

Fact Finding or Research?

Making Better History.

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Overview

- ♦ What counts as “good” historical research?
- ♦ What makes a “good” history book / exhibition / museum?
- ♦ What’s the difference between collecting/curation and research?

Local histories

some examples

- ♦ What are your first impressions of these books?
- ♦ What kind of reading do they invite?
- ♦ Do they ask questions and answer them?

Some issues to consider

- ♦ We have data – now what?
- ♦ Is there one historical truth or multiple historical truths?
- ♦ Can historical work be reliable and authoritative without being certain?
- ♦ Do emotions and myths have a place in historical work?
- ♦ Is objectivity important or achievable?
- ♦ Can we risk a hypothesis about these events/phenomena?
If so, how do we put flesh on the bones?

“There is no knowledge in libraries
... rather there are codes of various
kinds which, with ingenuity, we can
reconstitute as knowledge.”

Kieran Egan

Approaches to Research

- ♦ Organise your research – taxonomies and classification
- ♦ Keep track of where you have been and are going.
- ♦ Look for evidence you don't have.
- ♦ Look for conflicts/contestation/drama.
- ♦ Do more with less – leave things out!
- ♦ Contextualise your work.

Contextualising Your Research

- ♦ Maps
- ♦ Timelines
- ♦ What is going on in the rest of the
 - ♦ Community
 - ♦ Region
 - ♦ State
 - ♦ Country
 - ♦ Empire
 - ♦ World
- ♦ What key themes are you engaging with here?

Resources

♦ Asking for help

- ♦ Librarians
- ♦ Archivists
- ♦ Information specialists

♦ Print media

- ♦ Books
- ♦ Journals
- ♦ Newspapers
- ♦ Theses, etc

♦ Visual media

- ♦ Photos
- ♦ Maps

♦ Non-print and digital media

- ♦ Websites
- ♦ Radio
- ♦ TV
- ♦ Film

Realms of understanding

(from Kieran Egan)

- ♦ Somatic
- ♦ Mythic
- ♦ Romantic
- ♦ Philosophic
- ♦ Ironic

Somatic

- ♦ Dealing with the senses and emotion – vision, hearing etc but also sadness, delight, anger, fear, compassion, humour.
- ♦ Do these elements “belong” in historical work?
- ♦ If so, how do we deploy them?

Mythic

- ♦ Stories, legends, mysteries, metaphors
- ♦ Entities with a narrative trajectory which fix meaning and identity. Is it fact or fantasy?
- ♦ Images we create in our minds.
- ♦ “Stories are our best tool for helping one person to understand what it is like to be someone else.” *Egan*
- ♦ What are some Australian historical myths/legends?

Romantic

- ♦ Good and evil, heroes and villains.
- ♦ Individual against the elements/fates.
- ♦ Courage and cowardice.
- ♦ Triumph over adversity/constraints.
- ♦ Emotion over rationality.

Philosophic

- ♦ Abstract/theoretical ideas – justice, patriotism, loyalty, sacrifice, power, nationalism, democracy, gender, class, race, belief, prejudice, ideology.
- ♦ Take your thinking beyond the particular.
- ♦ Creating “metanarratives” – “the big picture”.
- ♦ Individuals as agents in wider historical and social processes.
- ♦ No simple answers.

Ironic

- ♦ The difference between what is said and what is meant.
- ♦ A meaning other than the overt or literal.
- ♦ Disavowing the search for certainty and being comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity.
- ♦ “the modulating tool of intellectual life.”

