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The Celluloid Front Line: Case Studies in Western Front Memorialisation From British, Canadian, and Australian National Cinema 1999-2019

by

Christopher Daniel Tubb

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

July 2019
University of Southampton

Abstract

Faculty of Arts and Humanities
Film Studies
Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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This thesis is concerned with the national cinemas of Britain, Canada, and Australia’s continuing involvement in the process of Western Front memorialisation and what role remembrance plays in the shaping of the perceived contemporary national self. Through Pierre Nora’s concept of lieux de mémoire and other theorists’ work on cultural memory, such as Jan Assmann, Maurice Halbwachs, and, more recently, Jay Winter, it examines three case studies from each of these Commonwealth nations to reveal how they articulate aspects of their dominant narratives framing the memory of the Great War. These case studies, taken from the period of 1999 to 2019, are: The Trench (William Boyd, 1999), Passchendaele (Paul Gross, 2008), and Beneath Hill 60 (Jeremy Sims, 2010). By approaching these works through a comparative, ethnological style of analysis, each is shown to demonstrate an exploration of their unique dominant narrative traditions, as well as a sense of contemporaneity in the way they choose to represent these, with the British sense of disenchantment related to the Great War, of Canadian exceptionalism embodied in the soldiery, and Australia’s Anzac myth.

It begins by laying out the cultural and production context, studying first how these dominant narratives developed before delving into how the films themselves came to production. With this context in place, it undertakes a three part textual analysis, first looking at how the films reconstruct the Western Front on-screen, then comparing it to the contrasting landscapes of home, before finally examining how the climatic events that the films centre around – the first day of the Somme, Canadian victory at Passchendaele, and the detonation of the mines beneath the Messines Ridge – are rendered cinematically as events worth remembering for a contemporary national audience. Before concluding it
surveys the reception of the case studies in their nations of origin to discover to what extent they were viewed as successful in bringing aspects of the cultural memory to life on-screen.

As this thesis will examine, cinematic representations of the Western Front hold a vital place in the continuing legacy of the Great War in Britain, Canada, and Australia through memorialising specific sites and poignant events for contemporary audiences. Although these films are objects of remembrance, gazing back on a war that took place almost a century previous, they reveal a great deal about the national perception of the experiences that occurred on the Western Front, as well as how this relates to the present national identity, as they narratively mould the cultural memory into a contemporarily pertinent form of commemoration.
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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: Christopher Daniel Tubb


I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission

Signature: Date: 01/07/2019
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I would like to thank my parents – Donna and Derek Tubb – and my brother James for their continual encouragement while undertaking this PhD. And to my grandfather Donald Woodley, who ignited my interest in the soldier’s experiences on the battlefield.

Finally, I wish to dedicate these final lines to Private Horace Woodley (1898-1918), who lies in the Jerusalem War Cemetery, and to Alfred Edwin Tubb (1898-1987), of the Royal Flying Corp, who was able to make it home. Your names are not forgotten.
Chapter 1  Introduction: The Western Front in Memory

One summer with its flowers will cover most of the ruin that man can make, and then these places, from which the driving back of the enemy began, will be hard indeed to trace, even with maps.¹

John Masefield, *The Old Front Line* (1917)

Published in the immediate aftermath of the Battle of the Somme, British poet John Masefield’s *The Old Front Line* (1917) anticipated a time when the current war, the Great War, with all its mutilation of landscape and combatants, would be little more than ‘a romance in memory’.² The artworks moulded from the personal memories of this conflict, then later the cultural memory, whether they be tragic or patriotic, have adapted and evolved in their form of remembrance, preserving its vividness and national relevance in the succeeding generations’ consciousness. These remembrances have often returned, as will be examined here, to the specific trench dominated landscape of the Western Front. It is back here that the combatant nations’ cultural memory has often sought to unearth the contemporary significance this traumatic period still holds. As Jay Winter observes, ‘sites of memory are places where people affirm their faith that history has a meaning’.³ For the three nations discussed in this thesis, Britain, Canada, and Australia, the Great War casts a shadow over the narrative of the twentieth century and their perception of their national heritage. Masefield knew that most the physical marks of the war would one day be unrecognisable. This process is natural and need not necessarily diminish people’s perception of the landscape as meaningful so long as they can gain a conceptual impression of what it is imagined it could have been like and, equally, possess a desire to call to mind and re-present events that occurred on this national identity defining frontier.

The particular form of representation that concerns us here, that shapes the perceived could have been experience of the Western Front, is one that was barely coming of age at

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² Masefield, p. 11.
Chapter 1

the time of the conflict, film, and as such I shall be analysing three cinematic case studies that create narratives within this landscape in recent decades. In reference to the influence of cinema on the cultural memory of the Great War, Winter observes:

By suggesting the monumental scale of the conflict, in a way prose rarely could do, cinema mythologized the war as a vast earthquake against the backdrop of which the petty conflicts and hopes of ordinary mortals were played out. Here again, the superior power of images over words has had a greater impact on popular attitudes to war than most commentators have recognized. This is as true today as it was a century ago when war cinema was in its infancy.4

Cinema, in the period of the war, became central to the mythologisation of the conflict, and founded a tradition that has continued since. Even within his prose work with photographic accompaniment, Masefield pointed to cinema as the site to witness the Somme Offensive, stating ‘all this bit of the old front line was the scene of a most gallant attack by our men on the 1st of July. Those who care may see it in the official cinematograph films of the Battle of the Somme’.5 It must be noted, however, that in another essay on memory, Winter cautions ‘while film mediates the construction of individual and group memories, and in particular memories of war, it does so in ways which are never mechanical and which, in their variety and subtle power, reach different collectives in different ways. Film disturbs as many narratives as it confirms’.6 The Western Front as it appears in the cultural memory is reinterpreted in distinctly different ways than it would be to history; its meaning is much more contingent on when, who by, and how it is remembered than the context and complex factors that shaped the original event.

The representations examined in this thesis were produced in the period of 1999 to 2019. These two decades encompass the end of the millennium, with the closing of the century that in some respects began in the trenches of the Western Front, follows through the 2000s, to the culmination of the centenary celebrations of 2014-18, and into 2019. Britain, Canada, and Australia, have each invested in many forms of memorialisation, from large-scale commemorative events, setting up educational initiatives, to cinematic

5 Masefield, p. 43.
endeavours for contemporary national and international audiences. Within this period I’ll be closely analysing three specific films, one from each nation, to demonstrate how cinematic strategies and modes of filmmaking are utilised to represent the Western Front experience within the national cinemas of Britain, Canada, and Australia. By this close analysis of three case studies I intend to illustrate film’s place as a form of memorial within a wider landscape of cultural remembrance. The direction, therefore, I shall be taking is a comparative, ethnological approach in line with two recent studies of the War’s impact on commonwealth nations, namely Mark David Sheftall’s *Altered Memories of the Great War: Divergent Narratives of Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada* (2009) and *Exhibiting War: The Great War, Museums, and Memory in Britain, Canada, and Australia* (2017) by Jennifer Wellington. Both these works study the way in which the Great War was remembered and preserved differently in Britain and its former Dominions during the interwar period, from 1919-39, examining the evolution of art and modes of exhibition, particularly through the language of remembrance, to discover how the dominant narratives of the conflict within each nation were shaped in its aftermath. Where the following analysis diverges, however, is its focus on national cinema in more recent decades to discover how these Western Front narratives are represented long after the war and what meaning, or, more precisely, what forms of meaning, they still have today.

As the Battle of the Somme holds such a striking place in Britain’s cultural memory of not only the Western Front, but the twentieth century overall, I have chosen to examine William Boyd’s *The Trench* (1999). Set in the forty-eight hour period preceding the Somme Offensive of July 1st 1916, *The Trench* depicts the day-to-day life of a small group of young men in Kitchener’s Army as they hold the line, waiting for the advance. Confined in these orderly ditches, these young men – soldiers by necessity – live through the final two days, then hours, then minutes in the titular trench. This is the brief window of time that was similarly sketched by Masefield in *The Old Front Line* and marks a watershed moment in British history that, as I shall demonstrate, manifests on-screen a narrative tradition that remembers the war as a fundamentally tragic, irredeemable, moment in history. At 07:30 on the morning of July 1st, the setting for the climax of the film, British troops went over the top into a no-man’s-land that would claim almost 60,000 casualties that day alone, with a third of those killed in action. It was the bloodiest day in the history of the British army. Moreover, as Paul Fussell in his seminal *The Great War and Modern Memory* describes, the economic ruin caused by such catastrophically costly victories, not
to mention defeats, and the prolonging of the conflict, led to the end of British imperial supremacy on the world stage. The memory of the war for Britain, with the Somme as its watershed moment, would become defined later in the century as a mismanaged waste of young life. The unique national experience and its specific traumas, therefore, has shaped the memory and meaning of the war very differently in Britain than in Canada or Australia. Describing this contrast, Wellington notes ‘this perception of the war as catastrophically pointless is in marked contrast to the entrenched view in both Canada and Australia’. It may, in these nations too, hold elements of tragedy, but these are underscored by a sense of national coming of age and mark a moment not of ending but of beginning. To summarise, with a view of elaborating later, it is the difference between sacrificing for a greater purpose, as is the case in these ex-Dominions’ dominant narratives of the conflict, where for Britain what little was gained in victory is rarely tallied up as having been worth the cost.

The second case study was significant when it was produced for being the highest budgeted Canadian film up to that point, showing a remarkable degree of investment from national institutions. Paul Gross’s Passchendaele (2008) culminates in the Battle of Passchendaele, otherwise known as the Third Battle of Ypres, which raged from July to November 1917. The inspiration for the film’s climax came in the final stages of the battle where Calgary Highlanders, otherwise known as the Fighting Tenth, were able to hold a significant portion of the line before the Canadian Corp could regroup and finally take the high ground on Hill 52 north of the village. To frame this historic episode, Passchendaele follows Sergeant Michael Dunne (Paul Gross) as he is first injured on the Western Front, returns to Canada to recover, and while convalescing falls in love with a nurse. In Calgary he witnesses the influence the war has had on his homeland, and more specifically on the attitudes of some of its citizens, before eventually choosing to return to the frontline in time for the titular battle. This film is focused more on a singular protagonist than on the ensemble shown in The Trench and the way it contrasts the soldiers on the frontline with the landscape of home marks several significant social factors within the cultural memory of the war that I shall highlight later in this introduction.

For the third and final core case study, I will be analysing Beneath Hill 60 (2010), written by David Roach and directed by Jeremy Sims. This Australian biopic is based on

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8 Jennifer Wellington, Exhibiting War: The Great War, Museums, and Memory in Britain, Canada, and Australia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 15-16.
the real life story of Captain Oliver Woodward and his command of the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company’s mining efforts beneath the Messines Ridge in the Ypres Salient in 1917, culminating in the detonation of Hill 60, the largest man-made explosion up to that point. The traditional narrative of the Great War in Australia, exemplified by the Anzac myth, has often focused on the Eastern campaign, and especially the landing of Australian troops at Gallipoli. This event was later mythologised in one of the nation’s most highly regarded films, the appropriately named *Gallipoli* (1981) directed by Peter Weir. *Beneath Hill 60*, as I shall argue, was made at a time when there was a wider cultural shift away from the hyper-masculine Anzac image previously foregrounded, such as in *Gallipoli*, and as part of this evolution the film looks toward a little known Australian contribution on Western Front, through the experience of miners there, to navigate this slight cultural shift within the popular Anzac tradition. In all three of these case studies, as shall be demonstrated in the following chapters, the representation of the cultural memory shapes the national myths in ways that are contemporarily relevant to on-going social discussions in the period they were produced.

To close this section, let me clearly state that the theme of this thesis is the cinematic memorialisation of the Western Front, and this shall be explored through the close analysis of the above mentioned case studies from the national cinemas of Britain, Canada, and Australia. By the term *memorialisation* in relation to cinema I am considering a deliberate act of drawing attention to an event in the past to preserve it in the national consciousness, with nationally specific characteristics, meanings, and purposes for return, thereby keeping the memory both alive and culturally pertinent. To begin analysing this concept, the following introduction will be comprised of three sections. The first will lay out the theoretical foundations of the above stated theme, exploring the concept of sites of memory and how this relates to cinema. Next, as a way of further establishing the subject matter of the three case studies, I will undertake a preliminary analysis of how the past is framed by each film through use of opening title cards. This shall lead me to explain the research questions that will be addressed throughout. It is my intention that by setting up this title card framing device in the introduction I can establish the way in which these films approach the period and the relationship this exhibits between the contemporary national

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identity and the memory of the Western Front, which will be expanded upon in later chapters. The final section of the introduction will then lay out the overall thesis structure, with descriptions of each chapter and their purpose towards advancing this study of cultural memory and the memorialisation of the Western Front on-screen.

1.1 Sites of Memory: The Western Front and Cultural Memory

Sites of memory, and their inherent presence in the cultural memory, lay at the heart of any discussion of a contemporary society’s relationship with a past landscape, particularly one that has been bestowed with such a multitude of symbolic meanings as the Western Front. Note, for instance, the value each of the case studies put upon the locale in their titles, with *Passchendaele* and *Beneath Hill 60* using specific toponyms, the names of the places, while *The Trench* instead chooses a noun that defines the space soldiers on the Western Front were forced to inhabit. And even this was a late change in the production, originally being titled *Somme*. All, through a simple choice of language, hold distinct Western Front associations for the nation in which each film was produced. Pierre Nora, in the first volume of his seminal *Realms of Memory* series, established the profound relationship between cultural memory and what he terms as *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, proposing ‘memory fastens upon sites, whereas history fastens upon events’.¹⁰ In Nora’s view, cultural memory forms through national triumph and trauma and is tethered by particular sites associated with these memories. Moreover, Nora defines a fundamental dichotomy between ideas of cultural memory and history in the following passage:

Memory and history, far from being synonymous, are thus in many respects opposed. Memory is life, always embodied in living societies and as such in permanent evolution, subject to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of the distortions to which it is subject, vulnerable in various ways to appropriation and manipulation, and capable of lying dormant for long periods only to be suddenly reawakened. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is always a phenomenon of the present, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of those facts that suit it.¹¹

¹¹ Nora, p. 3.
Simply, history tries to be critical, defined by demonstrable facts, knowing it is incomplete, whereas memory is always personal, defined by ‘symbolic detail’, reimagining what it can from the haze. Memories are therefore more malleable for storytelling, they can be told in old ways and new to shape their meaning, and be passed on between generations in a more distinctly narrative and emotive form. It is this, the way cultural memory is held as sacred, foregrounding the current relevance of specific experiences from their national past, and its symbolic rather than intellectual authority, that I will be exploring through the analysis of cinematic Western Front representations and how they are connected to specific sites of memory for the nations in question.

Interspersed throughout the former Western Front, from the Belgian coast and across northern France to the Swiss border, are memorials proclaiming that here a historically significant battle took place, the outcome of which would shape nations. The Somme, Passchendaele, and the battles along the Messines Ridge are fixtures in the narrative of the first half of the twentieth century; they are unavoidable to those who wish to retrace how collectively the former combatants have reached this present point. It is unsurprising then that these sites, these battlefields, hold a special place within the cultural memory of a wide range of societies across the globe. The need to connect to these experiences led to battlefield tourism becoming a popular pastime in the aftermath of the war, the multitude of guidebooks and travel texts bearing testimony to this cultural compulsion. A series of Illustrated Michelin Guides were published for travellers to the Somme, Amiens, Ypres and more, describing the tactical elements of the battle and the troops movements. The accompanying photographs gave tourists the opportunity to visit these sites and contextualise them with images showing what scarcely a year or two before this French or Belgian field looked like. As David William Lloyd describes ‘the landscape which drew travellers to the battlefields was largely an imaginary one. It was not the sites themselves which attracted travellers, but their associations. They were the place where loved ones or fellow countrymen had fought’. It was a successful industry as well, with the Michelin Guides selling in Lloyd’s estimation 1,432,000 million copies in France, England, and America before January 1922. In this way the physical landscape was etched with the

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12 Nora, p. 3.
14 Lloyd, p. 103.
memories of those loved ones who fell there, these are their associations, and it was only through active remembrance and marking of such that the dead could be honoured. For many pilgrims to these sites of memory there was, and still is, a desire to catch a glimpse of these battlefields not as they are, but as they were.

If we were to tread the same ground today as Masefield did, what we would see is farmland once more, interspersed with the rebuilt villages, towns, and cities, with maybe a tidy ‘restored’ trench line that could be measured in metres, not miles, for tourists to explore, and, present still, lines of grass covered earthworks that one could be forgiven for mistaking as the remnants of Iron Age defences in the seemingly placid timeless way they flow over the countryside. The scattered wooden crosses over makeshift graves have now turned to stone in purposefully arranged memorial gardens. Even this though is part of the process of memory turning to history. As Nora details, milieux de mémoire, the actual environments within the memory, cannot remain untouched settings where cultural memory is a genuine part of the everyday experience of a nation, particularly in the modern globalised era where history is perceived through media as a ‘thin film of current events’.15 These sacredly held sites, for instance war cemeteries, endeavour to preserve memory with a sense of cultural intimacy as lieux de mémoire through overt memorialisation, thereby retaining a ‘residual sense of continuity’ between the then of memory and the now in which we live.16 Cultural memories, in this way, must be actively sought after and interacted with in order to stay meaningful and out of the often-perceived impersonal grasp of history. It is for this reason also that battlefield representations have taken such diverse forms since the Armistice, as at particular times certain moments in the recent past have seemed more relevant to the contemporary concerns than others as lieux de mémoire to revisit, and to do so, in our case, on-screen.

Cinema, having entered the twentieth century in its infancy, had come by the end of the Great War to be key in the combatants’ propaganda and a powerful medium through which the people at home could witness current events in a communal way never before imaginable. In 1918, Victor Oscar Freeburg, when describing this young art, proclaimed:

A tremendous resource which distinguishes the photoplay from all other narrative and dramatic arts is the possibility of representing an action in its natural setting. For the first

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15 Nora, pp. 1-2.
16 Nora, p. 1.
time in the history of the arts which mimic human happenings it has become possible for
the spectator to go to the very spot where the action takes place.17

Freeburg’s understanding of place and natural setting demonstrates the early discourse that
confronted and discussed the abilities of the medium, not quarter of a century into its life, a
point that will be examined in more depth in Chapter 2. It was through the cinematic power
of allowing the audience to, in a sense, witness landscapes seemingly in their natural form
that led to the art’s growing popularity. This was important both during and after the war,
particularly for Australia, as the distance between the culturally significant sites and the
homeland were so vast that few could afford or had time to physically travel to them. The
cinema became a kind of transportation method. To have an affect on the audience, that is
to say make them feel, to stir up the emotions, is to save the cultural memories from the
gradual, inevitable senescence, the neutralising degradation to mere rote facts or
uncertainties and to ingrain this period in yet another generation’s memory. Representations do more than just visualise the past; they keep it present in the national
consciousness.

Pioneer of the field of General Semantics, Alfred Korzybski, in his chapter ‘On
Structure’ in Science and Sanity (1933), defined what has come to be known as the map-
territory relation through the utterance ‘a map is not the territory it represents, but, if
correct, it has a similar structure to the territory, which accounts for its usefulness’.18
Although seemingly a simple remark, this is vital when it comes to ideas of representation,
for although the representation of the thing is not the thing itself, its similar structure, that
is to say its descriptive form, is capable of creating a functional model that can be used to
gain an understanding of the terrain you wish to navigate. What this demonstrates at its
foundational level is that communicating ideas is by necessity abstract; understanding
comes from the form of communication and representation as often the entire territory,
whether that be a literal geographic territory or a theoretical field, is too large and full of
nuance to be completely understood by any single traveller trying to navigate it. This
highlights the question of representational authenticity that will continue to be asked of
works depicting the Western Front from the time of the war to the present. Very few,
whether they be spectators, critics, or the filmmakers themselves, would assert that a
representation of such a dramatic period as the Great War could even fractionally sum up

18 Alfred Korzybski, Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General
something as immeasurable as its true essence, particularly when one thinks cross-generationally. Yet these representations continue to be made and the iron harvest of the Western Front has intermittently resurfaced on cinema screens around the globe.

1.2 Framing the Past: Title Cards and Structuring Cultural Memories

In his study War Beyond Words: Languages of Remembrance from the Great War to the Present, Winter examines the significance of language in framing the memory of the war, while also acknowledging the impossibility of anyone fully being able to transmit its meaning. He uses the term ‘language’ to refer to a variety of creative arts, including speech, prose, and cinema, to discover how they ‘framed our meditations on war’. Winter does, however, note that due to film’s place as often popular entertainment targeted to large audiences, few filmmakers can ignore box-office concerns, particularly when films cost so much to produce, making the view of its power to authentically represent history questionable, but even with this in mind cinema occupies a privileged position in the popular imagination surrounding the past. With this question of authenticity consistently arising, I am now going to analyse a technique used in the case study films of framing the body of the narrative within two sets of title cards. This, I argue, attempts to lend a sense of authenticity to the events fictionalised by the films by first inviting the viewer into the past with text conveying relevant information, though selective, in line with actual historical truths and, once the narrative has ended, concludes with a postscript to emphasise the significance of the actual event that the audience just viewed a representation of. Accordingly, the way these films establish the history in the very first few moments is vital to analyse when searching for its mythmaking qualities and the supposed meaning gained from communally remembering this way.

