you've lost your papers, that's all!" (Marke, 1975: 24–25).

This lack of identifying ephemera did not hamper Marke, other than giving him some slightly tense encounters with officers. The fear, however, of not having the correct ephemera, and its potential to have profound impact on the movement of individuals. This fear was certainly justified given the tense racial relations which were changed and exacerbated by war. The Alien Restriction Act, enacted in 1914, meant that foreign nationals were documented by local police, and heavily monitored and regulated after the war's end. Paper, bureaucratic or otherwise, shaped the physical and emotional landscapes of individuals in wartime, emerging in their narratives as a catalyst for change.

Marke and Bruce's experiences coalesce in the memoir of Dr Emilie Hutton, who served with the Scottish Women's Hospitals in Serbia. On re-entering England in 1921, she was fiercely struck by how passports created feelings of alienation as a way of

tracking the movements of people of different nationalities. Coming into Dover, she recalled feeling:

> a thrill of delight that I was home. When I actually set foot on shore I felt, however, very far from being at home. The jostling passport business made one feel that one was something of an alien, and it was all so different from the Balkans, where I had travelled everywhere without thinking of providing myself or the unit with a ticket [...] I, who had never once felt lonely in the wildest portions of the Balkans, felt very lonely indeed in England (Hutton, 1928: 291).

This experience made the end of an arduous and long war experience stand out. Far from being a constant presence which provided some kind of rhythm to her experience of living abroad, Hutton's encounter with passports marked her return to her own country as a moment of profound change in someone experiencing this tightening of bureaucratic regulation for the first time.

Conclusion

For people who chose to articulate their experiences of the First World War in print or manuscript, ephemera proved powerful tools to engage with their readership. Authors of life writing showed a willingness and desire to explain the world through paper objects to which their readers could relate, suggesting the crucial nature of this paper material in the everyday. Ephemera entered into the psyche of the writers, and shaped the ways they articulated and structured their life writing. Far from being insignificant pieces of paper, these items, real and imagined, provided points of collective imagination, visual understanding, and narrative structure to people who fought in the First World War. Writers' experiences of living with ephemera seeped through onto the page, developing public understandings of how these slips of paper could socially and culturally perform.

Writers combined the imaginative power of ephemera with its physical presence. From well-worn family letters, to standardised forms of documentation which precipitated movement between countries and continents, the tangibility of the item and its message were interlinked. No clearer was this than in the case of bureaucratic documents. Official documents embodied state power, enabled access, and, in some cases, were quite literally the difference between life and death. When possible, the ephemera that so dictated the lives of individuals were reproduced in published life writing, offering to show readers snippets of information that corroborated and complemented writers' prose. Ephemera were complex—used in a variety of ways

which crossed personal and public divides, blurring political documentation with heart-felt family keepsakes. This complex relationship with the material is shown in author's descriptions of it, which veer from the inclusion of official documents, to personal letters written by a dying man to his family.

Part of the power of ephemera lays in this meaning-making potential of the material, which has proven a durable way of understanding the First World War. In the early 2000s, Paola Fillipucci conducted a study of place-making in Argonne, in north-east France, to try and determine how people understood the intense damage the region had sustained during the First World War. Instead of offering words, the majority of people 'volunteered pictures rather than narratives, specifically old picture postcards' (Filippucci, 2013: 221). The power of ephemera to act as items of meaning-making allowed this visual, rather than verbal, discourse to happen. The act of showing ephemera was assumed to be more powerful than articulating feelings of ancestral and local loss.

People did not have to independently remember life experiences to include them in their autobiographies—personal archives of ephemera did that for them. From the use of a scrappy diary to jog an author's memory, to the inclusion of letters sent to family members, life writing was full of memories accessed only through pieces of paper. Far from being throwaway objects, ephemera structured and influenced life writing about war in ways that profoundly shaped how the British public encountered war narratives. These personal collections made their way onto the page through reminiscences about their use (or lack thereof), or through direct inclusion in the published life writing itself. Life writing about the First World War across the twentieth century recognised this reliance on paper, translating it into pages that were in some cases equally as durable as the ephemera they were describing. As commonplace items, ephemera helped shape memory through life writing, seeping into the page, and providing a point of imaginative connection that could be understood through their ubiquity in everyday life.

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