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Photo courtesy SLQ



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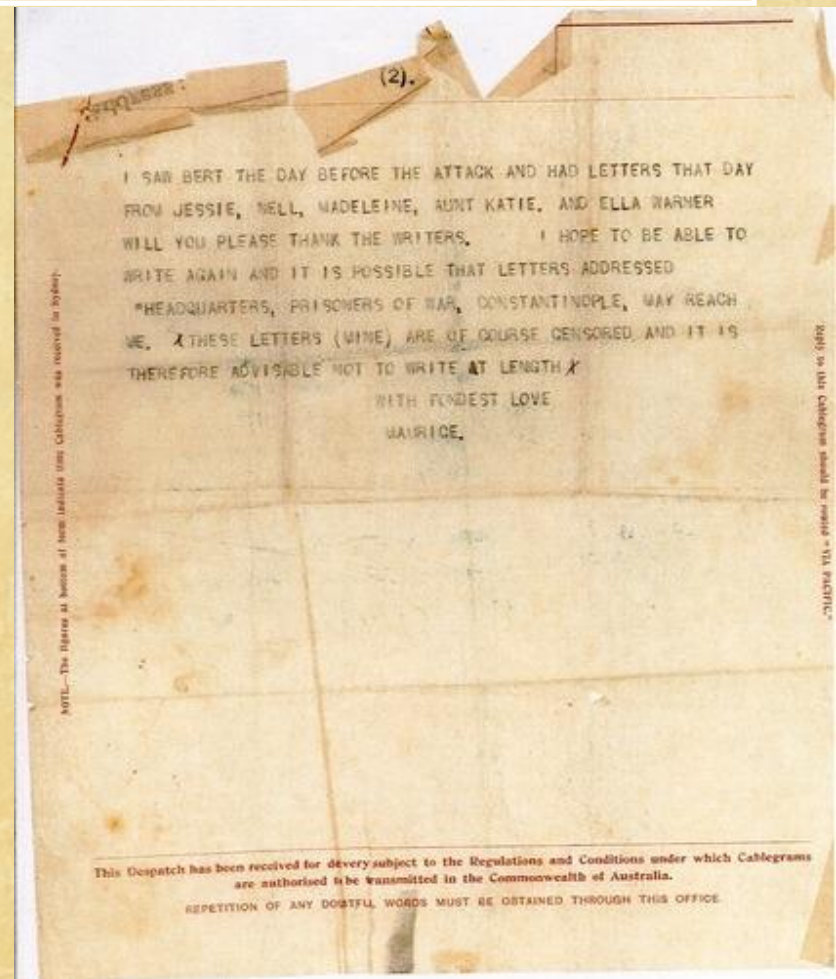
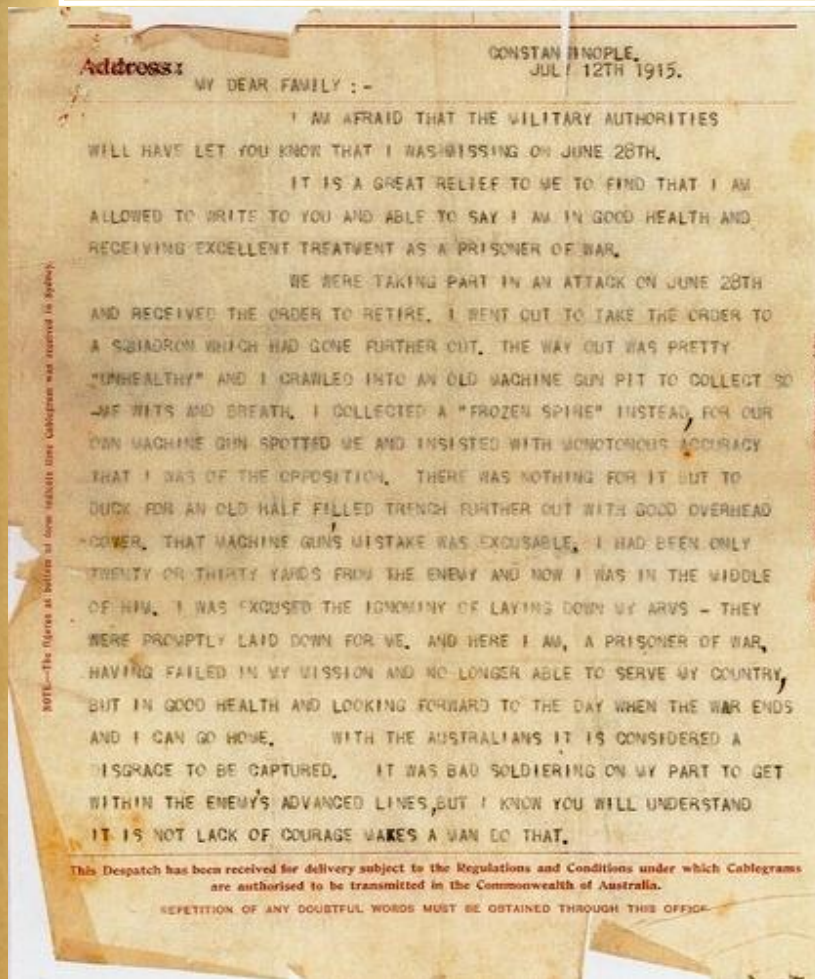


Photo courtesy SLQ



Photo courtesy SLQ

Delpratt Letter



Address:

CONSTANTINOPLE,
JULY 12TH 1915.

MY DEAR FAMILY :-

I AM AFRAID THAT THE MILITARY AUTHORITIES
WILL HAVE LET YOU KNOW THAT I WAS MISSING ON JUNE 28TH.