19 Winter, War Beyond Words, p. 2.
20 Winter, War Beyond Words, p. 69.
21 Winter, War Beyond Words, pp. 69-70.
Figure 1: British soldiers advancing through the mist.22

The first image we are shown in *The Trench*, before the first title card, is a company of soldiers with fixed bayonet, and eyeline, distinctly aimed towards the left of frame as they advance through the mist (Figure 1). Only two men are visible to any significant degree, both wearing the distinct rounded Mark 1 steel helmet of British troops, with more appearing at the side of the frame. As they advance, the shot turns into a close-up of Private Billy Macfarlane (Paul Nicholls), one of the ensemble of young men we shall get to know throughout the film. The footage has been slowed and desaturated, lending a preternatural quality to the scene as the score by Evelyn Glennie and Greg Malcangi builds towards a denouement. The image fades to black and two title cards are then shown:

In the high summer of 1916, in Northern France, the British Army prepared for the biggest offensive of the First World War.

As hundreds of thousands of troops massed in the rear, waiting for the order to attack, a reduced force was put in place to hold the front line trenches.

This text, quite simply, establishes for the audience the historical context that serves as setting of the film, the British frontline in late June 1916, and our characters, the troops holding the frontline. In two short sentences, the gravity of the place and the precarious
Chapter 1

lives of the individuals living here, by the phrasing, are thereby foregrounded as the subject matter. In commemorating a bespoke British trauma, *The Trench*, in its opening title cards, establishes the “hundreds of thousands of troops” waiting for the order to attack, and who are likely going to become victims of the Big Push. By specifying the numbers here *The Trench* informs, or for the most part reminds, the audience of the scale of the upcoming offensive and the losses accrued by it. By underscoring this cultural context with the sombre music the film establishes a tense, claustrophobic tone that is matched by its cramped trench setting.

*Passchendaele* opens similarly with two title cards that contextualise the historic setting and uses language that refers to Canada’s own cultural memory of the conflict:

In 1917, Canada was a young nation of less than 8 million people.

The First World War had been raging for three years and Canadian troops were mired in combat.

As the war claimed unprecedented numbers of men, recruitment efforts at home accelerated.

Over 600,000 Canadians entered the inferno.

One in ten never came home…

*Passchendaele*

By the phrasing of the introductory sentence, the film foregrounds that Canada was a young nation in this period, prefiguring the discussions of national identity and origins in relation to this film. Canada gained its independence from the British Empire on July 1st 1867; by the time of the Great War it was still a fledgling, but growing gradually prosperous, nation, with an increasing ardour to form a sense of identity all of its own and apart from their Anglo-French forebears. Through this first sentence writer-director Paul Gross highlights the youthfulness of the nation and, furthermore, that its population was proportionately modest if not small. Nevertheless, as the next line informs us, Canada had been involved in the conflict essentially as quickly as they were able to mobilise in 1914. By referring to the size of the nation, the film sets up the idea of the Canadian people punching above their weight during this conflict, a key point of pride in the national mythology since. Furthermore, recruitment, the necessity of it and the wasteful nature of
the lives of those who volunteered or were later conscripted, is highlighted as a core concern for the period (and therefore of the film) in the third line. The question of enlistment and its impact should not be underestimated, and it being highlighted in the first few lines points to its importance in both the film and the memory of the war in Canada. It was such a significant concern that the 1917 election revolved around the topic and resulted in a controversial Unionist victory, which saw conscription enforced under the Military Service Act. In the words of Canadian historian Tim Cook, the national outcry at this decision almost ‘tore the country apart along linguistic, regional, and class lines’. At the core of one of Canada’s most enduring myths of the war, the Vimy Legend, is the moral of unity, one that embodies more than just the single battle but the entire mythic framework of Canada’s experience. As a result, the Military Service Act has become somewhat an embarrassment for a previously proud volunteer army, particularly since it caused this sense of social cohesion, one where multicultural and multi-ethnic peoples becoming one, a centrepiece of Canadian identity to this day, to be seen as splitting at the seams. The way in which nations portray war, whatever war that may be, will focus, not surprisingly, on the issues that most concerned them about the period and what has endured in the memory. Connections to the specific cultural memory, and oftentimes-cultural trauma, will shine through in any such representation. The second title card serves to indicate the scale of losses, and it does this before invoking the name of the battlefield and title of the film. In this Canadian cultural artefact – a narrative of the war produced in tandem with the ninetieth anniversary commemorations – the nation’s youthfulness, and with this the corresponding concept of innocence, the issue of recruitment, and the sacrifices made are put forward as what you need to know and remember going in.

As with both The Trench and Passchendaele, the language of the title cards of Beneath Hill 60 forthrightly frames the following representation of history in the audience’s mind:

By 1916 the Great War has reached a stalemate. The front line stretches all the way from the English Channel to the Swiss Alps.

Millions of lives have been lost.

In a desperate attempt to break the deadlock, civilian miners are brought in to tunnel beneath enemy lines. It is the start of a secret, silent, underground war.

The following is based on real events...

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Here, key words set up the focus, namely the “civilian miners”, indicating that this is not about disciplined soldiers as many war films are but a different breed of combatants, and the goal of these men being tunnelling “beneath enemy lines”. David Roach, in considering the kind of film he wished to write, asserts ‘I knew the kind of war story I did not want to write: that predictable, blokey yarn with a thinly disguised nationalistic message. Having these kind of “outsider” characters at the core of the story could help me avoid that trap’. From these title cards, Roach’s implication that the film is not looking at an idealised image of a soldier, a simple retelling of the traditional Anzac myth, is upheld. Instead, they establish a narrative focusing on the tension and the strain on the nerves of men who, through their own choice, find themselves in this claustrophobic subterranean warfare. Moreover, Ina Bertrand has noted that, both during the war and after, those who enlisted early were held in high regard in the Anzac myth, particularly those who first landed at Gallipoli, whereas those who were slow to enlist were considered shirkers and sidelined. Yet these parameters have been stretched in more recent decades to include men who, in earlier times, would have been outside the mainstream boundaries of the Anzac myth. Therefore, I argue, in its focus on men who are not necessarily considered fighters in the traditional sense, and by its biographical focus on an individual perceived as enlisting late, Beneath Hill 60 is able to present a narrative that avoids many of the outdated trappings of the now mythologically charged perception of the Anzac, while nevertheless upholding its core ideals, in a way that represents an episode of the conflict that is highly suitable for mass-audience consumption and widens the national focus of remembrance to these ‘outsider’ characters. This preface concludes with a final reminder that “the following is based on real events…”, lending what follows a sense of authenticity throughout as the audience has been made aware that the underlying foundations of the narrative are a matter of actual historical record.

The reason this contextualisation is so vital to the analysis of a film interacting with the cultural memory, and why I am foregrounding it here, is that the perception of a place and a film comes not merely from what is seen and heard in the moment, but by the preconceived conceptions assembled before experiencing it. These opening title cards are

part of the film in a technical sense, but they are before the story in a structural one. The purpose of them is to establish what you need to know and, if you are already historically aware, to foreground what aspect of the war the filmmakers are trying to represent. Therefore, they both serve to include what is considered relevant and exclude what is not. The decision on these matters reveals how each nation remembers the period and begins the discussion of this thesis with a sense of the divergent narratives on show. Nora’s observation on the emotional resonance of micro-histories, as opposed to taking a broader historical view, is relevant here:

We spotlight selected elements of the past, concentrating on “representative samples.” Our memory is intensely retinal, powerfully televisual. The much-touted “return of the narrative” in recent historical writing has to be linked to the ubiquity of visual images and film in contemporary culture – even if this new narrative is very different from traditional narrative, which was episodic and self-contained. […] From countless “microhistories” we take shards of the past and try to glue them together, in the hope that the history we reconstruct might seem more like the history we experience. One might try to sum all this up by coining a term like “mirror-memory,” but the problem is that mirrors reflect only identical copies of ourselves, whereas what we seek in history is difference – and, through difference, a sudden revelation of our elusive identity. We seek not our origins but a way of figuring out what we are from what we are no longer.26

With the focus on micro-histories, as Nora observes, there comes a cathartic disconnect from all the surrounding debris of the past to instead focus on the personal narratives, not a comprehensive historical view or the complex politics of guilt and trauma. By framing the films through the utilisation of title cards, the past of the film becomes its own micro-history, shaping the memory of the war into a narrative of national significance.

Following Korzybski’s observation that ‘a map is not the territory it represents’, I will study these three cinematic representations of the Western Front as a form of contemporarily relevant war memorial with a focus on the cultural landscape.27 These films depict abstractions of historically significant battlefields built on national myths and fuelled by a need for national remembrance. I do not claim that they are maps to actual lived historical events, rather I am proposing that an understanding of the map-territory

26 Nora, p. 13.
27 Korzybski, p. 58.
relation can inform our opinion of how historical films can represent a culturally infused micro-history to a contemporary national audience in a way that reimagines and projects a pertinent aspect of the Western Front experience. The representations themselves are useful for their visualisations of what it is imagined this traumatic and formative period could have been like from the viewpoint of those looking back at the event being represented on-screen, rather than what the historical event was like in actuality (if such a thing could be depicted). These films reclaim and represent moments in the recent past in a way that tries to stake a claim on the historical territory, specifically for the national cinema depicting it, through the recreation of a historical memory landscape. With this in mind, I have decided to focus this thesis on the following research questions. Firstly, how do the cinematic modes and conventions utilised in these films serve to represent these reconstructed visions of the Western Front within a larger landscape of remembrance? Secondly, what continues to inspire filmmakers and financiers to memorialise nationally significant Western Front narratives on-screen and to what extent does the rhetoric of remembrance surround these films? And lastly, how does the divergent cultural memory of the Great War in Britain, Canada, and Australia shape the differing visions of the experience of the Western Front and the contemporary meaning drawn from it? It is to these questions that we shall continue to return.

1.3 About this Thesis: Methodology and Structure

Two key factors serve to ground the methodology for this thesis within the framework of how the Western Front is represented in British, Canadian, and Australian cinema. These are, to be specific, the contextual relationship the film has with its nation of origin – including when it was produced and released, by whom, why, and, to a lesser extent, how – and textual analysis of the films themselves. It is by carefully examining the relationship between text and context that I shall demonstrate how the case studies – *The Trench*, *Passchendaele*, and *Beneath Hill 60* – distinctively utilise the cultural memory of the Western Front within its national discourse in a way that serves the present as it simultaneously memorialises the past. Narrative is an essential part of this. When writing on the divergent narrative traditions of Britain and its Dominions in the inter-war period, Sheftall states ‘collectivities, like individuals, must rationalize and render coherent experiences that are perceived as abnormal, bewildering, and very often traumatic. Collectivities, like individuals, do this by recollecting, or perhaps more accurately, re-
imagining, the experiences as narrative’. Through this comparative analysis of narrative films, I am borrowing from the ethnological tradition that allows me to both draw links and identify characteristic national elements, which would be less distinct without contrasting viewpoints and the films as representations, along with the cultural motives behind them, particularly when one considers the shared history of these three nations. Undertaking a comparative approach, for this reason, provides an excellent opportunity for discovering how the cultural memory of the Western Front continues to make itself felt in the twenty-first century in different societies in ways that are both shared and unique, while revealing cinema’s place in transmitting these deeply felt memories within and between nations.

As to the structure of this thesis, I shall begin by laying a foundation of understanding as to the historical background of the relationship between Western Front and its representation in the national cinemas of Britain, Canada, and Australia both during and after the war. As no single chapter can summarise this history in any comprehensive fashion, I have chosen to focus on the question of cinematic potentialities posed by Peter Wade and D. W. Griffith, who both were, at the time of writing in 1915, outsiders looking toward the ‘European War’ and asking how film as a medium, and particularly narrative films, may be able to represent this conflict in meaningful ways in the same manner as other art forms have in past generations. Through this framework, the chapter will function, in contrast to those following it, as a broader survey rather than analysis for the purpose of establishing the cinematic legacy of the Western Front in these three nations by the turn of the century.

With this historical backdrop established, the following chapters will each examine one specific aspect of The Trench, Passchendaele, and Beneath Hill 60. The focus in ‘Chapter 3: Take Up Our Quarrel: Production Background and the Role of National Cinema in Preserving Heritage’ will be the circumstances surrounding the production and the social context of each. This will consider the rhetoric surrounding the films, and the way they were built into the wider landscape of remembrance, and through this show how the distinct national context of each shaped the film’s representation of the Great War. After this, ‘Chapter 4: Romance in the Memory: Reconstructing the Western Front’ will textually analyse the films’ depiction of the Western Front through their cinematography, mise-en-scène, characterisation, and sound design, to discover how their reconstruction of

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this landscape displays the distinct narrative traditions each comes from. With this examination of the Western Front in place, ‘Chapter 5: Home Fires: The Contrasting Landscape of Home’ widens the focus investigate how these films use – or avoid direct use in the case of The Trench – the contrasting landscape of home to demonstrate how nostalgia and traditions of landscape representation such as painting, in the cases of Passchendaele and Beneath Hill 60, call to attention the perceived impact the war had on the nation as a social entity.

In ‘Chapter 6: Lest We Forget: Memorialising and Marking Sites of Memory On-Screen’ I study how these films, conforming with memorials more broadly, stir up feelings of mourning within a community and position themselves as sites where societies confront and mark specific experiences. To do this I will be analysing how their climactic final scenes manifest feelings of mourning within their nation’s dominant narrative tradition. The final chapter before concluding, ‘Chapter 7: Their Name Liveth For Evermore: Reception and Release’, closely examines how the films were released, for instance their marketing strategies and any connection they had to educational institutions, and how they were received in their nation of origin. This shall question whether critics saw the films as, in any way, affective when appealing to the audience’s emotions in representing the Western Front experience and how the release was framed in terms of remembrance. In the conclusion I draw to a close my exploration of how cinematic representations of the Western Front have (and do) serve an important part in the continuing legacy of the Great War in Britain, Canada, and Australia by memorialising sites and poignant events for contemporary audiences.

Cinema is a site where the memory of the nation can be realised and felt for significant groups of people and within this space the Western Front has a powerful century long tradition. What follows is an exploration of this tradition, its impact, and the way such memory is represented cross-generationally.
Chapter 2  

**A Long, Long Trail: Mapping the Cinematic Western Front**

In 1915 the American Journal *Motion Picture Supplement* enquired ‘Will the Present War Produce Great Photodramas?’ in the title of an article by contributor Peter Wade. To answer this question the author looks to the past, opening with the statement ‘a remarkable thing about the history of literature is that the great creative works of art, whether dramatic, pictorial, writ in novel form or sculped from marble, always followed a great war’. By way of supporting this broad contention, Wade points towards the writings of Victor Hugo, Lord Byron, and Leo Tolstoy, as canonical works that ‘sprung from the forge of Napoleon’. Following this line of reasoning further, he notes distinguished examples of American literature that came into being as a result of the Civil War and how it ‘silvered the tongues of Beecher, Phillips and Lincoln’. Literature it seems, and artistic expression in general, in Wade’s view, has thrived on these historic moments of conflict to inspire their finest works. However, in the present, November 1915, Wade laments the lack of any significant filmic work on any war, including the current one in Europe, compared to that of past literary outpouring, remarking:

> Elaborate photoplays dealing with the present war have begun to arrive – there are hundreds in the making – but, with the exception of “The Birth of a Nation,” which deals with the problem of the Civil War, and “The Battle Cry of Peace,” which is a noble and convincing arraignment of our own military unpreparedness, a great and lasting photoplay dealing with war has yet to be written.

What is under scrutiny here is the potential of the medium of cinema itself to provide artistic form and meaning to an historical crossroad. Will, this leads one to ask, this present conflict result in a coming of age artistically for the adolescent medium of film? And, by the same token, if film is incapable of serving cultures in this way then how will it ever have any true impact? The predominant clause put forward by Wade here, it seems, being the ability to create works that are great and lasting. Part of the blame for the perceived

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29 Peter Wade, ‘Will the Present War Produce Great Photodramas?’, *Motion Picture Supplement*, 1:3 (1915), p. 43.
30 Wade, p. 43.
31 Wade, p. 43.
32 Wade, p. 43.
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lack in 1915 is put on the fact that ‘the news is collected by press agencies – censored and deleted down to cold dry fact’.\(^{33}\) The days of the ‘heroic war correspondent’ is gone he says; now the screen just shows depersonalized footage with news to serve a base explanatory purpose with no artistic or moralistic merit.\(^{34}\) Fiction, *great and lasting* drama, is what Wade advocates for cinema’s deliverance.

![Actual battle scene. German troops opposing a French attack](image)

Figure 2: Topmost photograph in Peter Wade’s *Motion Picture Supplement* article.

It is worth noting that in both pages of this two-page article the text is sandwiched between captioned photographs from the conflict. In fact, the images take up the majority of the spread. To give one of the four examples, on the top of the first page it describes the above image as an ‘actual battle scene. German troops opposing a French attack’ (Figure 2).\(^{35}\) The other photos shown in the article, in contrast to this, depict French and Russian prisoners and the movement of artillery, the fact that the first image on the page is described as an ‘actual’ battle scene shows the rarity of such an image, even when one keeps in mind the possibility that it was in some way staged. It is for this reason of scarcity that Wade highlights the fact that the cameramen do not have access to the front, ‘their firing-line is back of the troops, back of the great howitzers, even back of the military headquarters, and their photography is “handpicked” to suit the rigid censorship’.\(^{36}\)

\(^{31}\) Wade, p. 43.
\(^{32}\) Wade, p. 43.
\(^{33}\) Wade, p. 43.
\(^{34}\) Wade, p. 43.
\(^{35}\) Wade, pp. 43-44.
images that are disseminated throughout America at this time are seen to be so many degrees separated from the ‘action’ as to be effectively worthless in their duty of portraying what life is like on the Western Front and further afield. A visual culture existed but it was underserved. Wade forecasts that ‘some day the war will be over and its grimmer passions will be driven home to us […] the great photodramas that we are about to witness will be great only as much as they reflect the soul of the man in the trenches’.  

Featured in the same 1915 issue of the *Motion Picture Supplement* was an optimistic article titled ‘Possibilities and Probabilities’ by director D. W. Griffith, who released his groundbreaking *The Birth of a Nation* earlier that year. His core hypothesis centres on the potential of film as a medium to revolutionise storytelling. To demonstrate his beliefs, Griffith compares film to theatre, more specifically cinema’s perceived inferiority to this ‘aristocrat of the arts’. Prophesying a future where cinema can be taken more seriously, it is his belief that as directors craft more large-scale and dramatic productions, making use of the medium’s strengths that differentiate it from its artistic counterparts, they will transform it into something more than just a ‘ten-cent proposition’. Vitaly, cinema’s supremacy over setting in contrast to theatre is that cinema can use more than just painted sets and three walls, as Griffith describes:

In Motion Pictures we operate in a larger field. On the stage so-called “effects” are imitations. The film-play shows the actual occurrence and is not hampered by the size of the stage nor the number of people to be used. If your story traverses a battlefield, we show an actual battlefield. If it says that ten thousand men are fighting there, we engage ten thousand men, rehearse them in minute detail, and, when we are ready, we show you that scene as realistically as if you were looking down from a hilltop and watching an engagement.

Setting, or the ability to represent landscapes and action with fewer restrictions, can be realised on-screen, with such films as Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation*, in ways that audiences would not have witnessed before. The battlefield is highlighted as a potential site that could be authentically depicted in a manner that is superior to any other visual medium. This final point is indicated by his concluding assertion that ‘the motion picture is

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37 Wade, p. 44.
39 Griffith, p. 47.
40 Griffith, p. 48.
no longer an infant art. It is the newest, but also the most graphic, form of dramatic expression. There is no end to where it can be carried’. 41

This was the rhetoric surrounding film and war, and war on film, appearing in 1915 on the pages of this popular American journal. As outsiders at this stage in the war, Wade saw this conflict as one that was ripe to be portrayed in this new medium meaningfully for posterity, but in his view was failing to be fully realised by the combatants in any other form than dry, unaffecting propaganda. Wade was concerned with the potential of a ‘great and lasting’ photoplay fictionally depicting war with the same impact of literature’s finest works. As he was implicated in the industry of moviemaking itself, Griffith was fascinated by the potential of the form as a new medium for storytelling, looking at human dramas dealing with war. Together Wade and Griffith raise similar questions about cinema’s place in the current conflict, what potential it has for depicting actual or grandly re-enacted events, and when and how these films would appear. Whatever the question, it was clear that the Great War and cinema had a future together. This proved to be true.

It is the role of this chapter to survey this future in reference to the Great War and the Western Front up to the end of the century. As this is only a brief space to cover such a long period it cannot be comprehensive, rather this serves to establish the cinematic linage that is continued in the two decades from 1999 to 2019 that are the focus of this thesis. This is the history that filmmakers in the twenty-first century draw upon, and therefore it is necessary to set this backdrop to understand the core case studies in their national and cultural context. The focus, to ensure it serves the later analysis, will be on the history of British, Canadian, and Australian representations of the Western Front from the time of the Great War to the late 1990s. First I’ll examine the period of 1914-18, that of the war itself, to address the concerns of these three nations surrounding war, cinema, and particularly newsreels at this time. Much of this will look at the reporting from the front, propaganda, and the question of outside influences on national cinema screens. This section will be followed by an inspection of inter-war cinema and its influence in forming the dominant narratives of the war. These are narratives that are recognisable in the case study films analysed, although somewhat altered by succeeding generations. Primarily this will serve to demonstrate the growing anti-war rhetoric that began to frame Great War narratives, especially in a notable selection of British works that viewed this conflict as first and foremost a tragedy, and the alterative view that, although there was much struggle, it was a

41 Griffith, p. 61.
formative experience for nations like Canada and Australia. As this was the period covered by Mark David Sheftall and Jennifer Wellington, I will be drawing upon their research to discover to what extent cinema followed, or made itself distant from, other forms of remembrance before the Second World War disturbed many of the narratives and meanings that were seen to have come from the 1914-18 conflict. In the third section, I will consider the period following the Second World War up to the 1990s to address the relative lack of First World War representations compared to the Second, to underline the significance of narratives set in this conflict when they do appear, and what meaning it still held or was conveyed by its usage. The concluding section of this chapter will then summarise the key findings to establish the cinematic legacy of the Western Front by the turn of the century.

2.1 1914-1918: Desire to Witness the Western Front

Canada’s political position as a Dominion of the British Empire, and its geographic one sharing a border with what was gradually becoming one of the world’s foremost powers, meant it was subject to two potent cultural influences on its cinema screens throughout the war. For much of this period there was some opposition to the slew of U.S. films being shown on political grounds as, firstly, the still prevalent colonial mentality desired a greater number of British imports untainted by the perceived anti-war propaganda of the American product for the first few years of the conflict. The second point of contention was that these imported films and newsreels, even after the Americans had entered, failed to portray Canadian heroism to such an extent that they, in Manjunath Pendakur’s evaluation, ‘insulted them by an excessive display of the Stars and Stripes’. 42 Within this cultural environment, therefore, the question of self-determination when it came to what was shown on the nation’s cinema screens became a complicated subject in the early years of both the war and cinema’s coming of age.

Immediately after war broke out, the foremost producer of newsreels, the French based company Pathé, was able for the first months to film various sides of the conflict relatively unhindered. This would soon change as the German government became aware that the

42 Manjunath Pendakur, Canadian Dreams & American Control: The Political Economy of the Canadian Film Industry (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1990), p. 49. See p. 77 for the more detail on the colonial mentality being against the anti-war sentiment.
potential impact of these images on morale could be devastating if they were not serving the national cause, and a concerted drive towards censorship soon began to appear in all combatant nations.\textsuperscript{43} The ability to control what was viewed on the cinema screens became a concern of primary national importance, and, as with Canada, external influences, even from neutral trade-partners, could disrupt the national message and take away the home audience’s opportunity to view their soldiers at the front within officially sanctioned guidelines. In his essay ‘Cinema and the Memory of the Great War’, Pierre Sorlin states:

The First World War was the first war to be extensively filmed for huge national audiences. But the period 1914-18 was also the first time when entire populations involved in a conflict could witness, indirectly, what was occurring in the war zone. The newsreels established what we might call the accepted version of the War.\textsuperscript{44}

The style of narration in these newsreels often, to modern eyes, may seem to be edited without any clear continuity or flow. However, Sorlin asserts that because of the way contemporary spectators received and understood this footage it served more as evidence of on-going conflict through short glimpses that upheld the wider, multi-media propaganda purposes without the need for the contained narrative based progression we are used to today (even in our up to the minute news media).\textsuperscript{45} As well as footage of actual occurrences, these newsreels would sometimes contain unsignposted re-enactments, particularly of battle scenes. The reason for this cinematic chicanery was, in part, for quite sensible practical purposes, including but not limited to the safety of expensive filmmaking equipment and the specialists that run it. It was also to better serve propaganda purposes, depicting a valiant charge rather than a muddy scramble, and in terms of censorship meant that they could avoid showing on-screen images of dead bodies that may horrify audiences at home and lower morale. To this effect, Tim Travers describes how, from 1915, through the censor boards, the Canadian Department of Militia and Defence regulated what audiences were able to see of the war for fear that showing anything other than sanitary glimpses would discourage enlistment.\textsuperscript{46} With this policy in mind, it is not surprising that Americans like Wade were unable to view images from the Western Front as their closest

\textsuperscript{44} Sorlin, p. 13.
\textsuperscript{45} Sorlin, pp. 10-13.
geographic neighbour involved in the conflict was actively trying to subdue such images, at least for public display.

Canada, moreover, was not alone in its concern with the kinds of images and messages the public were consuming from this growing form of mass media. As James Chapman asserts ‘the necessity, during total war, of each side projecting its war effort to publics both at home and abroad in order to maintain morale and influence opinion brought about the organization of official propaganda agencies to facilitate this’. On-screen propaganda became vital for shaping public perception and, when exported, that of neutral countries as well. On a national level, cinema became the principle communal space where current events overseas could be shared and where, through propaganda and censorship, the impression that together they were witnessing history in the making was constructed. In Sorlin’s opinion, even when one acknowledges their production as propaganda, ‘they are of paramount importance for what they reveal about the construction of a memory of the conflict’. Therefore, it would seem that to be witness to the action was as much a duty as a desire and established an aesthetic, cinematic language that has shaped the way we continue to visualise this conflict, and in this way is the seed for what later filmmakers have tried to replicate at least in terms of aesthetic and even, to an extent, tone.

In Britain, the War Office, not fully realising cinema’s growing potential and reach, would not begin to officially produce films until eighteen months into the war under the newly founded Topical Committee for War Films. As such, the founding of this committee could be considered the result of pressure from the public and exhibitioners alike, who desired to see a consistent stream of actuality footage from the front, rather than created purely by the War Office’s own initiative. In his analysis, Chapman notes that ‘British audiences were disappointed by early films of the Western Front because they did not contain any close, dramatic footage of the fighting’. With newsreels serving a particular visual, informative need in cultures around the world, not replicable in other mediums and bypassing the need to be literate, there was seemingly a shared disappointment at the images coming from Europe, showing the difficulty of representing modern warfare on-screen and also its perceived necessity. In the introduction to *British Silent Cinema and the Great War*, Michael Hammond and Michael Williams observe that exhibitors were:

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48 Sorlin, p. 13.
49 Chapman, p. 38.
50 Chapman, p. 40.
Succumbing to the beginnings of the booking practices that favoured Hollywood product, they were also drawing on and adapting the practices of the music hall manager and the showman, which were tried and true methods of attracting family audience and inculcating the cinema as an acceptable social space in the community. Therefore, while Hollywood dominance was growing, so was a sense of cinema as a communal space where the actions of the nation could be viewed and thereby a sense of nationhood affirmed. In short, cinema was beginning to have a significant role in the community; it was no longer just a novelty of the lower classes. Hammond and Williams point towards Leslie Midkiff DeBauche’s description of Hollywood’s ‘practical patriotism’, an attitude held by many in the industry who saw the war as an opportunity. They, producers and distributors, would spread propaganda and, in turn, would gain a sense of legitimacy within the communities as well a larger share of the public’s interest in the cinema itself. This close relationship had its mutual benefits.

Official newsreels, sanctioned by the War Office, would begin to be produced by late-1915, but it was with the 1916 feature length documentary *The Battle of the Somme* that film’s true potential as a medium through which it was perceived the public could truly witness what the soldiers were experiencing. In his essay on the film, Hammond notes that many of the iconic images that are still remembered today in Britain, through being repeatedly reused, were first seen in *The Battle of the Somme*. Its influence persists, often in short vignettes, extricated from the original film, and reappearing in television documentaries, online clips, and through either visual references in recent films or through direct use of the clips themselves. One example is the emotive sequence of a soldier carrying one of the wounded through the trenches on his back, portraying a sense of both comradeship and struggle. Furthermore, Hammond notes the film’s three arc narrative structure, with the first section showing the preparation, the second the actual attack, then the final section showing the bodies being buried.

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54 Hammond, pp. 24-25.
structure, when considered alongside the short newsreels, can be seen as a major reason for its success. It places the narrative progression of the ‘Big Push’, as much as the visuals, at its centre for shaping audience perception of events.

The response in Britain, described by Hammond, to this complex mix of spectacle offered in one sequence and tragic reminders of personal loss in others led to a performed kind of ‘patriotic response’, tapping into ideas of national duty, and then blurring the line of public/private through its reminding of loved ones in service, or having fallen, making the cinema a site of mourning as well as a place to be informed about current events. Upon release, The Battle of the Somme was a box-office sensation in Britain, becoming the most popular non-fiction work of the entire war and kept pace with the release of The Birth of a Nation the same month, and this was reflected to a large extent in the Dominions. In Canada it was enthusiastically received, with one article announcing the film’s limited three day ‘re-re-engagement’ at the Gaiety theatre in Winnipeg in December 1916 and describing the original release having the ‘greatest crowds ever assembled to see a moving picture’ in the country. This piece, thankful to David Lloyd George for the ‘liberation’ of the footage from the military archives to demonstrate the efforts of the ‘Anglo-Saxon race’, praises it in no uncertain terms as ‘a living, trembling, thrilling cross section of war, battle at the moment of the climax. It is the greatest moving picture in the world’. Similarly in Australia, a newspaper article commenting on the over-taxed local theatre, the Central Hall in Wynyard, uses the phrase ‘the people of the British Empire’ to refer to how the film shows ‘the world exactly what modern warfare is’. This language, blurring simple national lines, made The Battle of the Somme a work that could speak to audiences across cultures within the Empire. For Britain, and its Dominions, this film transcended mere propaganda to become a deeply affecting medium through which they could, collectively, feel that they are witnessing the experience of life at the front.

Arguably the key figure in Canadian Great War cinema was Sir William Maxwell Aitken, 1st Baron Beaverbrook, the Canadian-British newspaper mogul who oversaw the creation of the Canadian War Records Office in London in 1916. The following year he

55 Hammond, pp. 31-33.
56 See: Hammond, p. 21. For detail on the popularity of The Battle of the Somme in Britain at the time.
58 Anon, ‘Battle of the Somme Film Returns to the City’, Winnipeg Evening Tribune, p. 4.
would also found the War Office Official Topical Budget and with it handle the responsibility of supplying, twice weekly, the official newsreels for exhibition in Britain and across the Empire for the remainder of the conflict. In his analysis of the direction Beaverbrook took with documentary making, Travers explains that ‘his central idea was that propaganda films should appeal to the widest possible audience, rather than aim at elites. For this reason, the films could not be dull, and even sensational items should be included’. Although the censors were a concern, Beaverbrook was trying to reach as large a section of the public as could fit in the cinema with these documentaries and newsreels. One such film produced under his supervision for Canadian audiences was *The Canadians in Action and the Advance of the Tanks* (1917). An advertisement for the film clearly displays the novelty of the tanks through its imagery (Figure 3). Moreover, its liberal use of exclamation marks and statements as bold as the on-coming tank demonstrate Travers’s point that Beaverbrook was not above sensationalism – the phrase “the final sensation” is even used here – when it came to distributing footage from the front.

These short newsreel documentaries, once they had found a consistent form by late 1916, allowed audiences at home to witness the Canadian involvement in Europe. As Travers observes, these films ‘reveal a lot about Canadians on the Western Front’ by showing ‘portraits and behaviour’ of the soldiers, as well as civilian life and new technologies, and serve as a useful tool for historians to understand the Canadian war experience. By 1918 it is clear that although there were censored newsreels that Canadians could call their own, with some notable propagandist documentary work released under the direction of Beaverbrook, the Canadian cinema industry itself was still struggling to get to its feet and it would be a decade before any significant narrative fiction would represent the national experience of the war for home audiences.

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60 See: Travers, p. 102, and Chapman, p. 39.
61 Travers, p. 102.
62 Travers, p. 105.
63 Travers, pp. 105-106.
When war first broke out, Australians began enlisting in the newly formed First Australian Imperial Force and, simultaneously, cinema attendance grew rapidly to share in this national experience. This surge in regular attendance aided in the war effort in a financial sense through newly introduced entertainment taxes, yet the most significant positive impact cinema had on this ever-increasing audience, in Ina Bertrand’s view, was on morale. Bertrand asserts that in both what was shown in the newsreels and performed in locally-filmed dramas ‘there was certainly no mismatch between the fiction and the non-fiction: they supported each other, with no room for alternative views or second thoughts about Australia’s participation’. Cinema reinforced the righteousness of the cause, helping to vilify Germany while mythologising its own troops. As a representative form, it strengthened morale during the most traumatic periods of great loss, and kept the war, no

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matter how distant, a part of everyday Australian life. It was telling, for many, a national drama that could be shared in and witnessed on the cinema screens, the narrative told in this drama, as Bertrand notes, was a ‘coming of age’ story of the young nation exerting its influence on the world stage for the first time.66

If Australia can be said to have its version of Beaverbrook, a figure to champion the national cause in terms of representation with a similar conception that cinema would play an important role in this, it was in the form of the less aristocratic figure of historian Charles Bean. It was Bean who, even during the war, would begin to construct the foundations of the Australian War Memorial and the concept of the Anzac spirit, which will be built upon in the interwar period, with his egalitarian focus on the fighting digger in the trenches. As Robert Dixon relates, these two men, in fact, had disagreements along national lines due to Beaverbrook having ‘not sought Australian representation on the Cinematographic Committee’.67 This effectively meant that Australia would not have a national voice when it came to how the footage taken on the Western Front by the British Empire was used, and therefore, it was safe to assume as Bean did, who would be responsible for archiving it after the war. This for all intents and purposes meant ownership of it. What Dixon describes as an ‘atmosphere of intercolonial rivalry and bourgeoning colonial nationalism in the final year of the war’ was a major cultural force as the Dominions were gaining a stronger sense of independence, and cinema was a major site where the national self could be represented widely from within.68

In January 1917, with permission from Beaverbrook, Bean would get the opportunity to oversee an edit of a documentary focusing on the Battle of Pozières using the available footage of Australian soldiers. Daniel Eisenberg states that Bean’s goal was effectively ‘to create an Australian equivalent of The Battle of the Somme’.69 In Eisenberg’s estimation, this was in part due to his sense of disappointment that the original film used footage from the Battle of Pozières, much of which he was present for, thereby decontextualising it to place it within the British War Office sanctioned narrative and further demonstrating the lack of Australian control over footage of Australian actions.70 The resulting film, With the Australians in France 1916 (1917), was the ‘very first film sent to Australia with the

66 Bertrand, p. 79.
68 Dixon, p. 43.
70 Eisenberg, p. 205.
express purpose of being preserved for the nation’s memory’.  

71 When Bean witnessed the final result, however, he was dismayed at the jumbled, incoherent structure describing it in no uncertain terms as ‘2000 feet of miscellaneous rubbish’.  

72 So disappointed was he at the final film, having been put together largely ignoring his instructions, that he would re-edit much of the footage to make Australia in France, Part One (1918). It would seem, therefore, that Bean, who would later publish The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918 between 1921-1943, viewed the cinematic record of the war of prime importance in shaping the public perception of it. The failure of the first documentary to touch the hearts and minds of cinema audiences at home, or even to serve as an accurate record, was an enormous blow to his dreams of a collection of relics, from personal diaries to films, independent from that of the Imperial War Museum in London. Simply, but it would by no means prove easily, he wanted to tell Australia’s experience of the war, independent and culturally distinct.

What the war revealed about British, Canadian, and Australian attitudes towards the cinema screen, and what was shown on them, is a growing realisation of the importance of national self-determination when it came to representing themselves and their stories on-screen.  

73 What this was fundamentally tied to was the desire to witness the present action for the sake of posterity, though the war sapped many of their resources and much of their manpower to be able to realise this dream adequately. External influences, particularly in the period when Hollywood was asserting itself as the foremost producer of motion pictures, and especially narrative fictions, were not just seen as diluting the official propaganda messages of the government of these nations, it was the sense that cultural sovereignty was being undermined in a period when nationalism was widely seen as a source of pride. It wasn’t just Hollywood though in the case of the Dominions, Canada and Australia both saw themselves as growing powers that deserved an equal place as part of the imperial project. Canada had been confederated in 1867, and the Australian federation came into being in 1901, the Great War for both was seen as a demonstration of their abilities to stand beside Britain as the heads of the Empire. At such a time of imperial ambition, militarism and its necessary displays had to be seen in these two countries as something they are each capable of. Showing the Empire and its defence as something

71 Eisenberg, p. 207.


73 See: Chapman, p. 248.
undertaken by Canadian and Australian citizens, not because of orders from British parliament, nor because they needed Britain to determine their future, rather what they were proving was their potential for equal might in allegiance with a motherland that was framed as a sentimental attachment as much as an imperial one. As we shall see, this question of national voice in relation to the war and its memory, as shown on the cinema screens, would remain a firm motivating force in British, Canadian, and Australian, national cinema long after the Armistice.

2.2 1919-1939: Desire to Remember the Western Front

It was during the interwar period that the dominant narratives of the Great War would fully take root. Britain, Canada, and Australia each would forge from the memories of domestic life in the period and those brought home from the front the now well-established symbols and national myths related to this experience. As the next chapter will more firmly demonstrate, these are present and fervently connected to the modern concept of nationhood and what meaning the Great War continues to have. However, it must be remembered that these narratives did not come out of the trenches fully formed, rather it took active commemorating, reminiscing, and retelling to commit the dominant national narrative, and its relationship with the landscape of the Western Front, to the cultural memory. As Hammond and Williams remark ‘the issue during the war was how to represent it; following the war it was how to remember it’. The poems, literature, paintings, and films of the 1919-1939 period tried to scavenge amongst the bones of the battlefields to find any flesh of meaning that endured. This meaning they searched for was not the meaning expected by those who marched into battle in 1914 with all their perceived innocence of ideals and imperialist hopes for peace by Christmas. Instead they would find, after four years of struggle, divergent narratives, as Sheftall terms it in the title of his book, which would become tailored and sincerely meaningful for each individual nation in their modes of remembrances. In Sheftall’s comparative analysis, he summarises:

The inter-war years in Britain witnessed the increasing prevalence in literature, art, film, media commentary, commemorative texts, historical works, and other cultural products, of depictions and interpretations of the Great War experience that emphasized the disillusioning human, material, social and spiritual cost of the conflict. In Canada,

74 Hammond and Williams, p. 1.
Australia and New Zealand by contrast, the dominant narrative of the war for the duration of the inter-war period focused on what was achieved between 1914 and 1918 by the nation and its soldiers, rather than on what was lost in the process, despite the fact that human cost of the war for each Dominion was proportionally comparable to or greater than that experienced by Britain.\textsuperscript{75}

This view, that there is a distinct contrast between the British narrative of disenchantment and that of the Dominions’ coming-of-age ‘popularly remembered as, while tragic, the site of the birth of the modern nation’, is also upheld by Jennifer Wellington in her analysis.\textsuperscript{76} These two writers, amongst others, have firmly established these as the dominant narratives of the Great War that the representative arts in these nations, and the modes of commemoration, would form in this period up to the Second World War. In this section, therefore, I will detail how this relates to specifically cinematic depictions of the Western Front and how they conform to these national trends.

In her book \textit{Reel Patriotism}, DeBauche observes that after the Armistice in November 1918, with an average six-month production period for most features, the U.S. alone released fifty-four war films in 1919.\textsuperscript{77} This number dropped significantly the following year, and in 1921 there were only an estimated nine films released that depicted the Great War in Hollywood to any notable degree. In clarifying the reason for this drop, though, DeBauche raises a crucial point ‘the war was never a taboo subject for film narrative – as it was never taboo for published fiction and non-fiction’.\textsuperscript{78} As Hollywood had become the commercially dominant producer of films globally it is clear from this trend that audiences both in the U.S. and internationally had become fatigued with the prospect of another on-screen representation of war when the War had just reached a hard fought conclusion. For those living in 1919 onward, the war was equally part of their cultural memory, the personal memories of the individuals, and still affecting their day-to-day lives. Daily the headlines inflicted readers with yet more consequences of its aftermath. The battlefields of the Western Front, and all the theatres that participated in the Great War, were being cleared. Iconic memorials of mourning in our modern landscapes were being raised during

\begin{footnotes}
\item[77] DeBauche, p. 165.
\item[78] DeBauche, p. 166.
\end{footnotes}
this period as well. The Cenotaph was unveiled in London in 1920. The Menin Gate finished construction in 1927. In 1936 the Canadian Legion organised a pilgrimage for over six thousand veterans and their families to attend the unveiling of the National Vimy Memorial, and the Australian War Memorial, incorporating a military museum, was officially opened in Canberra in 1941. Australia’s memorial/museum had existed in concept for over two decades before this, with much public discussion, and, in Wellington’s view, it was much more successful in becoming the national memorial than the Imperial War Museum in London was for Britain due to the motivations of its organisers who ‘deliberately constructed the Australian War Museum according to a coherent narrative of nation, and created displays in which the war was intended to form the foundation of a national story’. In this context, with much cultural discussion still revolving around the Great War and its meaning, it is unsurprising that Jeanine Basinger observes ‘after the Armistice, war films temporarily disappeared from the screen, presumably because people were sick of the subject. Advertisements for movies even carried the promise: THIS IS NOT A WAR FILM’. As the battlefields still, in a both physical and psychological sense, were a part of the day-to-day lives of post-war nation states, many did not want to see them elaborately represented on film when they escaped to their local cinema.