IT IS A GREAT RELIEF TO ME TO FIND THAT I AM
ALLOWED TO WRITE TO YOU AND ABLE TO SAY I AM IN GOOD HEALTH AND
RECEIVING EXCELLENT TREATMENT AS A PRISONER OF WAR.

WE WERE TAKING PART IN AN ATTACK ON JUNE 28TH
AND RECEIVED THE ORDER TO RETIRE. I WENT OUT TO TAKE THE ORDER TO
A SQUADRON WHICH HAD GONE FURTHER OUT. THE WAY OUT WAS PRETTY
"UNHEALTHY" AND I CRAWLED INTO AN OLD MACHINE GUN PIT TO COLLECT SO
MUCH WITS AND BREATH. I COLLECTED A "FROZEN SPIRE" INSTEAD FOR OUR
OWN MACHINE GUN SPOTTED ME AND INSISTED WITH MONOTONOUS ACCURACY
THAT I WAS OF THE OPPOSITION. THERE WAS NOTHING FOR IT BUT TO
DUCK FOR AN OLD HALF FILLED TRENCH FURTHER OUT WITH GOOD OVERHEAD
COVER. THAT MACHINE GUN'S MISTAKE WAS EXCUSABLE. I HAD BEEN ONLY
TWENTY OR THIRTY YARDS FROM THE ENEMY AND NOW I WAS IN THE MIDDLE
OF HIM. I WAS EXCUSED THE IGNOMINY OF LAYING DOWN MY ARMS - THEY
WERE PROMPTLY LAID DOWN FOR ME. AND HERE I AM, A PRISONER OF WAR,
HAVING FAILED IN MY MISSION AND NO LONGER ABLE TO SERVE MY COUNTRY,
BUT IN GOOD HEALTH AND LOOKING FORWARD TO THE DAY WHEN THE WAR ENDS
AND I CAN GO HOME. WITH THE AUSTRALIANS IT IS CONSIDERED A
DISGRACE TO BE CAPTURED. IT WAS BAD SOLDIERING ON MY PART TO GET
WITHIN THE ENEMY'S ADVANCED LINES, BUT I KNOW YOU WILL UNDERSTAND
IT IS NOT LACK OF COURAGE MAKES A MAN DO THAT.

This Despatch has been received for delivery subject to the Regulations and Conditions under which Cablegrams
are authorised to be transmitted in the Commonwealth of Australia.

REPETITION OF ANY DOUBTFUL WORDS MUST BE OBTAINED THROUGH THIS OFFICE

(2).

I SAW BERT THE DAY BEFORE THE ATTACK AND HAD LETTERS THAT DAY
FROM JESSIE, NELL, MADELEINE, AUNT KATIE, AND ELLA WARNER
WILL YOU PLEASE THANK THE WRITERS. I HOPE TO BE ABLE TO
WRITE AGAIN AND IT IS POSSIBLE THAT LETTERS ADDRESSED
"HEADQUARTERS, PRISONERS OF WAR, CONSTANTINOPLE, MAY REACH
ME. THESE LETTERS (WINE) ARE OF COURSE CENSORED AND IT IS
THEREFORE ADVISABLE NOT TO WRITE AT LENGTH.

WITH FONDEST LOVE
HAIRICE.

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Photo courtesy SLQ

THE BLOOD VOTE

"Why is your face so white, Mother?

Why do you choke for breath?"

"O I have dreamt in the night, my son,
That I doomed a man to death."

"Why do you hide your hand, Mother?

And crouch above it in dread?"

"It beareth a dreadful brand, my son;
With the dead man's blood 'tis red!"

"I hear his widow cry in the night,

I hear his children weep,

And always within my sight,

O God!

The dead man's blood
doth leap.

"They put the dagger into my
grasp,

It seemed but a pencil then;

I did not know it was a fiend a-gasp,
For the priceless blood of men

"They gave me the ballot paper;

The grim death-warrant of doom,

And I smugly sentenced the man to death
In that dreadful little room.

"I put it inside the Box of Blood

Nor thought of the man I'd slain,

Till at midnight came like a whelming
flood

God's word—and the Brand of Cain.

"O little son! O my little son!

Pray God for your Mother's soul

That the scarlet stain may be white again
In God's great Judgment Roll."

Written by W. R. Winspear, and drawn by Claude Marquet, St Andrew's Place, Sydney.



An anti-conscriptionist poster depicting Prime Minister Billy Hughes as the devil lurking behind the wavering voter

Photo courtesy AWM

Thanks for listening

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