This trend was not immediate, however, and did not follow an entirely universal pattern. Moreover, many of the films that deal with the war in this outwardly fallow period begin to open up the discussion of its impact on national identity, as well as cinema’s role in this discourse, in a number of ways. In Australia, for instance, two noteworthy films were released only a year apart, *The Sentimental Bloke* (1919), often considered the crowning achievement of Australian silent cinema, and its sequel *Ginger Mick* (1920), now considered lost. These are based on the works of C. J. Dennis, with the first being an adaption of the long verse narrative *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke* (1915), which saw widespread success when originally published in Australia, while *Ginger Mick* is a semi-adaptation of two other poems by Dennis and is the result of the first adaptation’s success. *The Sentimental Bloke* does not approach the war as a subject, yet its relationship to its sequel, and Australian culture more widely, brings into question the impact of the war on the perceived national character. Bertrand’s essay, making reference to both the written

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79 Wellington, pp. 207-208.
work and its adaptation, points to its significance when released in forming an idea of the national identity, or at least furthering a discussion, and the opportunity of life in Australia being ‘potentially idyllic, with employment for all who want it, and the possibility of redemption/inclusion of the outsider through hard work and love’.\textsuperscript{81} This, as Bertrand notes, is in stark contrast to the much more masculine sequel, and in many respects represents the more insular and actively nationalistic Anzac model of this period. This dissonance in relation to the two films can be seen in a piece in the \textit{Daily Examiner} reviewing \textit{Ginger Mick}, which describes ‘the departure of Ginger Mick for the war, and his glorious deeds and death at the front afford splendid opportunities for dramatic contrasts between the simple home life of The Bloke and the clamor and tumult of the battlefield’.\textsuperscript{82} What these two films indicate, and to a certain degree the discussion around the sequel’s relationship to its predecessor, is a questioning of the contrast between early-war and post-war Australian national identity.

As has been widely observed, the dominant narrative in Britain today, as Wellington describes, emerged in the late 1920s in the view that the war was ‘a futile tragedy, in which incompetent leadership led to countless, purposeless deaths’.\textsuperscript{83} While this is the most common interpretation within the British cultural memory, it should be remembered that such dominance is achieved over time, permeating the national consciousness, and, particularly in this case, was far from the only interpretation of the war’s meaning competing in the 1920s for this canonical position. In line with the common view, Michael Paris begins his chapter ‘Enduring Heroes: British Feature Films and the First World War, 1919-1997’ by describing this dominant interpretation of the Great War in Britain as being a futile struggle commanded by dull-witted general with no strategy other than to waste young lives.\textsuperscript{84} This view, embodied by the “lions led by donkeys” myth, however, did not fully take shape until the 1960s. In the 1920s, Paris notes, there were two notable interpretations of the war:

A minority view held by the disenchanted, a response by some battlefield survivors – mostly officers from the social elites, who mourned their fallen contemporaries, the golden youths who, it was believed, would have been leaders of the nation; and a more common

\textsuperscript{81} Bertrand, p. 76.
\textsuperscript{83} Wellington, p. 15.
view, which endured at least until the Second World War, and which believed, or tried to believe, that the War had been justified and which emphasised it heroic and sacrificial nature – another bloody but glorious page in the history of the British Empire.\textsuperscript{85}

This second interpretation, although absent from the elite writings that now make up much of the canon of Great War literature, at least held an equal position in the cultural landscape of Britain throughout the inter-war period as the more digestible narrative for the purposes of entertaining mass audiences, many of whom would have lost loved ones in the conflict. Therefore, it is unsurprising that they may have preferred, when down the local cinema, not to be confronted with the implication that these sacrifices were for nothing.

It is for this reason that Paris believes cinema, as a ‘popular’ art form that was still to a degree maligned by the intellectual elite, provides a useful measure of popular opinion.\textsuperscript{86} This corresponds with Sheftall’s observation that the narrative of disenchantment took root first in literary works that ‘represented the meaning of the war that was diametrically opposed to the consolatory, validating interpretation epitomized by the language and imagery associated with the monuments and commemorative ceremonies that were omnipresent in societies throughout the Empire in the immediate aftermath of the conflict’.\textsuperscript{87} Two narratives were present. One of disenchantment, developed first in the literary sphere, the other still seeking solace in victory, appearing in official commemorations and popular entertainment. Both narratives could hold general pacifist messages, but in Sheftall’s view, ‘the narrative of disenchantment offered no such reassuring rationale for the carnage of 1914-1918’.\textsuperscript{88} This multitude of interpretations is highlighted further in Wellington’s description of the formation of the Imperial War Museum, as a result of the less central dominant narrative in this period ‘allowed room for the development of alternative narratives. In short, there was in Britain room for the futility narrative to take root’.\textsuperscript{89} The reason for this, in Wellington’s view, was the result of the organisers of the museum not attempting to form a ‘a national narrative of identity and purpose from the war’, instead:

\textsuperscript{85} Paris, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{86} Paris, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{87} Sheftall, p. 152.
\textsuperscript{88} Sheftall, p. 152.
\textsuperscript{89} Wellington, pp. 247-248.
Many of them hoped that they were illustrating a plurality of contributions to a vast national and imperial effort to defeat both a barbarous enemy and the barbarity of war itself. The Imperial War Museum in Britain illustrated a rupture with the past, a full stop in history. Both the Canadians and Australian museums, rather than illustrating a rupture with the past, illustrated a beginning, a moment in which through their forces’ valiant efforts, they had entered into the British imperial story – a narrative of brave deeds and military success – and to a degree had gone beyond.90

Unlike in Canada and Australia, where what could be described as the official narrative of the war was enshrined in the national consciousness, in Britain this war was not a genesis but rather a continuation of a long running narrative, and possibly an ending, that could be interpreted in many different ways by independent artists.

In this milieu of vying interpretations, Paris asserts ‘British feature films dealing with the Great War struck an uneasy balance, reflecting the dominant public mood of wanting to remember the War as worthwhile and the dead as heroes, yet often tinged with the disenchantment that film-makers shared with others of their class’.91 This point is affirmed by Andrew Kelly, who states ‘for the British cinema, it seemed, whilst the war was bloody slaughter, the deaths that resulted were not necessarily wasted’.92 Cinema as a popular art form that was under more scrutiny from government censor boards than most depicted a narrative that, although not afraid to show the harshness of the conditions on the Western Front, avoided the implication that the immense sacrifice of young lives were pointlessly wasted. From 1921 to 1927, almost annually, British Instructional Films released battle reconstruction narrativised documentaries, including The Battle of Jutland (1921), Ypres (1925), and Mons (1926), all of which were well received commercially.93 These were produced by Henry Bruce Woolfe – himself a veteran – who desired that these films would serve as a cinematic form of commemoration, where the dead could be acknowledged as having achieved particular victories showing images of duty and sacrifice for the protection of their homeland.94 Heroism was still seen as something that could be achievable, as opposed to in the later disenchantment narrative that saw it as an either naïve or even dangerous aspiration. Some got close to this, such as George Pearson’s

90 Wellington, p. 314.
91 Paris, p. 53.
94 Paris, pp. 56-57.
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*Reveille* (1924) and *Blighty* (1927), which Paris observes are much more ambiguous in whether or not they are framing the war as a worthwhile sacrifice or a pointless waste of young life, and therefore ‘offering different readings to different audiences’. 95 Although films like these show the horror of war in a manner that corresponds with the idea of futility, they do this without really condemning war as an institution.

The few years following the tenth anniversary of the Armistice saw a great number of films being produced in Britain, Europe, and the United States that depicted the Western Front.96 In Britain these included *Dawn* (1928), *The Guns of Loos* (1928), *Lost Patrol* (1929), and *Suspense* (1930). Elsewhere productions were moving towards a filmic model that could be described within a wider global cycle of ‘anti-war’ films with Lewis Milestone’s innovative Hollywood production *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), G. W. Pabst’s *Westfront 1918* (1930) in Germany, and in France Raymond Bernard’s *Wooden Crosses* (1932).97 Other factors than moralistic ones also fuelled this anti-war trend, as Chapman explains ‘film-makers were responding to the public mood and turning to subjects that struck a chord with audiences. To this extent the anti-war cinema was partly informed by commercial considerations. It is significant that it declined later in the 1930s as public opinion changed’.98 In this way, anti-war films could be regarded as texts made specifically to appeal to widely held public opinion, not challenge them. Britain’s main contribution to this cycle is often said to be *Journey’s End* (1930), an adaptation of R. C. Sherriff’s influential play. In Chapman’s view, this dramatises how ‘idealistic youths are transformed into bitter veterans’.99 In line with the memoirs being published at the time, Sherriff’s play focused on the officer class, yet it clearly condemns many of the pointless and wasteful orders of military high command, planting the seed for later representations condemning the officer class. The anti-war message is diminished however, as Paris has notes, by underlying theme of duty and endurance with the message that a proper Englishman must ‘carry on’ through trying times.100 *Suspense*, in contrast, depicting the infantry experience of the trenches, is an unnervingly tense film that shows the powerlessness of a group of British soldiers in this landscape as the Germans tunnel beneath their position.

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95 Paris, pp. 57-59.
96 Chapman, p. 121.
98 Chapman, p. 123.
99 Chapman, p. 126.
100 Paris, p. 61.
Following *Suspense* the subject of the British experience of the Western Front would not be approached again until the 1960s on-screen. Paris believes that this avoidance of the topic was:

A tacit acknowledgement, perhaps, that the subject was becoming too painful and too controversial to attract a mass audience. Yet at the same time, film-makers were reluctant to proclaim openly the War’s futility. In such a climate they developed oblique ways of dealing with the War which still allowed them to explore heroism but avoid the contentious war in the trenches.\(^{101}\)

This growing disconnect between the narrative of disenchantment and of duty highlights the difficulty that filmmakers must have had to properly articulate the meaning of the conflict in their chosen medium. Meaningful stories would be told about the Great War in British cinema that would be critically praised and commercially popular, these would not appear to any measurable degree for decades though while the nation and its citizens grappled with the aftermath and, within this wider cultural struggle, filmmakers searched for new ways to depict war on screen.

Britain is not alone in struggling to articulate its Great War experience on-screen either. Due in part to the difficulty of independent feature film production as a result of the U.S. dominance of distribution, as well as a variety of other nuanced causes; there has been an abiding absence of on-screen representations of the Canadian Great War experience. That is not to say there were no films set during the Great War from 1919 to the 1939, the home-grown Canadian film industry almost made itself a belated casualty of the conflict with a $500,000 gamble in the late 1920s, titled *Carry On, Sergeant!* (1928), which was a ruinous critical and commercial failure for the fledgling national cinema.\(^{102}\) Canadian International Films, a joint Canadian-British venture, planned it to be an adaptation of the popular cartoon character Old Bill, a walrus-moustached old tommy created by British humourist and veteran Bruce Bairnsfather. The producers originally brought Bairnsfather on board to help promote the project, but as it developed he ended up taking on the role of both writer and director. The finished project, although inspired by the Old Bill character and tone of the comics, focused on the Canadian experience of the war. Its souvenir programme describing the potential significance of film:

\(^{101}\) Paris, p. 63.  
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Nations and countries are now largely represented in the world by the culture, and the solidity, both financial and artistic, that lie behind the products of their motion picture studios. In presenting the feature picture “Carry on Sergeant!” to the audiences of the world, Canada has in one stride, show that a production of artistic merit, capable technique, and of universal appeal, can be made in the Dominion.

The language used here in this programme is reminiscent of Wade’s desire to see great and lasting motion picture dramas forged from the conflict (Figure 4). Unfortunately, upon release, it received a mixed reception and, as previously stated, was an enormous financial failure. Its tone was an issue as the combination of comedy and tragedy in this setting felt uncomfortable. Travers explains that this problematic mix of ‘humour and mud and blood’ conflicted with the attempts at realism in the film.103 One of the credited roles was in fact a popular vaudeville actor of the day, Jimmy Savo, and with Bairnsfather being primarily known as a humourist it was clear from the reception that he struggled to translate his brand of comedy, that was highly regarded for its upholding of morale during the war, to a sincere dramatic war film a decade later.

Figure 4: First page of the Souvenir Programme for Carry on Sergeant! (1928).104

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103 Travers, p. 106.
Seven years later, Canada would release its first feature documentary, *Lest We Forget* (1935), which was written, directed, and edited by Frank Badgley, the then director of the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau, with the Canadian Legion assuming much of the production costs. This was both an achievement in the annals of Canadian cinematic history and a publicly funded commemoration of the war dead, the title referring to a common phrase carved into memorials and used in remembrance observations throughout the Commonwealth. Tinged with condemnation for Germany as concerns of a new war were beginning to be felt, Travers describes that ‘the rather harsh image of *Lest We Forget* reflected the intentions of the committee to condemn the futility of war’. There was much debate at the time if it succeeded in following the anti-war tradition or glorified combat, this confusion could, in part, have arisen from it promoting the ‘cult of the ideal Canadian Soldier’ myth that was one of Canada’s dominant narratives of the period. This element in the growing mythic landscape of remembrance idealised the soldiers as honourable upholders of the morals of the nation. In fact, one point of contention with *Carry on Sergeant!* was its depiction of the sergeant character sleeping with a French barmaid, something that went against this idealised moral view of Canadians at war. Within Canadian society, from the 1920s to 1935, Wellington describes how ‘memorial projects guided by members of Canada’s elite assisted in creating a broadly positive memory of the meaning of the war, whilst catering to a popular need to believe that the war was necessary and just’. This cult of the soldier is comparable with Australia’s Anzac myth in that it created a romanticised image of the fighting men, often in fiction, that simplified the figure into an archetype that could be placed into the national coming-of-age narrative. As Sheftall notes, ‘while seldom glorifying war, Dominion authors generally celebrated the character and achievements of the nation’s soldiers with obvious pride’. Consequently, by idealising the soldier as the upholder of morals then being involved in the conflict itself must itself have been the moral thing to do. The two traditions, it must be noted, have their differences with the Anzac image, broadly speaking, more concerned with the construction of idealised masculinity within an egalitarian group of men rather than a strict figure that upholds the morals and sense of justice for the nation. *Lest We

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105 Travers, pp. 107-108.
106 Travers, p. 108.
107 Travers, p. 107.
108 Wellington, p. 263.
109 Sheftall, p. 10.
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*Forget* and the 1937 documentary on the unveiling of the memorial to the Canadians at Vimy Ridge that occurred a year earlier, titled *Salute to Valour*, largely failed to appeal to general audiences. Travers speculates that this was not due to a lack of public interest in the Great War but rather ‘the relative lack of success of the two films meant that most Canadians had already formed their own ideal images of the War, and needed no reminding, while others were pacifists and so reacted against the films’. In Canada, therefore, both fiction and non-fiction films failed to make any serious impact on the dominant narrative, even though the influence of cinema as a social space where such dominant narratives could be shaped was now fully recognised.

In Australia, cinema, by contrast, can be seen as taking a more consistent role in the landscape of remembrance, if not always a successful one. To return to *Ginger Mick* briefly, the climax of the film takes place during the Gallipoli Campaign with the titular character dying there. This example signals the impact the Middle Eastern Theatre, as opposed to the Western Front, has had on the memory of the Great War in the Anzac tradition. I’ve used this term Anzac previously in general terms, but now it is time to define exactly what it means to more deeply highlight its significance. Yearly commemorated on April 25th and officially recognised as a public holiday in Australia in 1927, Anzac Day marks the 1915 landing of ANZAC assault troops in what now is known as Anzac Cove, named so in 1985, on the Turkish coast. In the following campaign, ANZAC troops suffered major casualties, with the final outcome being an Ottoman victory following the mass evacuation of ANZAC and British soldiers from autumn 1916 to January 1917. Anzac is a neologism of A.N.Z.A.C. (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps), and the Anzac tradition can be said to lie at the heart of the Australian memory of the Great War. Tanja Luckins explains that although Anzac was ‘initially an acronym used in official despatches, ANZAC quickly became “an Anzac”, “the Anzac” and “your Anzac” [...] It was “Anzac” that had begun to personalise soldiers for the homefront. “Anzac” began to be associated with public acknowledgements of the war dead in the early months of 1916’. Inseparable from a mythic military ideal, the Anzac became enshrined in the Australian national identity, with an annual day of commemoration bearing its name, to both remember fallen soldiers in all conflicts, and mark the perceived ‘birth of the nation’

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110 Travers, p. 108.
where Australia was able to demonstrate itself as more than merely an ex-colony or one of the Dominions but its own nation being able to make an impact on the world stage.\(^\text{112}\)

National myths imply complicity, it was not just any group of soldiers fighting on the Western Front it was your people, bestowing a sense of responsibility for some perceived inheritance, that of the nation itself, and contains within the myths a sense of what this constructed idea of the nation represents in terms of values. Tomasz Gadzina describes the central figure of the Anzac as having its roots in the nation’s folk tradition of bush literature, ‘which propagated the idea of a bushman, described as a white, heterosexual, male hero, as a representative of the national character’.\(^\text{113}\) As well as asserting this figure as representative of the national identity, what Gadzina is indicating is an evolution from this bushman tradition of the late 1800s, personified by such national icons as Ned Kelly, to the digger of the Great War that similarly embodies Australian anti-authoritarianism, stoicism, resourcefulness, drive, physical prowess, and follows the ‘code of mateship’.\(^\text{114}\) This mateship ideal came through in the cinema of the era. *Fellers* (1930), primarily set during the Palestine Campaign, was a comedy that followed the exploits of three friends in the Australian Light Horse cavalry. Both *Diggers* (1931) and *Diggers in Blighty* (1933), adapted from the same popular stage show, revolve around friendship of Chic and Joe. All three of these films’ titles are colloquial terms, with the word ‘digger’ being almost interchangeable with the word ‘Anzac’.\(^\text{115}\) Cinema, in this way, expressed the wider cultural myths that were taking shape in the Australian consciousness, existing to reinforce the widely understood Anzac value of mateship.

In summarising Bean’s influential work on the Great War, Ken Inglis sees his writing as fundamentally concerned with national character.\(^\text{116}\) Inglis describes how Bean ‘believed that he was writing about an army which was unusually good because of the character, and in particular the egalitarian comradeship, of its members; and he wrote a history appropriate to this belief’.\(^\text{117}\) An observation of Bertrand on Bean’s thought process is relevant to note here, ‘though Bean (in his published writings) was more responsible than anyone else for the idealised image, in his private diary he admitted the

\(^{112}\) Luckins, p. 86.


\(^{114}\) Gadzina, pp. 234-236.

\(^{115}\) See: Bertrand, p. 80.


\(^{117}\) Inglis, p. 30.
incompleteness of the ideal’.

Inglis, moreover, points out that in invoking the national character a writer, particularly a historian, should expect to be challenged as to what is fact and what is legend ‘to be precise about just how the national character was formed and how it can be discerned in action’. In this sense the Anzac and another national myths should be considered in terms of cultural memory not history, as outlined by Pierre Nora, and therefore should be approached cautiously and understood as part of a living tradition, a narrative one, and not necessarily a record of the past per se. In terms of narratives, Sheftall states that ‘in the Dominions, the narrative of loss and disillusion was successfully marginalized during the inter-war years, while in Britain, it provided a compelling and eventually dominant alternative to interpretations of the war experience that validated and affirmed the sacrifice of those who died in the conflict’. The overriding emotion of futility related to the Great War in British culture was at times shared by its Dominions, but undercut by a comforting message that, though requiring great sacrifice, it fortified the young nations in their own individual identities.

Dominant national narratives, seeded during the Great War, took root in the inter-war period through many artistic forms, including cinema, and were shaped considerably by the former combatants themselves, wanting the war to be remembered culturally in line with their own personal memory of it. It was in this period, Guy Westwell believes, that ‘the experience of battle is brought to the fore as the focal point of war, its centre of meaning’. In other words, the battlefield experience is made central to the narrative and connects to the themes in representing the growing dominant narratives. Britain’s narrative of disenchantment pervaded the national mythology throughout the interwar period, particularly in literature, and continues to have significant influence, whereas in the Dominions the dominant narrative mitigated the losses as a sacrifice that demonstrated to the world the qualities of their nation and manhood. That is not to say that these ways of remembering the Great War have or ever were totally agreed upon views by all members of each society, but, nevertheless, these broad narratives can be palpably felt even today in many respects in the way these nations memorialise it.

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118 Bertrand, p. 80.
119 Inglis, p. 33.
120 Sheftall, p. 2.
121 Westwell, p. 19.
122 See: Sheftall, p. 182.
2.3 1960-1999: Desire to *Commemorate* the Western Front

Representations of the Great War experienced a revival on the big screen in Britain, Canada, and Australia between the 1960s and 1980s, reflecting these nations’ renewed interest in the cultural memory of the war and its complex interpretations.\(^{123}\) On-screen, the First World War had been superseded by the Second, the dominant narrative of which could be summarised in many cinematic works as the “good war,” being viewed as a just fight between the good Allies and evil Axis.\(^ {124}\) This has been a popular and lucrative way to depict war on film through using this dichotomy to set up narrative conflict, as well as the symbols and motifs of its players, following the war as adventure model, to create popular pieces of entertainment, such as *The Guns of Navarone* (1961), that need not be morally challenging.\(^ {125}\) Counter-culture movements in the 1960s, however, fuelled by less clear-cut recent conflicts such as the Korean and the on-going Vietnam War, were re-evaluating the moral value of the kind of heroism that had long been attached to the military and war, and there was growing interest in the Great War as its fiftieth anniversary approached. Furthermore, in this period, as Chapman observes, many influential new-wave movements in Europe produced films with ‘irreverent and cynical attitudes towards cherished national myths and popular narratives of the past’.\(^ {126}\) On this tide of subversion came several notable anti-war films set in the Great War where the heroes are less idealised and the enemy is not an opposed army but found instead in the military command structure itself. A prominent early example of this kind of anti-war film is Stanley Kubrick’s *Paths of Glory* (1957), an American film, set in France, which deals with a miscarriage of justice leading to the court-martial of three infantrymen who, along with the rest of Company B, refused the order to attack from a glory-hunting general. In the latter decades of the twentieth century, therefore, there was a return of the dominant narratives of the Great War to discover what meaning remained, with some representations upholding them, others revising them, and others challenging them.

In Britain, the nation’s first cinematic return to the Western Front, *King and Country* (1964), scathingly placed the futility of war narrative at its thematic heart. Arriving on the year of the fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of the conflict, this film, in line with *Paths of Glory*, avoids patriotism, using a similarly ironic title, with a protagonist being court


\(^{124}\) Winter, *War Beyond Words*, p. 73.

\(^{125}\) See Chapman’s chapter ‘War As Adventure’ for the outline of this mode of depicting war on-screen: Chapman, pp. 171-244.

\(^{126}\) Chapman, p. 131.
martialled for perceived cowardice, and concludes with him being shot by firing squad. The film bitterly depicts the trapped nature of the Western Front, its horrific conditions, and the uncaring, unthinking, officers in the High Command. Unlike many of the interwar films, *King and Country*’s protagonist is a simple young private, demonstrating a break from the underlying theme of duty in those films as it relates to class. This bleaker view was already taking shape on-screen two years before this in David Lean’s *Lawrence of Arabia*. On the surface level this film could be viewed as a continuation of the inter-war narratives with a well-educated officer doing his duty, for King and Country one could say, demonstrating leadership capabilities and stoic resolve in troubling times. On a deeper level though, as Paris has commented, it does not shy away from portraying Lawrence as a tormented individual who ‘thrives on danger and the power to take life bestowed by the War’, depicting how war, rather than bringing out the best in men, is equally capable of revealing the worst aspects of their character.127 Returning to *King and Country*, Kelly, who describes it as the last great Great War film, believes that, although critically acclaimed, it was too bleak, stating ‘there are no uplifting moments: *Paths of Glory* ends on a message of hope, *King and Country* with an old general in his car. The condemnation of war is just as strong, but the humanity is absent’.128 The dominant narrative in Britain as it is understood today was taking shape in such films, being shown as a futile waste of life that intensified class discord and led the country on a downward spiralling path from which it could never fully recover. The bleakness of this message was reflected in *King and Country*, even if it made it less widely palatable.

In 1969, Richard Attenborough’s *Oh, What a Lovely War!* approached the subject in a much more accessible fashion through a music hall inspired comedy that followed an abridged history of the conflict. Although choosing a rather sardonic method of re-telling this story, it undercut the heroic mould of the officer class further through depicting a gleefully dancing Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig as the death toll rises on a scoreboard behind him. By casting Sir John Mills, who was widely recognised for his many heroic roles in popular films set during the Second World War, as this controversial British military leader *Oh, What a Lovely War!* is able to exemplify the “lions led by donkeys” aspect of Britain’s narrative of the conflict and undercuts traditional heroic military values. There are no heroes, only war facilitators and victims.

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The 1970s saw only two British films based during the Great War, both out of touch with the zeitgeist of the time. The first was Zeppelin (1971), an action-drama in the adventure mould with spies and a dastardly plot by the German’s to destroy the Magna Carta. Then, nearer the end of the decade, came Aces High, a retelling of Journey’s End set in the Royal Flying Corps. In Paris’s view, this film’s story ‘appeared even more strongly an essay in duty and patriotism’.129 From this point on, until 1997 with Regeneration, it was on British television where narratives of the Great War would find a home. Highlights include a mini-series adaptation of Vera Brittain’s Testament of Youth (1979), the highly controversial The Monocled Mutineer (1986), a dramatisation of the life of deserter Percy Toplis that depicted the Étaples Mutiny, which the Conservative Party took such offense over that many of their MPs signed a motion demanding the resignation of the then Director General of the BBC. Finally, one of the most popular sitcoms of the period, Blackadder, set its final full series in the trenches of the Western Front, concluding its final episode with its core ensemble going over the top and dying in no-man’s-land for no perceivable purpose. As this series had spanned generations of Blackadders since the Wars of the Roses, this final scene seemed to imply, until a later revival, the end of this family line along with this series’ satirical take on British history, thereby turning comedy to tragedy through the depiction of a point of no return in the nation’s recent past.

Two years before The Trench, the British-Canadian co-production Regeneration adapted Pat Barker’s novel of the same name, centred around the Craiglockhart War Hospital and the traumas, both physical and mental, of its patients and staff. Critical of the war itself, quoting Siegfried Sassoon’s open letter and including him as a major character, this film focuses on aspects of trauma on the individual and the ability to overcome. In his analysis of the film, Paris describes it in these terms: ‘richly-layered and haunting, Regeneration nevertheless returns us, full circle, to the “inevitable” war and the nobly enduring hero of the trenches’.130 Therefore, in the British narrative of the conflict as seen on-screen, with broader motifs of lions and donkeys, futility and wasted life, there is a continual return to the individual’s experience in the trenches. The cultural memory of the Western Front in Britain, in these terms, is a place of cognitive dissonance, an intolerable landscape that is repeatedly returned to in both fiction and non-fiction to reaffirm its intolerable nature. Beneath a cloud of disenchantment there is still a fascination with those who experienced this battlefield, one that we will return to with The Trench.

129 Paris, p. 69.
130 Paris, p. 70.
Well into the 1970s, after the creation of the Canadian Film Development Corporation in 1967, American distributors still had a monopoly on Canada’s lucrative first-run market. When the president of Odeon Theatres, C. R. B. Salmon, was challenged regarding this imbalanced handling of Hollywood films over home-grown independents he claimed that if there was a ‘good’ Canadian film it would it be treated equally.\(^{131}\) As Pendakur points out though ‘audiences can only be formed for films that are effectively available to them’.\(^{132}\) In other words, audiences can only actively choose what they want to see in relation to what is available to see. Such equivocation on the part of the controllers of distribution, implying the Canadian style was of inferior quality rather than admitting to an ingrained bias towards the Hollywood product, undeniably held back the Canadian film industry. The growth was so stunted that Christopher E. Gittings establishes the 1970s as the decade when it first became viable for the truly national feature film industry to begin to emerge.\(^{133}\)

Within this industrial context, it was not until 1978 when one aspect of the 1914-18 conflict was approached with Lionel Chetwynd’s *Two Solitudes (1978)*. Chetwynd’s film, based on a bestseller by Hugh MacLennan, confronts one of the more troubling aspects of the war for the nation, the Conscription Crisis of 1917. As opposed to the dominant narrative that appeared in the interwar period, this film does not look back to the war as a coming of age, but rather a traumatic moment where aspects of its national identity were divided. Nevertheless, this film, set solely on the home front, did not challenge the mythic figure of the idealised Canadian soldier. This would happen in 1983’s *The Kid Who Couldn’t Miss*, a poorly received docudrama that revolved around the questioning of real-life fighter pilot Billy Bishop’s military record that stirred up such a controversy that it was debated in the Senate.\(^{134}\) As Travers relates, this film was released not long after the Vietnam War had ended, and its creators were part of a new generation that chose to question, through a documentary format, the ideal of heroism, and the very construction of heroes as propagators of militarism rather than bringers of peace.\(^{135}\) However, the result of this questioning made clear that Canada’s myth of the ideal soldier in relation to the Great War was still the culturally dominant view.

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\(^{131}\) Pendakur, pp. 154-155.
\(^{132}\) Pendakur, p. 32.
\(^{133}\) Gittings, p. 2.
\(^{134}\) See: Travers, p. 109.
\(^{135}\) Travers, p. 109.
Near the end of the century, Timothy Findley’s novel *The Wars* was adapted into a film in 1983, and seven years later Guy Maddin released his *Archangel* (1990), an expressionistic melodrama of Canadian intervention in the Russian Revolution following amnesiac Lieutenant John Boles (Kyle McCulloch) who, although the film is set in 1919, is seemingly oblivious to the fact that the Great War has ended. This final example can be seen as an indirect contemplation of the Great War and *The Wars*, as can be deduced from its title, does not consider this conflict as its sole focus. Although the above is not a comprehensive census of Canadian depictions of the Great War on-screen – there are additionally a few made-for-television movies – it does however cover the theatrical releases, demonstrating the scarcity of representations of this formative period and reveals that where it does appear it is routinely an auxiliary narrative component. The Canadian experience during the Great War would not be approached on-screen after *The Wars* until quarter of a century later with the release of *Passchendaele* in 2008. Travers, in concluding his essay, theorises the plausible causes of this lack:

Perhaps World War Two and its controversies continue to overshadow World War One; perhaps the historian George Stanley is right, Canadians are an unmilitary people, quick to forget war and interested chiefly in civilian pursuits; perhaps Canadians still have a strong image of the ideal of the World War One soldier and do not look for new interpretations; perhaps the significant Canadian role in World War One still awaits a Canadian film-maker who can really capture the powerful tragic events of that time.

If we take this as true, Canada is fairly unique in its relationship to its military, preferring to cultivate the image of it as a purely peacekeeping force on the world stage and shies away from military aggrandisement, as observed in Noah Richler’s influential study *What We Talk About When We Talk About War*. Travers wrote this statement in 1999, almost a decade before the release of *Passchendaele*, and concludes with a sense of anticipation that such a film would inevitably appear.

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136 Tim Cook and Christopher Schultz designate *Passchendaele* as the first Canadian film to deal with the Great War in quarter of a century, taking us back to *The Wars*, in ‘New Theatres of War: An Analysis of Paul Gross’ *Passchendaele*,’ *Canadian Military History* (2010), 19:3, Article 6, p. 51.
137 Travers, p. 110.
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One of Australian cinema’s most prolific genre outputs, for many decades, particularly during the so-called ‘golden age’ of the 1970s and 1980s, has been the period film.\(^{139}\) Anne B. Hutton in her 1980 article ‘Nationalism in Australian Film’ states that, in an effort to grow a popular national film industry, the 1970 Australian Film Development Corporation Bill specified a wish to encourage films that show “significant Australian content”. In Hutton’s view, this caveat brought with it ideas of ‘classic Australian nationalism’, which had been experiencing a resurgence in many other aspects of culture, with a particular kind of backwards gaze that expresses three stages of growth, namely ‘tradition, transition and modernity’.\(^{140}\) At the same time there was considerable political change, with new attention given to minority groups and moving away from a monolithic image of the Australian as white, masculine, working class, and rural. Hutton describes how the period films solve this dilemma in the national identity, ‘if unable to define what Australia is, it can be solved by restating the myths of what it has been’.\(^{141}\) As part of this gazing back to the national past came fresh depictions of the Anzac myth to reaffirm particular aspects of the national identity with a cycle of films and television series in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

As Jenny Macleod has charted, the popularity of Anzac Day has fluctuated in the past century, with the 1960s beginning a particularly low period where the date was observed intimately mainly by those few who still survived having fought at Gallipoli.\(^{142}\) One of the turning points in interest in the Anzac myth was Peter Weir’s 1981 film *Gallipoli*, which grabbed audience attention through its realist aesthetic and its call for remembrance on a mythic level. For instance, one Australian poster for the film carried the tag-line, “From a legend we’ll always remember, comes a story you’ll never forget”. Addressing the Australian audience as a collective *we*, this poster emphasises the sense of the film as taking an active role in the formation of cultural memory and invokes the rhetoric of Anzacs as in some way a legendary ancestor of current Australians. As Antje Gnida observes:

*Gallipoli* is not so much a ‘war’ or ‘anti-war’ film, but rather a ‘celebration of the national ideology’ (Freely, cited in Haltof 1993), and has much more to do with the anti-British

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\(^{141}\) Hutton, p. 98.

discourses existing in Australia at the time of its release. However, as one of the films most extensively seen by Australian audiences, this film was pivotal in breathing new life into the Anzac myth.¹⁴³

Unquestionably then, *Gallipoli* has had a considerable influence on the perception of the Anzac myth and the Great War, keeping the Australian focus on the Eastern Campaign rather than the Western Front, and helped to reignite the popularity of Anzac Day for a new generation, demonstrating cinematic representations authority in influencing culture at large.¹⁴⁴ Graeme Turner describes how the way the two heroes of the film are given simplistic characterisation, essentially one is from bush, the other from the city, enables them to serve as general representatives of Australian youth going to war and ‘exist in a nationalist limbo – heroes in waiting, ready to be the symbolic indices of the futility and waste of Gallipoli’.¹⁴⁵ This depiction of Anzacs, as Bertrand highlights in her study, fundamentally continued to frame Australian identity in a white, straight, masculine, terms, but its significance is such that ‘it is so hard to represent the flaws in the myth without at the same time being accused of denigrating the sacrifice of the real men’.¹⁴⁶ In this view, they become archetypical figures; Anzac totems that evoke a sense of nationhood that can be both celebrated and read as embodying a version of the nation’s values in a time when these values were under question.¹⁴⁷

After *Gallipoli* came *The Lighthorsemen* (1987), similarly set in the Eastern Campaign, and several popular television series, including *1915* (1982), *ANZACS* (1985), and *A Fortunate Life* (1986), all depicted the Anzac trait of mateship as one that tied together groups of men with a simplistic view of nationhood.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, Jonathan Rayner observes that films addressing the Vietnam War, such as *The Odd Angry Shot* (1979), depict the conflict as a ‘political and national embarrassment’, but with Great War set narratives the heroic image of the Anzac is able to return, albeit tinged with tragedy that

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¹⁴⁶ Bertrand, p. 89.
¹⁴⁷ For more on the question of debate within Australian society and itself relation to the myth shown on film see: Bertrand, p. 89.
¹⁴⁸ See: Rayner, p. 95.
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makes it in some way more heroic.\textsuperscript{149} The phenomenological interaction with cultural representations through traditions such as Anzac Day and films such as Gallipoli can result in meaningful experiences due, in large part, to pre-established emotional investment in the subject through its invocation of the cultural memory. Turner believes that ‘our nationalist myths are not unmediated reflections of history but transformations of it, then they must work to construct a very specific way of seeing the nation’.\textsuperscript{150} They do not necessarily serve to enforce uncritically national grand narratives, although they can, but take those formative narratives and translate them into a representation that fits in with the agreed upon contemporary national identity to reinforce a sense of togetherness through shared understanding.

From the 1960s to the turn of the century, British, Canadian, and Australian filmmakers returned to the national narratives of the Great War in ways that questioned certain aspects while, at the same time, affirming this period’s significance in the formation of the contemporary national identity. These representations followed a long period where the Second World War had been favoured narratively, but with growing counter-culture movements there was a move away from simplistic affirmations of positive military interventionism to ones that grew increasingly disenchanted and began to edge more towards pacifism. As Winter states, the ‘post-1970 generation of war films […] are one important source of the moral ambiguity with which the public has come to view war in the last few decades’.\textsuperscript{151} The cultural memory of the Great War was made prescient once more as a site where this complexity could be depicted and engaged with. For Britain, the disenchantment narrative firmly rooted itself with less of a focus on the upper classes and questions of duty, but rather the simple act of endurance in the trenches. Cinematically, Canada, on the other hand, had difficulty consolidating the idealised soldier figure with this anti-war view, and after two prominent controversial works, largely avoided the subject of the war in any direct manner. For Australia, a number of Anzac focused films and television series were able to reshape this nationalist myth, making Anzac martyrs on-screen that reinvigorated the legend for a new generation, while simultaneously avoiding much of the contemporary debate about this predominantly white, masculine ideal.\textsuperscript{152} The revival in interest in the Great War in the final few decades of the century, and its exploration in these three national cinemas, framed the conflict in ways that directly

\textsuperscript{149} Rayner, p. 107-109.
\textsuperscript{150} Turner, p. 107.
\textsuperscript{151} Winter, \textit{War Beyond Words}, p. 74.
\textsuperscript{152} Bertrand, pp. 87-89.
confronted cultural myths that would continue to have relevance in the twenty-first century.

2.4 Conclusion: The Legacy of Cinematic Representations of the Western Front at the Turn of the Century

This chapter opened with a comparative analysis of two 1915 articles from the Motion Picture Supplement enquiring into the future of war and cinema. What followed was an exploration into the evolution of the way in which the Great War has been shown on-screen for the purposes of propaganda and remembrance, thereby shaping and manipulating the cultural memory of these events. Through an analysis of three key periods, I presented this heavily abridged history of the war’s on-screen representation to demonstrate its importance in the cinematic cultures of Britain, Australia, and Canada. During the conflict the core concern for these nations I outlined was that of self-determination when it came to representing the national self on-screen, particularly in newsreels, revealing a desire to witness the Western Front through the perspective of their countrymen. In this way, these weren’t just newsreels reporting from the front, they, together, told the story of each of the Dominion nations coming of age, while what was shown on Britain’s cinema screens, and how the rhetoric framed it, carefully balanced entertainment and propaganda to produce several works that not only influenced the mood at home but throughout the Empire and in neutral nations as well. These alternate views of the war when it was very much present in the thoughts of these nations’ citizens were to become equally culturally defined in the following century, with coming-of-age narratives taking root in Canada and Australia in the inter-war period, while Britain took a bleaker view in its films that indicated the waste of life that had occurred, being more in line with the anti-war cinema that was popular in Europe in the late 1920s and early 1930s, but, in part due to censorship and the commonly prevailing view held outside all but a small literary circle, undercut this with a sense that there was still meaning to be found in the theme of duty.

After the Second World War, up until the 1960s, there were very few cinematic works in these nations that returned to the Great War, but as the fiftieth anniversary approached a questioning of its remaining influence on their identities arose. British films fixed the dominant narrative further in the sense of disillusionment, becoming more class conscious.
and foregrounding the futility of the conflict. Canadian films, when they did appear in the 1970s and 1980s, avoided translating the idealised view of the soldier of the Great War to the screen as any direct challenges to this culturally dominant view were only seen as insults to the memory. The national bildungsroman narrative resurfaced in later Australian films through a revival of the Anzac myth and continued its focus on the Eastern Campaign as opposed to the Western Front where Britain and Canada more often chose to set their stories.

In this survey I have outlined a number of key concepts that shall be returned to throughout this thesis. These are the desire within a nation for its own independent forms of cinematic representation, giving a bespoke culturally related texture to represent their dominant narratives, and, within these three periods, the sense that the Great War on-screen poses both challenges and opportunities for filmmakers to confront questions of national identity. Cinema was still considered a young mode of expression at the time of the Great War, and therefore the questioning of cinematic potentialities posed by the likes of Wade and Griffith is telling. These writers were outsiders looking towards the ‘European War’ and asking how this new medium, particularly in terms of narrative, may be able to represent conflict in meaningful ways in the future the same as other forms of art have in previous generations. Although they were gazing backwards at the important works of the past, and undoubtedly to those most widely remembered in the present, they establish a persistent trend in the rhetoric surrounding films depicting historical subjects. To be specific it is the idea that cinema can frame memory to make it present and in this way memorialise the chosen moment of the past to reawaken it in the cultural memory. Winter, although critical of the medium, asserts ‘the flaws of those films which attempt to show what war “is really like” are evident, but in the hands of masters, film is today and is bound to remain an essential point of reference for those who try to understand what happens to soldiers in combat and for those who try time and again to imagine war, our brutal companion, past, present, and future’. In this way, cinematic representations have the ability to re-envision these battlefields in a way that interacts with the cultural memory to reinforce and re-map it for the modern era. This kinetically revived mode of re-experiencing the Western Front in particular, often through fictional (or fictionalised) narratives, moulds the cultural memory into a contemporarily pertinent and affective form of commemoration.

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153 Winter, War Beyond Words, p. 91.
Chapter 3  Take Up Our Quarrel: Production
Background and the Role of National Cinema in Preserving Heritage

A nation’s cultural memory is something that, if it is to survive, must be commemorated, must be handed down the generations like a torch, and therefore must be represented widely from within. More than any other contemporary art form, film has the potential to re-present the past in a kinetic and engaging fashion to a significant national audience. It is also debilitatingly expensive. *The Trench* (1999), *Passchendaele* (2008), and *Beneath Hill 60* (2010), range from the lowest end of an estimated five million GBP to the highest at twenty million CAD, each receiving a considerable share of the budget from governmental institutions and heritage initiatives. One of the instrumental factors in the ignition of the so-called ‘memory boom’ of the 1980s and 1990s is, in Jay Winter’s view, the affluence of said nations, shifting the focus from the concept of origins that such memory appropriates to the actual audience who desire to connect to the cultural memory.\(^\text{154}\) In his essay ‘The Generation of Memory: Reflections on the “Memory Boom” in Contemporary Historical Studies’, Winter observes the simple truth that ‘dwelling on memory is a matter of both disposable income and leisure time’.\(^\text{155}\) To preserve the cultural heritage, whether that be through institutions that protect sites of significance, large-scale commemorative rituals, or the re-presenting of the cultural memory in such art forms as cinema, costs money that previously would have been required for issues that impacted the present nation, meaning they had less time and resources to focus on a conception of the continuity this has to the past. As a comparative case study he points towards economic and cultural trends in Britain and France noting the symmetry between the two that he believes ‘we ignore at our peril’.\(^\text{156}\) This economic affluence is, in Winter’s estimation, just one significant factor amongst a multitude that range from political, technological, cultural, and philosophical, that have allowed the memory boom to thrive, not just in its initial combustion in the west in the late twentieth century, but through its continuing reverberations in the twenty-first.\(^\text{157}\)


This memory boom has been a rich vein of study for a number of academic fields, from history to sociology. Vast swaths of society have needed to be engaged in the passing on of memory, involved in rituals preserving it, and desiring its continual existence. In many ways, as Winter lays out in the below passage, the memory boom is the direct result of the personal and cultural traumas that came from both the First and Second World War:

The passage of generations has played a part in this cultural phenomenon too. The survivors of World War I have faded from the scene, but their children, now elderly, have brought to young people over the last two decades stories about families and about what happened to them in wartime. These stories become interwoven with narratives about World War II, many of which were linked to the Holocaust. An earlier notation about traumatic memory was stretched to fit this new and unprecedented disaster. Encoding these narratives of both world wars, and of the Holocaust too, are works of imaginative literature that will endure long after the last survivors of the wars of the twentieth century have passed away.\(^\text{158}\)

Pierre Nora, who established the concept of *lieux de mémoire*, was a key intellectual figure in this movement. Cultural memory, following Nora’s definition, links people to their presupposed origins and helps to define their identity through a shared heritage, and this heritage surfaces most clearly at sites marked as historically important. These sites of memory become mythologized through their associated past events intruding on the present national consciousness and through the resulting juxtaposition they are re-evaluated in a variety of media embellishing the memory further in the culture.

As described in the introduction, memory, and more particularly for our purposes the way cultural memory can be transposed into the representative form of film, is capable of this due to the fact that it is a more malleable social construct than history. This dichotomy of history and memory, however, predates Nora, although he was the first to fully articulate its development within the specific national context of France. Maurice Halbwachs, writing half a century earlier, in his essay ‘Historical Memory and Collective Memory’, having been inspired by the ideas of Émile Durkheim, examines three different forms of memory that exists within a social group. Collective memory, in Halbwachs’s view, exists between autobiographical memory, the first-hand experience of the individual, and historical memory, the construct made by the study of the past by professional

historians. Each of these can be seen as offering something that the others cannot.\footnote{Maurice Halbwachs, ‘Historical Memory and Collective Memory’ in The Collective Memory ed. by Mary Douglas (New York: Harper and Row Colophon Books, 1980), p. 52.}

Autobiographical memory is so clearly specified purely by what the individual remembers of their own experiences, and coloured by their personal viewpoint, that it is most highly valued when it comes to a sense of self, but sometimes requires the use of both collective and historical memory as a kind of framework to supplement the gaps that appear over time. Historical memory, on the other hand, is about details and the contrasts distinguishing one period from another, it is a fundamentally disciplined form.\footnote{Halbwachs, p. 58.}

Halbwachs, although using the term ‘historical memory,’ does not find it adequately represents its nature, and prefers the term ‘formal history’ at times to better communicate the contrast between it and other forms of memory within a society. Accepting the idea that categorising periods and people within them defines formal history, it by necessity begins taking shape at the point where the traditions and social memory are diminishing in cultural relevance.\footnote{Halbwachs, p. pp. 78-79.} Halbwachs believes collective memory is different to history in two respects:

It is a current of continuous thought whose continuity is not at all artificial, for it retains from the past only what still lives or is capable of living in the consciousness of the groups keeping the memory alive. By definition it does not exceed the boundaries of this group.\footnote{Halbwachs, p. 80.}

In this way, collective memory preserves the boundaries of a group, linking them to a shared sense of the past. This concept was later adopted in Nora’s concept of sites of memory, which preserve cultural memory by continuing ritual practice, creating a sense of continuity within a group, whereas ‘history belongs to everyone and to no one and therefore has a universal vocation’.\footnote{Pierre Nora, ‘Between History and Memory’, in Realms Of Memory: Volume I: Conflicts and Divisions, ed. by Pierre Nora, and Lawrence D Kritzman, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 3.}

Expanding on this dichotomy of history and cultural memory further, Nora later observes, ‘what we call memory today is therefore not memory but already history. The so-called rekindling of memory is actually its final flicker as it is consumed by history’s flame. The need for memory is a need for history’.\footnote{Nora, p. 8.} Therefore, cultural memory, as a form of shared collective thought, is distinct from history and
opposed to individual memory; it is formed collectively amongst peoples and nations to create a shared understanding of their past which in turn is used as a foundation to define their contemporary identity. Yet it is also an inevitable, even necessary, part of this transition from memory to history which, as Nora states, ‘requires every social group to redefine its identity by dredging up its past’.\textsuperscript{165} Winter, when examining how sites and rituals shape and are shaped by cultural memory, defines sites of memory in relation to the Great War thus:

The critical point about sites of memory is that they are there as points of reference not only for those who survived traumatic events, but also for those born long after them. The word “memory” becomes a metaphor for the fashioning of narratives about the past when those with direct experience of events die off. Sites of memory inevitably become sites of second-order memory, that is, they are places where people remember the memories of others, those who survived the events marked there.\textsuperscript{166}

The significance of culture to cultural memory manifests itself here in this observation through this backwards gazing outside the purely intellectual, and remaining affectual, and at times sentimental or nostalgic. Culture is both a shaping force of memory and identity but is itself reliant on continued memory practice and group identity to exist.

In this chapter, to confront this question of cultural memory and identity in relation to the production background of \textit{The Trench}, \textit{Passchendaele}, and \textit{Beneath Hill 60}, I’ll explore the stated motivations of the creative talent behind each of these projects, as well as the broader national context in which they worked. To do this I shall examine the three case studies in turn to build an understanding of how they were able to reach production, interrogating the motivations of the financiers and national institutions involved, as well as the filmmakers, who brought these narratives to the screen. Thus far my discussion of cultural memory has centred on the idea of nationhood, therefore the first section in this chapter will now delve into the aspect of family memory in which individuals are more personally engaged. This will particularly be in reference to \textit{The Trench}, the directional debut of Scottish novelist and screenwriter William Boyd, and the highly charged British memory of the Great War at the turn of the century. After this I will expand further to

\textsuperscript{165} Nora, p. 10.
demonstrate the political nature of remembrance as it interacts with the concept of national identity, this time examining Passchendaele, and highlighting the place of heritage institutions and funds in relation to this. Finally, I will explore how a changing sense of national identity in relation to cultural myths impacts what stories are told and the way in which this task is undertaken. Australia’s Anzac myth and its place in society at the time of Beneath Hill 60’s release is of core interest here for its well-defined place in the culture, but also its contemporary evolution. What I hope to clearly demonstrate through these examples is the construction of cultural memory through active agents selecting and drawing from a perceived shared past, one that is deeply connected to the experience of the Western Front, and its significance in terms of commemoration. From the individual, to the family, outward to the nation itself, these narratives have stayed within the cultural consciousness for the last century because people have retold, preserved, and commemorated them. Britain, Canada, and Australia each have their narratives of the Great War, with significant cultural differences being revealed in their decisions to tell stories from it. Here, before moving onto the how of the following chapters, I simply ask Why?


Thus far my discussion of cultural memory has centred on the idea of nationhood and the citizen more broadly. Here, however, we shall look towards more personal and familial linkages that exist within this cultural memory, leading certain individuals to actively pursue representing them on-screen. To once again clarify, cultural memory is ‘a collective concept for all knowledge that directs behaviour and experience in the interactive framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated practice and initiation’. Developing ideas put forward by Aby Warburg as well as Halbwachs, this definition by Jan Assmann in his seminal essay ‘Collective Memory and Cultural Identity’ indicates both the shared and interactive nature of this kind of collective knowledge and its ritualistic formation. In Assmann’s view, for the on-going process of cultural memory to occur within a social group a kind of investiture must take place to admit the initiate into

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this shared knowledge base. Therefore, it would seem that to be one of these bearers of cultural memory one must undergo processes of committing to memory, whether consciously or unconsciously. This can take many forms, particularly in the modern era. The schoolchild at their desk, the visitor strolling around the museum, the tourist touring sites of past conflict, the academic with their tome on the sociological impact of such-and-such, the absorbed midnight reader of historical fiction, or a person sat in a public park contemplating its lichen spotted memorial. All of these are, in some way, undergoing a dual process of remembering (in the cultural sense) and committing to memory (in the personal sense) as they are actively absorbing or considering mediated knowledge that is the historical capital, as Pierre Sorlin would term it, of the society and familiarising themselves with it from sources – each offering varying degrees of depth and disparate amounts of information – and this knowledge formed in the individual’s mind fosters the perception that they are a part of a society with a shared heritage.\textsuperscript{168} It is over time that the knowledge, usually from a number of the above listed experiences, is amalgamated into a manifested conception negotiating with the past and their own relation to it. This is the individualist component of that amorphous, yet palpable, collective entity known as cultural memory.

For those going through the Great War, what we shall call the first generation of rememberers, their process of memorising the events was much more, shall we say, direct. For instance, the Battle of the Somme would have been something on-going in their time, they maybe even experienced it or knew someone who did. In short, what is more original or deeply personal about their experience is simply that the first generation went from a state of not knowing something will happen, it happening, and finally, if they survived, knowing how events concluded up to a point. We, now, are not so (un)fortunate in being able to memorise these events through this direct experiential method – we’ve got our own pending concerns, but identities seem to be more formed, and certainly more often affirmed, by attempts to understand what has happened than the unknowns of the present or what could. This concept is what Assmann calls the ‘concretion of identity’ through continual preservation of knowledge and manifestations of the cultural memory to signal who belongs to the imagined social group and who does not.\textsuperscript{169} Karl Mannheim, commonly regarded as the father of sociology, labelled this latter form of memory “appropriated memory”, as opposed to first-hand “acquired memories”. Even taking into

\textsuperscript{169} Assmann, p. 130.
account the indirect nature of these appropriated cultural remembrances, they still shape the identity of a later rememberer within a culture group and hence their perception of the world around them.170

The Battle of the Somme, arguably more than any other battle, persists as a vivid trauma in the British cultural memory of the Great War, with losses unmatched in the history of the nation’s army. The traumatic reverberations of the Somme, in the view of Maria Holmgren Troy, continued to echo powerfully throughout twentieth century Britain, becoming a kind of ‘founding trauma’ that defines the contemporary identity, and it is to the end of the century that I wish to draw attention.171 William Boyd’s The Trench, premiering in the U.K. in September 1999, was made with a centennial compulsion in mind. This film can be seen as one cultural artefact amongst many that chose to memorialise the conflict of the beginning of the century as it came to a close. As Claudia Sternberg has observed ‘the number of British World War One-related ceremonies, exhibitions, re-enactments and media productions reached a peak in the final decade of the 20th century’.172 It seems that the coming of the new millennium sent some into an unusually ruminative state on nature of progress, modernity, identity, and remembrance, summoning them to reconsider the momentous events that went on to impact all that came after. This was not just the case in Britain, as the widely observed memory boom demonstrates, but within Britain there was a notable return to the trenches of 1914-18 as a principle site of significance.

In the case of novelist Boyd he chose, for his third return to the Great War in fiction, cinema as his form for its ability to seemingly return colour and life into familiar monochrome images. In this passage from his non-fiction volume Bamboo, he narrates the motivation behind revisiting the Somme at the end of the century:

We forget that the First World War took place in glorious Technicolor, so familiar we are with its monochrome version. We forget also that those smiling faces, chatting, brewing up, puffing on their Woodbines, also spoke. The silence – and the sepia – distance the event from us profoundly, and it seemed to me one of the great values of making a film

about the trench experience of the First World War at the end of the twentieth century would be that, at the very least, we would see it and hear it approximately as it must have been.

And perhaps, more importantly, it would be of some significance, as we leave the century behind, to attempt once again to come to terms with one of its defining events. It can be argued, with some conviction, that the twentieth century actually began in 1914, not 1900. Or, even more pertinently, that it began on 1 July 1916 at 7.30 in the morning as the barrage lifted and the first waves of Kitchener’s Army left their trenches and walked across the dense untended meadows of the Somme valley, the misty morning sun beating down upon them, too their sudden, messy deaths.  

Boyd’s terminology highlights the significance of the idea that cultures must ‘come to terms with’ identity defining events by actively choosing to look back, and, in his case, to strive to capture the experience approximately as it must have been through film, a quality at the centre of this thesis’s consideration of representing the Western Front. Furthermore, his analogy of the war taking place in Technicolor, and this vibrancy being lost in the monochrome familiarity of the archive could seem prophetic as, in 2018, in time for the centenary of the Armistice, New Zealand filmmaker Peter Jackson, in cooperation with the Imperial War Museum, London, produced the documentary They Shall Not Grow Old colourising original footage. These two examples, one being fiction, the other documentary, both coming at times of mnemonic significance, take different approaches to the memory of the experience of the Western Front, but both place great stock in bringing colour back into the popular imagination of it.

As Boyd’s motive behind the film was an exercise in trying to come to terms with a traumatic, identity-defining aspect of the British cultural memory, The Trench becomes an object of remembrance in itself. Cinema, as an industry of culture, is part of the processes that shape cultural memory and it is in its potential to influence that makes this film notable for study. As previously stated, this was not the first time he had approached the Great War, preceding his sole directorial endeavour he had written two novels exploring the subject. First was his Booker Prize-nominated An Ice-Cream War (1982), set away from the European battlefields, creating a dark comic tale amongst the British and German clashes in East Africa. He has since described this part of the conflict as ‘a surreal but

bloody little affair that resembled the counterinsurgency of the sixties and seventies more than the traditional image of huge, immobile armies facing each other across 600 miles of trenches’. This quote acknowledges the fact that the commonly perceived notion of warfare in this period has been shaped more by a shared vision of the trenches of the Western Front, and not the often equally dramatic conflicts simultaneously taking place elsewhere.

Just a few years after *The Ice-Cream War*, in 1987, he turned to the Western Front and the Third Battle of Ypres in *The New Confessions*, a novel written as if it were the autobiography of its protagonist. Boyd chose the setting for his own personal connection to this battlefield, his grandfather and namesake, William Boyd, was wounded there in October 1917 by a piece of shrapnel. Although Boyd the younger was never able to meet his grandfather, he held this metal shard, now a family relic, and grew up on tales of his grandfather’s war experiences. This tactile form of investiture made the conflict personal through an artefact linking Boyd back to a family member two generations previous. This ‘familial proximity’, the honouring of ones ancestors while trying to figure out what their lives might have been like, as is the mystery Boyd was exploring through *The Trench*, is a fascinating and potent aspect of each of the focus films discussed as we go through them. Knowledge of family heritage, those who came before and their actions, is a fundamental, and even inspiring, motivator of historical remembrance for many as, for one to wish to belong to a culture group, they desire to feel connected to events beyond their present ken and thereby orient themselves within a greater historical narrative. The significance of family has been asserted by Winter, who postulates:

> Historical remembrance overlaps with personal or family remembrance [and] is a way of interpreting the past which draws on both history and memory, on documented narratives about the past and on the statements of those who lived through them. Many are active in this field. Historians are by no means in the majority.

With this overlap in mind, compare it to the below statement by Boyd concerning his own relationship with the experiences of his grandfather:

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174 Boyd, p. 43.
175 Boyd, pp. 41-42.
176 Boyd, p. 42.
Chapter 3

I never had the chance to ask him what was going through his mind during that wiring party (he was a sergeant in the Royal Engineers) as he unspooled fresh rolls of barbed wire in front of the British trenches, freezing motionless as the starshells came over from the German lines. Perhaps he heard the unmistakable noise of incoming artillery – he had been two years on the Western Front by 1917 – and wondered, as everybody must have done, if this time his number might be up.178

From this quote I would like to highlight the word *perhaps*. What are historical fictions if not a form of speculation? An act of taking historical information and forming a narrative within the parameters set, reshaping the primary, albeit hand-picked, material provided by the past into something that is both recognisably of the past and a contemporarily constructed story. It was during Boyd’s time researching *The New Confessions* inside the Imperial War Museum, looking over miles of old newsreels, photographs, and documents, that the idea for *The Trench* was first conceived to later be developed into the screenplay.179

Boyd’s family history, and this expanding sense of the lived experience of the past through contact with images within an institution dedicated to preserving the past such as the Imperial War Museum, can therefore both be seen as catalysts for the creation of the film. Outside the personal motivations of Boyd, *The Trench*’s production aligned with a period of widespread remembrance of the Great War in Britain, demonstrating the cycle involved in the ‘concretion of identity’ that Assmann has observed. To have continued relevance, cultural memories require continual retelling, with new generations initiated, and then in turn passing it on with their own individual signature. *The Trench*, *Passchendaele*, and *Beneath Hill 60* can all be seen as instances of this preservation. As Assmann asserts, a core characteristic of cultural memory is its ‘capacity to reconstruct’ in a way that relates the knowledge of the past to the contemporary society that appropriates, criticises, preserves, or represents it.180 He states:

> Cultural memory exists in two modes: first in the mode of potentiality of the archive who accumulated texts, images, and rules of conduct act as a total horizon, and second in the

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178 Boyd, p. 41.
179 Boyd, p. 43.
180 Assmann, p. 130.
mode of actuality, whereby each contemporary context puts the objectivized meaning into its own perspective, giving it its own relevance.\textsuperscript{181}

In representing events in the cultural memory, in film or any other medium, there are problems with authenticity as it relates to the original period. This arguably does not undermine the past; rather it is an inevitable result of any retelling. As Boyd admits ‘we say, casually, that life in the trenches of the Western Front must have been ‘unimaginable’ but the challenge of art, surely, is to try to imagine it, to set the imagination free and to try to bring that bizarre, terrifying, boring, filthy world to life’.\textsuperscript{182} The imaginative potential that the cultural memory provides is, in this way, a key aspect of its draw.


National cinema institutions play a crucial role in the shaping of memory, using more often than not a combination of private and public funds to create works that are intended to connect, or in some way reflect, the culture in which they are produced. Yet they are not the only contender on this stage. For over a century, the spectre of Hollywood has been deeply rooting its dominance over cinema screens, particularly in the west, and especially in the English-speaking world. On-screen representation is still a troubling concern for Canadians today. As recently as 2015, English-language Canadian films only took a one to one-point-five per cent share of domestic ticket sales.\textsuperscript{183} Nonetheless, the desire for increased national autonomy when it comes to film is a wide-reaching battleground on which culture and identity – or, in Manjunath Pendakur’s words, ‘self-expression’ and ‘self-realisation’ – is engaged.\textsuperscript{184} Under the jurisdiction of the Department of Canadian Heritage, Telefilm Canada, for instance, proclaim their guiding principle is to ‘stimulate

\textsuperscript{181} Assmann, p. 130.
\textsuperscript{182} Boyd, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{184} Manjunath Pendakur, Canadian Dreams & American Control: The Political Economy of the Canadian Film Industry (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1990), p. 221.
demand for and access to Canadian productions – in Canada and everywhere’. Not merely culture, but *heritage* becomes a national cinema’s express responsibility, and one that can be transmitted at home and abroad. Heritage is a nuanced label, meeting at the crossroads between culture, tradition, history, tourism, and national identity in both the sense of how it recognises itself and how it wishes to be perceived by outsiders. In any case, the principal implication of the heritage label is the notion of inheritance, particularly in a material sense. What any given nation has, in this view, is theirs by right of those who preceded them, and with this comes a desire to protect this, as any good heir should. As a consequence of this implication of protection, however, comes a dispossession anxiety. This is keenly expressed by Paul Gross, writer, director and star of *Passchendaele*, who proclaimed in an educational tie-in book to his film:

> Over 600,000 Canadian men and boys enlisted to serve in the Great War. It’s not hyperbole to assert that what it means to be Canadian – strong, resolute, proud – was forged in the crucible of the Western Front. Sadly, with each passing year, our memory of this sacrifice diminishes. We must not let this happen. We must pay honour to the 173,000 casualties, and we must do homage to the 67,000 who paid the ultimate sacrifice.

This quote unambiguously states the aim of this project as a resistance against forgetting, because in his words this *must not* happen. A film like *Passchendaele*, approaching the topic of the Great War on the national stage, is part of a wider process of remembrance, supported by heritage focused institution Telefilm Canada, that attempts to preserve in the cultural memory periods considered of national importance within the present identity.

Premier of the Government of Alberta, Ralph Klein, first announced that *Passchendaele* was to be produced in November 2005 at the Museum of the Regiments. This announcement was made as part of the province of Alberta’s centennial celebrations and the film premiered three years later at the Toronto International Film Festival during the ninetieth anniversary of the Armistice. By aligning itself with this milestone,
Passchendaele can be viewed as a project with remembrance in mind, aimed toward a release date in 2008 to make the most of the film’s mnemonic potential. In the press release announcing the project it established the ‘province’s proud military history’ as the focal point of the film, thus justifying the $5,500,000 towards the budget from the centennial public purse and Telefilm. Any expense seemed to be justified in the Premier’s goal of keeping the region’s heritage alive, as this quote demonstrates:

"The province's centennial is a time to recognize our past and tell our stories, including those about Alberta's military heritage," said Premier Ralph Klein. "We must work to keep our veterans' sacrifices in the forefront of our minds. The story of Passchendaele pays tribute to a key event in our country's history, and will educate Albertans and all Canadians for years to come."

It would come to be the highest budget Canadian film ever produced at around $20,000,000 indicating a significant amount of investment and faith in the project and its goals. Similarly, The Trench, to return briefly to this example, was a low budget film at around £5,000,000, produced in association with British Screen and the Arts Council of England, demonstrating how without these institutions in place such heritage based projects could not be as easily undertaken. Now, with Winter’s concept of affluence as a necessary part of the ability to focus on and share cultural memory in mind, it should be noted that throughout the 2000s, up until 2009 in line with the global economic crisis, Canada had seen consistent growth, allowing for such an expensive form of commemoration to be produced with public funds. As well as promulgating the cultural memory not merely as a motivator but an objective of the project, this investment was in large part in recognition of the film’s director, writer, and star.

Actor-turned-director, Paul Gross first gained national, and international, fame in the 1990s through his leading role in the popular television drama Due South (1994-1999) where he played an officer in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, an icon of Canadian law enforcement. Once again Passchendaele would place him in uniform, trading the vibrant red serge of the Mounties for the olive drab of his Great War ancestors. In the

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seminal study of stardom and celebrity *Heavenly Bodies*, Richard Dyer explains how the figure of the star, their image and persona, are inherently intertextual, connected to their past work and even what is known about their personal life, so that their very presence in a work implies something about the film you are about to see.\(^{191}\) As Gross, both in Canada and abroad, was most well-known for his role as a Mountie in *Due South*, the perception of him and his work is closely tied to this symbol of Canadianness, and this officially sanctioned image of authority.

As established in the previous section, inherited narratives can come from society and culture at large, yet the most personal and valued often stem from a familial link, which are at their most vibrant in those places where they intersect with official history. Once again, as with Boyd, Gross has discussed the significance of hearing his grandfather’s wartime experience, told to him first-hand, as what ignited his interest in the topic. He explains, ‘for me, his story opened a door onto the adult world of consequence. Since then my interest in the cost and carnage of the First World War has remained undimmed’.\(^{192}\) In recognising this form of familial memory, Winter states:

> When we encounter family stories about war in this century, we frequently confront another kind of storytelling, one we have come to call traumatic memory. The recognition of the significance of this kind of memory is one of the salient features of the contemporary memory boom. I take this term to signify an underground river of recollection, first discussed in the aftermath of World War I, but a subject of increasing attention in the 1980s and 1990s, when posttraumatic stress disorder became the umbrella term for those (as it were) stuck in the past. The memory boom of the late twentieth century arrived in part because of our belated but real acceptance that among us, within our families, there are men and women overwhelmed by traumatic recollection.\(^{193}\)

The personal trauma of Gross’s grandfather has reverberated throughout the past century, from becoming a kind of family trauma through the empathic connection between grandfather and grandson, to then later, through the representation in the film, be transposed into the cultural trauma of the nation. Returning to Boyd, and *The Trench*, the experience of the Western Front was part of the family’s narrative, with an artefact testifying to its legitimacy, to similarly engage with a traumatic, formative past. However,

\(^{192}\) Gross, pp. 2-3.
in the search for a formative past comes the question of what it is exactly such a history formed in terms of national identity.

Thus far I have attempted to demonstrate how the production background of *Passchendaele* was intimately tied to the idea of heritage, calling upon national symbols, from the associations that Gross’s star persona creates of Canadianness to the targeted release of the nineteenth anniversary commemorations. It is worth now, therefore, considering what it was about this period, Canada in the 2000s, that, apart from a notable upcoming anniversary, would make such a project culturally relevant. In calling upon the past, Assmann claims that ‘through cultural heritage a society becomes visible to itself and to others. Which past becomes evident in that heritage and which values emerge in its identificatory appropriation tells us much about the constitution and tendencies of a society’.\(^{194}\) This concept of national values has been significant in both the reception of the film and also, more significantly, in the discussion of national identity in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

The production of *Passchendaele*, it has been observed, coincided with a period of identity crisis for Canada. This crisis period has been notably articulated by Noah Richler in his in-depth consideration of Canadian national identity in the first decade of the twenty-first century, *What We Talk About When We Talk About War* (2012). Richler’s core premise is that from 2001 to 2006, through concerted effort by the Conservative Party and their allies in civil society, Canadian ideas about the significance of the military and its role in foreign policy were drastically recalibrated from being perceived as a “soft power” peacekeeper to a “warrior nation”.\(^{195}\) This peacekeeper myth came into question, as, despite the fact it may have had the best of intentions behind it, it no longer seemed practical as a national attitude in the new millennium. Due, in part, to the global sense of insecurity ignited in September 2001, this questioning of the national identity had already been prefigured by Canadian involvement in Bosnia, Rwanda, and Somalia in the 1990s. As Richler notes, it was a Canadian, Roméo Dallaire, that led the U.N. peacekeeping force in Rwanda, which catastrophically failed to prevent the genocide of more than 800,000 Tutsis by the Hutu majority government. In Somalia, the brutal beating to death of sixteen-year-old Shidane Arone by Canadian soldiers not only undermined the peacekeeper image of Canada but led many to question the effectiveness of, on the surface level at least, these

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\(^{194}\) Assmann, p. 133.

humanitarian efforts. The Canadian Armed Forces needed a new sense of purpose as the twenty-first century dawned, and, as Richler proclaims, ‘the quickest way to do this was to retrench and turn back to the much less complex business of “war-fighting”’.  

Richler sees the decade in which *Passchendaele* was released as a period when Remembrance Day (née Armistice Day) was co-opted as ‘an opportunity of looking forward and of the military’s present vindication, more than of the lament for which November 11 was intended’. The call for knowing history better, in his view, was a euphemistic way of persuading the Canadian people to acknowledge a military legacy, and wish to continue it. In this way, the Vimy Legend was re-appropriated to convince the public that they were inheritors to a “war fighter” identity that was a ‘simply more exciting’ narrative of self-actualisation that offered the ‘pleasing idea of winning’ over the contemporary interrogation of the role of the peacekeeper. Richler believes that a section of Canadian civil society ‘was able to effect the transformation because it took the power of foundation myths seriously’. An indication to this in relation to *Passchendaele* is the figure of Klein, a great champion of the project, who was head of the Alberta Government when it received the funding, and the leader of the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta from the late 1990s until 2006. This desire to keep the nation’s military heritage at ‘the forefront of our minds’ can be noted in the statement by Premier Klein quoted earlier. Similarly, the press release announcing the film provided this synopsis: *Passchendaele* follows the fortunes of two people in love, caught in the vortex of great conflict. It is a story of passion, courage and dedication that will ignite in our youth an interest in this formative period in our nation's history. Through undertaking an enormous project like *Passchendaele*, Klein and Gross were able to bring the Great War back into the Canadian cultural consciousness, but exactly what version of the Canadian past should be remembered was a problematic topic at the time.

In later chapters I will be examining how *Passchendaele*, being released when it did, balances precariously between a cultural memory artefact that enshrines exceptionalism as a core aspect of the national identity through a depiction of marshal prowess and a melodrama that explores themes of redemption and the futility of war. As I will discuss,
the film received multiple, antithetical even, responses from critics. Some viewed it as a patriotic display of the “warrior nation” observed by Richler, which shows military competence and the ability to exert force to achieve a particular goal, while others saw the ideal of Canada as a peacekeeper being displayed where the individual’s responsibility to the community is what binds them together as one people. At the heart of both myths – meaning stories circulating within a society that inform its identity – is unity, and yet these two visions of Canadian identity seem very much antithetical to one another. With such a dramatic schism appearing in the cultural consciousness it is not surprising that a large “event” film such as Passchendaele grapples with this dissonance.

3.3 Unearthing National Stories in Beneath Hill 60 (2010): ‘We took the Hill, come and help us keep it!’

In his seminal analysis of Australian narrative traditions, National Fictions: Literature, Film and the Construction of Australian Narrative, Graeme Turner argues that certain formal and ideological patterns traverse representational forms and considers ‘narrative as a culture’s way of making sense of itself’.202 What he advocates is the concept that ‘the nation’s narratives are defined not so much by factors such as the birthplace of the author or whether a text was written in Sydney or London, but rather by the bank of ideologically framed myths, symbols, connotations and contextual associations upon which they draw’.203 This has already been witnessed to a degree in the previous two examples with the national narratives on display being those of Britain and Canada. The similarities of the two, for instance the element of loss, are clear but, simultaneously, the historically divergent way in which the Great War has scarred each comes through in these representations. There is a palpable sense of nation in their relation to the cultural memory, national identity, industry contexts, and marketing, as the ‘bank’ from which they draw to conceptualise the same period is distinct, even as allies who fought side-by-side on the same front. In terms of representation and meaning, The Trench indicates a kind of backwards gaze prompted, in part, by the encroaching millennium, and Passchendaele, through the complex socio-political environment in which it was released, manifests the

203 Turner, p. 19.
struggle within the national consciousness to find the appropriate form to remember a moment of both national loss and achievement. When examining this third example, *Beneath Hill 60*, in contrast, the debate is less framed in a discussion of national identity crisis than it is in articulating a recognisable image of the national character, namely following the Anzac tradition, within this tradition’s contemporary configuration, which has evolved and continues to do so, yet still elements remain fixed. These elements, or, to use Turner’s phrase, bank of ideologically framed myths, are brought to the screen for this representation of the actions of the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company to indicate the contemporary formation of such national myths within the culture.

In the previous two examples the individual most responsible for deciding to bring a particular aspect of the cultural memory to the screen in a creative sense has been the writer/directors Boyd and Gross. For *Beneath Hill 60*, however, the individual whose passion fuelled the film’s eventual creation was not a filmmaker but mining engineer Ross Thomas. Having worked in the Australian mining industry much of his life, he had a particular interest in researching the efforts of the tunnellers during the Great War. During his time as an inspector of mines in Queensland in the 1980s he learnt of the diaries of Captain Oliver Woodward, officer in the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company responsible for detonating the mine beneath the infamous Hill 60 on June 7th 1917. On discovering Woodward’s story, Thomas made contact with Barbara Woodward, Oliver’s daughter, who allowed him access to five volumes of journals written in the 1930s by Woodward himself. Before meeting anyone interested in producing a project depicting the tunnellers in Australia, Thomas had invested in a documentary with a British production company. Soon into the process, however, he decided to cut his losses once he realised the direction the film was taking would focus on solely on British troops and decided to direct his efforts into finding a way to tell something that shed light on the Australian perspective of the war.

Finding a first-hand account written by a key figure with a considerable amount of responsibility in a vital turning point in the conflict provided a framework for a representation of the national experience, especially as this aspect of the fighting, tunnellers not traditional soldiers, has often been overlooked in Australia in favour of the more highly regarded image of the Anzacs who landed at Gallipoli and fought on that front. Focusing national remembrance on those directly taking part in combat is a common

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tactic for forming popular narratives, particularly narratives where individuals must sacrifice their lives for the sake of the nation. Joan Beaumont’s findings indicate a shared imperial nature of the Anzac legend alongside other British Dominions, as she observes:

To be sure, Australians drew on the distinctive cultural imagination that arose from the bush, but Canadians had a comparable imagery inspired by their settlement of an equally vast and inhospitable landscape. For both Dominions, then, the ideal of the soldier that emerged after the war was the resourceful, independent citizen in arms who, thanks to his social and cultural background, made a natural fighter.205

Therefore, what such mythologised constructions create is a set of values, which can at times seem exclusionary and inflexible. This can be inferred by Barbara Woodward’s explanation for the fact that the miners’ story, not just Woodward’s but that of the Australian tunnellers in general, has been much overlooked:

Most of the men stayed on after the armistice because their engineering skills were needed to rebuild roads and bridges, so not many of them took part in the homecoming parades […] There was also a low level of recognition of the work they had done. Theirs was a secret war and people had no concept of what tunnellers did. There was also the feeling that mining was not quite right; that is, was not glorious soldiering, with men charging the enemy on horseback, swords drawn. Digging underneath and blowing people up was seen to be a bit unfair, really.206

Consequently, by choosing to represent this group for a national audience Thomas was hoping to shed light on an aspect of the nation’s heritage that has in the past been excluded from the wider cultural memory, either by some kind of prejudice or merely a failure to widely acknowledge their role in the conflict. To achieve his aim, Thomas met with executive producer Bill Leimbach, later describing how ‘we realised the only way to do proper justice to the story was to turn it into a feature film’.207 Meaning, if they wanted the widest possible audience, Australian or otherwise, to hear this story, it would have to be on

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207 Ross Thomas quoted in: Mark Day, ‘Film Digs up Forgotten Past of War’s Hill 60 Tunnellers’.
the big-screen and it would have to be adapted into a narrative feature rather than a documentary.

Back in the initial process of getting this story to screen in documentary form, Thomas describes how ‘I wanted recognition at the Australian War Memorial, but when support from Canberra was found to be wanting I pushed for it to be located in my home town of Townsville’. Thomas’s insistence that this feature film be produced in Townsville paid off as much of the initial financing for the film came from wealthy individuals in the town who were interested in bringing this story to life. Later, after the global financial crisis of 2008 forced some investors to pull out, the filmmakers approached national funding bodies, eventually being able to raise their initial budget to nearly ten million dollars due to funding from Screen Australia as well as a distribution deal from Paramount. In a Townsville Bulletin piece advertising for extras and financing as the film was entering pre-production, Leimbach claimed, ‘this is a war movie with a lot of relative things to Townsville and by going in as an investor with property here as well, I hope that the film is not only successful but also brings more people to this city because of it’. On the same page is a repurposed Great War recruitment poster announcing ‘we took the Hill, come and help us keep it!’ with an image of Leimbach inserted (Figure 5). This tongue-in-cheek reference to period propaganda brings with it a genuine expectation that it is in the reader’s interest to aid in the making of the film if they can. By emphasising the local aspect of the cultural memory, the film became a kind of communal memorial to the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company for Townsville. Moreover, in a similar fashion to Passchendaele, Beneath Hill 60 had a targeted release window to optimise its potential for mnemonic recognition. Its target: Anzac Day.

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208 Thomas quoted in: Mark Day, ‘Film Digs up Forgotten Past of War’s Hill 60 Tunnellers’.
209 Andrews interviewing Sims, p. 16.
Through Leimbach, screenwriter David Roach was brought onto the project and, after a treatment and draft of the script had been written, director Jeremy Sims also arrived, just off from his feature film debut *Last Train to Freo* (2006). Although having never considered directing a war film before, Sims expressed in an interview the significance of national identity in his decision to direct the project. In his words, ‘I’m very interested in the idea of Australian identity, and I had never imagined that I might jump in the deep end by telling one of our iconic war myths’. 212 Therefore, on a wider cultural level, following from Barbara Woodward’s observation, bringing a story like that of the tunnellers to life can be viewed as an effort to expand the cultural memory of the war to encompass more than the typical Anzac archetype. When discussing national identity, Turner states that:

Inventions of national identity are not simply cultural templates to be employed, with automatic success, by various groups. That the message has been “sent” is no guarantee that is has been received. Further, definitions of national identity are sites of struggle; the

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definitions are never static or “fixed”. Nevertheless, the specific terms of the particular “invention” are of some cultural importance.\textsuperscript{213}

In this regard, Leimbach was quoted just before the film’s release, that ‘the picture is in the right place at the right time. The limelight is being pulled from Gallipoli across to the western front, which was longer, larger, and ended with a positive result. Last year was the first time there was a dawn service for the western front; Australians want to learn more about it and this film will help fill that gap’.\textsuperscript{214} Therefore, from the outset, the impetus for this film’s production was to commemorate an overlooked aspect of the Australian Great War experience. In line with Turner’s concept, the cultural template of the Anzac myth was framed in the discussion around the film’s production to approach this icon in the cultural memory once again, but through this contemporary version of the myth shed light on the Western Front experience.

3.4 Conclusion: The Cinematic Formation of Cultural Memory and Its Role in Preserving National Heritage

In this chapter I have sought to layout the motivations behind the production of The Trench, Passchendaele, and Beneath Hill 60 within each of their national contexts. For Britain, the late 1990s was a time where there was much remembrance and gazing back toward the Great War at the opening of the century. In the 2000s, Canada was undergoing a crisis of national identity requiring parts of society chose to consider what the nation was to attempt to reveal what its place is now on the world stage. In Australia in the 2010s the Anzac myth has continued to hold its dominant place in the national mythology, but has required interrogation on some of its more hyper-masculine, imperialist, exclusionary aspects of its traditional form. The Great War has been a keystone of each of these country’s cultural memories in differing ways, whether that be the disenchantment narrative in Britain, the war-fighter/peace-keeper dichotomy produced around it in Canada, or the Anzac myth in Australia. The creators of these films have become familiar with these narratives throughout their lives, in both a national sense, through official institutions

\textsuperscript{213} Turner, p. 110.
such as schools and by yearly rituals from the July 1st commemorations in Britain to Anzac Day in Australia and New Zealand, but also more personally in a familial sense. For Boyd, as a case study, his initiation into the cultural memory of the Great War was first connected to stories of his grandfather, with a link to the period forged by a piece of metal, creating a blood connection that is literal on two counts. It is not blood that remembers though. Such a biological linkage in terms of the collective memory of a defined family group masks the true psychological connection that is formed over a lifetime from the moment the infant enters into the perceived family structure. This ‘indissoluble union’, as Halbwachs terms it, is unique for its predetermined nature, setting up relationships before one could even comprehend any kind of social framework. Yet, throughout the early years of one’s life, and into adulthood, one undergoes initiation into this family group and receives from it an acutely focused view of history, unique to each, and made more so by the peculiarities of the individual within the family unit’s consciousness, that follows often named individuals who are not the main players mentioned in the history books. A desire to reconstruct the past as told by elders, therefore, can be seen in all three films, with the directors/writers of both The Trench and Passchendaele referring to stories told to them by their grandfathers as a deeply meaningful influence in wanting to represent the period on-screen. Beneath Hill 60, instead, is based on the written record left by Captain Woodward, with a more local impetus in mind. Both these motivations, however, are connected back to the idea of keeping the memory of the Western Front in some way still present within the cultural consciousness.

To return to the metaphor of the passing torch, with the Great War as well as the Second World War, arguably more than any other periods in history, there has been a palpable desire in the west to keep them part of the cultural memory. In many ways we still think of our society, our world, as in the aftermath of both. From these testimonies cinematic narratives can be formed, and state sponsored institutions, as shown in the examples here, often are willing to step in to secure much of the funding. This is only possible in an age of affluence, with both time and money free to pursue and preserve national heritage, and has become a vital aspect of the sense of national identity. As Assmann maintains, it is through collective knowledge that society creates a sense of unity and constructs it as a noteworthy collective to be a part of. These three films have each

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216 Assmann, p. 132.
received their spark from the multiple forms of collective knowledge, the familial, the cultural, the historical, to attempt to reconstruct the Western Front for contemporary audiences. In the next chapter we will move from *why* this task was undertaken to *how* stylistically it was bought to fruition.
Chapter 4  

Romance in the Memory: Reconstructing the Western Front

In his essay ‘Invention, Memory, and Place’, Edward W. Said examines the way in which nations are politically motivated to invent narratives to reinforce their contemporary identity, if successful these stories can enter the cultural memory supporting nationalist efforts to secure loyalty and intensify insider understanding of one’s country.\(^{217}\) A crucial realisation that comes from this motivation for narrative imbued representations of past landscapes, in Said’s view, is that ‘people now look to this refashioned memory, especially in its collective forms, to give themselves a coherent identity, a national narrative, a place in the world’.\(^{218}\) With this in mind, one clear rationale for both the marking of the physical site of battle and the representation of that same remembered space comes into view: both are implemented to control and manipulate the cultural memory. The first generation inhabited the territory, we possess the map, or, to be more precise, innumerable maps many sharing common qualities, some highlighting different landmarks than others, and a few that don’t seem to fit at all with the rest. First and foremost though the map, the manifestation of the cultural memory shaped landscape of ‘the past’ as represented, is an imagined space. In this way, it is arguably not that people want to be there; rather, it is that forging such a connection with the cultural consciousness can infuse someone with the desire to know what it was like to have been there during identity defining periods. To share in the collective memory, one would have to have a certain amount of knowledge of the experience, while not having taken part in the experience itself, as it is from this knowledge that one can feel a part of a shared heritage. Meaning is both bestowed and found in these landscapes through connections to a particular culture’s memory. In an example close to our study, Paul Gross, before production began on Passchendaele (2008), attended the 2007 re-dedication ceremony at Vimy Ridge. In the non-fiction companion book to the film writer Norman Leach quotes the director:

“To stand at the Canadian memorial to the battle is a sobering experience,” he recalled. “It is humbling and horrifying. What today is an eight-minute walk, in 1917 took our troops 10 days of the fiercest of fighting and cost almost 5,000 lives and 16,000 casualties. It


\(^{218}\) Said, p. 243.
doesn’t take much effort to recreate the horror in your mind and see our forebears struggling across the tormented ground.”

Visiting the actual spaces on which major battles of the Great War took place, as this quote attests, is an often-affective way to feel an almost spiritual connection to those living in the past, allowing one’s imagination to mingle with historical knowledge as well as cultural and familial memory to experience, through a tinted lens of pastness, a highly charged emotional, deeply subjective, relationship with the landscape in its past and present form. Visiting sites of memory on the former Western Front is therefore a way to feel a connection with the past in the national and personal sense. However, this is just one practice of remembrance, albeit the most spatially defined, yet it holds a close relationship with another, often similarly involving physical entry without the geographical specificity of this happened here, that of trench reconstruction.

Trench reconstructions are a distinctive node in our contemporary rituals of remembrance, as if voluntarily stepping into a space made to look, and often sound, similar to that of an actual trench could bring us closer to understanding and empathising with those who had to suffer them historically. One of the earliest of what could be defined as a ‘reconstructed’ trench opened in the formerly booming Victorian pleasure town of Blackpool in 1916. Titled The Loos Trenches, after the recent battle, this attraction was originally dug during exercises by troops preparing to cross the channel. The war had eaten somewhat into the town’s traditional trade, that of holidaymaking, and to counteract this these practice trenches were repurposed to create an educational experience for civilians to feel they could gain insight into the life of those at the front. In his essay, comparing this early reconstruction to the fibreglass ‘Trench Experience’ inside the Imperial War Museum, London – opened in 1990 and remaining in the style described until a refurbishment in 2013 – Richard Espley underlines the principle phrase in the rhetoric surrounding the exhibiting of the Loos Trenches:

Their absolute realism, their authenticity, was clearly of key importance. […] Not only was authenticity sought, but it was clearly of paramount importance to assure the visitor that it

219 Norman Leach, Passchendaele: An Illustrated History: Canada’s Triumph and Tragedy on the Fields of Flanders (Ontario: Coteau Books, 2008), p. 47.
had been achieved. Given that these trenches were not constructed for this purpose, but for flexible military training, it is a suspect claim, particularly in its relation to specific sites on the Western Front. What is most striking to the modern reader, however, is that it anticipates the rhetoric of all subsequent trench reconstructions.\textsuperscript{221}

Their effort to achieve a sense of ‘realism’ and ‘authenticity’ could be witnessed in the display of British military equipment, weaponry and, most significantly, the guides for these trenches were made up almost entirely of wounded soldiers returned from the front, relating their first-hand experiences in reference to the reconstruction surrounding them.\textsuperscript{222} It was this sense of authenticity, the feeling that being enclosed in these adorned practice ditches made to stand in for a ‘real’ experienced space, which enabled the civilian to share a meagre fragment of this practical knowledge, to feel closer to loved ones or to global events at large, that was conceivably what made people want to see such a reconstruction for themselves. However, the validity of such claims of authenticity should always be under a certain amount of scrutiny. Inaccuracies noted by Espley in the case of the Loos Trenches include the guidebook map, which he describes as ‘a compressed and confused map of Flanders’ with many misspelled toponyms.\textsuperscript{223} The conclusion extrapolated from this is arguably that a representation of a place, no matter how convincing, cannot capture the absolute impression of its realities and will always, therefore, be deeply flawed.

On the other hand, following these observations, Espley provides a significant caveat to any judgment drawn from such inaccuracies, one that I wish to highlight for the following discussion of cinematic reconstructions. Simply put, it is impossible to entirely recreate the complex ‘truths’ that have occurred in even the recent past on any scale. He asserts ‘the mistake that hobbles this discussion is to continue to rely upon the vocabulary of the “realistic” and the “authentic”. It is obvious that such a stable, univocal narrative was and is unavailable’.\textsuperscript{224} In this view, one should question the veracity of representations, to a point, but be weary of overzealous claims that only the one-hundred-per-cent perfect representations are of any worth. They do not exist. The clear fault in logic by this way of thinking then can be seen in equating the two absolutes of authentic and inauthentic with worthwhile and worthless. It would seem that it is a virtue to strive

\textsuperscript{222} Espley, pp. 327-328.
\textsuperscript{223} Espley, p. 342.
\textsuperscript{224} Espley, p. 345.
towards being, as best as one can, historically authentic in the creation of a work – whether that be a film, novel, or museum exhibit – while at the same time it being an immeasurable quality that will never hold up to scrutiny by either expert or that of a stringent amateur. Reconstructions, or representations, though can be worthwhile for the way they attempt to express an aspect of the cultural memory, particularly as it pertains to the present. One should study motivation and extent rather than absolute authenticity.

Cinema has the ability, in a fashion, to turn the then and there into the here and now, removing the impediment of time by re-constructing the historical memory landscape. The territory we are concerned with here is the Western Front. This space has been safely relegated to the past, with places marked for rituals of remembrance, and the landscape remains in a binary state of how it is viewed now and how it was perceived to be then. In the previous chapter I demonstrated how national narratives were key in the motivation behind the production of my three case studies. The Trench (1999), in the British context, became a deeply personal project in which director William Boyd wanted to attempt to bring the ‘bizarre, terrifying, boring, filthy world’ of the Somme ‘to life’. It touched on a wider pre-millennial British mourning for the century, and particularly the dead of the Great War, which showed itself in a not inconsequential amount of works of both fiction and non-fiction. Almost a decade later, on the other side of the Atlantic, Passchendaele was being produced at a time when there was much questioning of what it meant to be Canadian. Although somewhat binary, Noah Richler’s argument of the growing dichotomy of an image of Canada as a war-fighting ‘warrior nation’, exemplified by their widely acknowledged offensive capabilities in both World Wars in the first half of the twentieth century, struggling with the peacekeeping ‘soft power’, which had dominated the previous half century, but had recently been brought into question through a number of high profile controversies, is significant here. Gross’s project was being championed, by which I mean funded, by various governmental institutions to align with national nineteenth anniversary commemorations of the Great War. The cultural memory was ‘refashioned’ to inform the contemporary national identity. In Australia, Beneath Hill 60 (2010) was similarly focused on renewing national interest in the Western Front, although it in many ways was looking to open up the Anzac myth further to include not just the frontline infantry, but others, in this case the miners who have remained a relatively obscure aspect

225 Boyd, p. 45.
226 Noah Richler, What We Talk About When We Talk About War (New Brunswick: Goose Lane Editions, 2012), p. 43.
of the general understanding of warfare on this landscape. *Beneath Hill 60* was looking to unearth their story and in particular that of Captain Oliver Woodward from his diaries.

With these three films it is clear that the *then* of the Western Front continues to impact the cultural memory of these nations so that a return to them is inevitable to reinforce their contemporary identities. The sites *now* though arguably do not reflect the landscape remembered, re-remembered, and imagined of these places at the time they made this impact. The territory has grown and changed, only the map remains of these determinative periods. Descriptions, literal maps, photographs, paintings from the naturalistic to the surrealist, films, and actuality footage are all that is left of the battlefields as fought, while the monuments marking these sites reflect the landscape as memorialised. In this chapter, and the following two, I am going to focus on textual analysis of the case study films themselves to see how they reconstruct aspects of the Western Front landscape and the national experience of it. This will touch on questions of authenticity and romanticism, on the influence of the nationally dominant narratives, and on filmmaking style. The primary focus of this chapter is to look at how the experience of life on the Western Front is represented for contemporary national audiences. These films are fundamentally reconstructions; through cinematography we navigate the space where we meet the inhabitants, the characters that the narrative centres around, and through this journey we hope to catch a glimpse of a lost world that is still so very present in the cultural consciousness.

Before we begin this analysis of the three films it is worth reminding ourselves of the title cards at the very start. These were examined in the introduction but, to be brief, the title cards of *The Trench* establish that a reduced force holds the frontline during the run up to the Big Push of the Somme Offensive. Those in *Passchendaele* describe how the war has been raging for three years with Canadian troops “mired in combat” and draws attention to the sacrifice of this young nation by giving the statistic that one in ten never came home. *Beneath Hill 60* begins by explaining that a stalemate has been existing on the Western Front and civilian miners have been brought in to conduct a “secret, silent, underground war” to attempt to resolve this. With these in mind, each of the films will now be examined individually before coming to a final comparative conclusion. My analyses will begin, firstly, with an examination of the opening sequences, asking how they establish the different national visions of the conflict. I will be making particular reference in these sections to statements by the writers and directors about their intention for the films as a project and the way in which they intended to approach the history. In the second
section of each I’ll take a broader view of the films, with reference to particular scenes, to study how the nation’s soldiery is portrayed. If we are to come to any conclusion about the depiction of national character in these films it is necessary to spend some time discussing characterisation to see how the national self-image is preserved in the cultural memory within these films as well as their contemporary relevancy. Having established how the Western Front is introduced and the characters that inhabit it, in the third and final part of each analysis I am going to detail how the Western Front is reconstructed, discussing the cinematic as well as storytelling techniques the films use to refashion the cultural memory. In undertaking this three part branching style of analysis – introduction, character, landscape – I intend to establish how the different national origins shape the representation of the Western Front experience in these films within each of these nations’ evolving dominant narratives.


We say, casually, that life in the trenches of the Western Front must have been ‘unimaginable’ but the challenge of art, surely, is to try to imagine it, to set the imagination free and to try to bring that bizarre, terrifying, boring, filthy world to life.\(^{227}\)


As described in the previous chapter, the seed of the idea for *The Trench* came from research conducted at the Imperial War Museum. Boyd was in the process of writing his second novel on the Great War, *The New Confessions*, having long been interested in the conflict from hearing of his grandfather’s experiences. Boyd has described how he spent weeks watching over newsreels, occasionally glimpsing ‘the reality of what these young men, these boys, were going through’.\(^{228}\) What *The Trench* formed from was the idea that the familiar version of the Western Front that many think of today is an inert, silent, ‘monochrome’ one drawn from the photographic record that distances us from the lived experience that occurred in ‘glorious Technicolor’.\(^{229}\) It is fitting then that, following the title-cards, and accompanying the opening credits, is a series of archival photographs of


\(^{228}\) Boyd, p. 43.

\(^{229}\) Boyd, p. 43.
British troops in the trenches. The first of these is Lieutenant John Warwick Brooke’s highly recognisable photograph of the Cheshire Regiment holding a captured German trench at Oviller-la-Bosisselle (Figure 6). When the image first fades in it is digitally zoomed on the figure of the sentry, poised on the fire-step with his rifle, before drawing back to show the full frame, with his comrades asleep. By its immediate focus on the individual, before revealing the whole scene, Boyd establishes the film’s focus on the figure of the soldier living within this landscape. Moreover, the scene is quite a passive one, with all the other soldiers resting, representing a moment more typical of this period of the conflict at large then one showing action would have been. Each of the subsequent photographs similarly depict the more humdrum and quotidian aspects of trench life, with soldiers sitting down, standing in unregimented groups, cooking, and smoking of course.

As the opening credits draw to a close, the final image of troops mingling fades into colour and begins moving. A time stamp appears stating that this is June 29th 1916. Private Billy Macfarlane (Paul Nicholls) travels through the lines delivering a can of fresh water, passing two other characters who are sitting playing cards, before moving on to find his brother in Petticoat Lane (Figure 7). This sequence of shots as Billy moves through the trenches establishes the setting further as one of mundanity, with the main indication that they are a part of an active battlefield being the sounds of distant shellfire. After Billy delivers the water, Lance Corporal Victor Dell (Danny Dyer) is overheard asking another soldier if he has any sugar for the tea. Certainly a considerable concern, and a particularly British one, yet it is not the life or death uncertainty that one might expect on the frontline. Furthermore, when Billy finds his brother, Private Eddie Macfarlane (Tam Williams), he gives him an apple that he’s taken with the “sergeant major’s compliments”. These three issues, the grateful delivery of fresh water, the desire for a proper cup of tea, and a scrounged apple from an officer’s store show an environment of scarcity and uncertainty. Representing everyday experiences and struggles, not battle, lay at the film’s heart. Moreover, the smooth transition between archival photographs to the reconstructed trench of the film can be seen as a manifestation on-screen of Boyd’s claim that the role of art is breathing colour and life into the fading sepia of the ‘unimaginable’ national past.

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230 The photograph and more detailed information can be found on the Imperial War Museum website: <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205193132> [accessed: 05 January 2018].
231 Boyd, p. 45.
By seemingly breathing colour and life into the final monochrome photograph, *seemingly* being the operative word, Boyd’s opening sequence provides for the audience some of the unembellished archival material, the selected series of photographs, as way of trying to establish a certain authenticity of the reconstructed setting of the trench through the comparison. Furthermore, by making a seamless transition from still archival photographs to the moving contemporary reconstructed film it establishes a dialogue between the historic site of conflict, the Somme Valley just before the battle, and this

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232 *The Trench*. 00:01:07.
233 *The Trench*. 00:02:09.
representation of it. By employing archival images to set up ‘everyday’ aspects of the trench experience the film mimics techniques of the documentary to gain a greater sense of realism as a direct link is made to the historic artefacts of the photographs themselves. Additionally, alongside the intellectual acknowledgement of the photographs there is the possible emotional response kindled by this direct invocation of the dead. As Claudia Sternberg observes, ‘archival footage still provides some of the strongest affective moments and – since it is not subject to the changes in the memory sectors of the human brain and need not fear mortality – will remain central to any renderings of the war’s history’. The photographs, through this technique, provide an affective link to the past for the cultural memory to latch on to, analyse, and build upon. In this way, Boyd is simply elaborating upon speculative possibilities which are stimulated through the recognition that the figures in the historical photographs and newsreels were living people. These possibilities provoke questions such as, in Boyd’s words, ‘who are you? Who did you leave behind? How frightened were you? Did you think you would die? How would I have coped if it had been me instead of them?’ As such, *The Trench* follows in a tradition going back to Frederic Manning and other post-war writers through a focus on the individual lives of the soldiers at the front, as opposed to the political machinations of the “important” higher-ups. More significantly, the film’s relationship with the cultural memory, and the questions that are naturally asked about the lives of those living in periods marked out as formative, turn *The Trench* into an exercise of enquiry as well as a reconstruction of the experiences of those British troops in the Somme Valley in the summer of 1916. After posing these questions, Boyd directly states:

*The Trench* is my attempt to provide answers to those questions. It is not a film about conflict – the Battle of the Somme only begins at the end – but about waiting to go into battle and the pressures of that wait – two days, with the clock clicking remorselessly down – on very young men.

These archival images, their placement before the fictional narrative of the film, and the sombre tone of the score, convey the impression of a kind of monochrome ‘In Memoriam’ to the dead. Boyd followed the desire to bring these photos to life and translated it quite

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235 Boyd, p. 45.
236 Boyd, p. 45.
literally to the screen in these opening few minutes. What this creates therefore is not the action packed opening to a combat film, instead, in line with the British dominant narrative of the conflict; it establishes the film as a melancholic meditation on the war dead through focusing on the experience of life of a small ensemble of Tommies.

*The Trench’s* immediately established focus on the individual’s experience of war, and the interpersonal relationships between the men, not the socio-political background or the strategic minutiae of the battle, can be seen as a continuation of previous forms of trench reconstruction. While examining criticisms made against the Trench Experience in the Imperial War Museum after its opening to the public in 1990, Espley considers the efforts to ‘personalise’ the conflict in the eyes of visitors through the use of mannequins and voiceovers as echoing attempts within the nation’s school curriculum that sought to imbue a sense of historical empathy. An utterly agreed upon ‘univocal’ narrative of the Great War, one that is can unquestionable have the title of ‘authentic’ upon it, is entirely out of reach.  

As such, in the case of the Trench Experience, Espley argues:

> While the gallery does not provide the whole truth of all trench warfare, it does provide an accessible impression of certain aspects of this elusive historical situation. Its light, sound and smell effects, and its multiplicity of human stories told in fragments across the jumbled progress of a few minutes, mimic in some important ways a truth of the confusion and disorientation of the battlefield.  

In his view, the conscious choice of focus ‘is not driven by an attempt to edit out the unpalatable; it is rather that the contemporary popular understanding of the trench was heavily invested in the experience of individual soldiers’.  

The virtue of the effort was wrapped up in contemporary considerations such as those questions posed by Boyd. Rather than being concerned solely with the formal history, individual experiences were being debated, uncovered, and taught as a vital aspect of the conflict. Winter aligns this focus on individualism in British war films with a wider movement following the end of conscription in 1963 and the downsizing of the army, as he observes ‘it is hardly surprising

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237 Espley, pp. 345-346.
238 Espley, p. 343.
239 Espley, pp. 345-346.
that when armies were reduced radically in size, films moved away from the spectacle of war to the predicament of the warrior and of those civilians trapped in war at this time. A product of the latter half of the same decade as the Trench Experience, *The Trench* is framed as a similar reconstruction where the spectator encounters on-screen uniformed actors of flesh and blood, rather than fibreglass mannequins. The core ensemble of *The Trench* is made up of a regionally diverse Pals battalion. Having volunteered together in Lancaster in the north of England is seventeen-year-old Billy and his older brother Eddie. The younger is dependent on the older, and the older seems guilty early on about bringing him. Also Privates, there is George Hogg (Michael Moorland) and Horace Beckwith (Anthony Strachan), both from Glasgow, and Irishmen Charlies Ambrose (Ciarán McMenamin) and Rag Rookwood (Cillian Murphy). From England, apart from the two brothers, is Lance Corporal Victor Dell, with Dyer’s trademark cockney accent, and his more educated counterpart Private Colin Daventry (James D’Arcy). The latter of these is the most disenchanted of the men from the start; the others come to learn it. The only professional soldier, Sergeant Telford Winter (Daniel Craig), is a seasoned veteran who has a clear affection for these boys that conflicts at times with his equal regard for military discipline. His superior, 2nd Lieutenant Ellis Harte (Julian Rhind-Tutt), is, apart from a brief visit from Lieutenant Colonel Villiers (Adrian Lukis), the highest ranking officer shown at the front. There is a sense of hopelessness in this character from the beginning. As he tells the sergeant news that they are supposed to be in the third wave he seems not to believe that it’ll be the safe walkover expected after the barrage, and back in his dugout finds little comfort in his worn old pocketbook of Tennyson. He seems to find some in an occasional drink though.

In actuality it would have been unlikely to have a battalion constructed of such a broad cross-section of the United Kingdom, particularly in a period when Pals battalions were made up of one usually regionally locked group of friends and close acquaintances who signed up together. Yet, by creating a kind of composite battalion, a fictional regionally varied group of Pals, Boyd deals directly with the ‘myth’ as it stands in of itself and not attached to any specific real experience. He borrows from the cultural memories, the history, and refashions them with his own grounded storytelling style. It may be inauthentic in this regard but it is so for the sake of an abstraction that accounts for a

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greater portion of the United Kingdom than it may have done otherwise. Yet, equally, Boyd chose to be authentic in another aspect relating to the characters, age. Most of the cast were in their late teens and early twenties to reflect authentically the youthful demographics of many who were killed. Boyd claims that ‘we forget how young soldiers are and there is no disguising a genuinely youthful face, that innocent incongruity beneath a tin helmet’ (Figure 8).

In this regard, Pam Cook emphasises how the reconstructive nature of the film’s production caused some controversy. By making the young actors in pre-production experience a night, dusk until dawn, on a replica trench with specialised military reenactors provoked ‘criticism that to submit the participants to such harrowing experiences for the purposes of media spectacle was exploitative and in poor taste. History, it seems, requires a proper distance’. It should be noted that this is not an unusual practice in pre-production as a way of getting the actors trained in basic military procedure. However, from Cook’s observations, it seems Boyd and the production team, through their attempt to get a clearer insight into what young British troops experienced and to recreate it for the screen, managed to find themselves in an uncomfortable liminal space between being too close to the past and yet not close enough.

Figure 8: 'There is no disguising a genuinely youthful face, that innocent incongruity beneath a tin helmet'.

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241 Boyd, p. 449.
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Within the ranks there is fair amount of joking and profanity. Boyd attributes the former trait to a kind of ‘gallows humour’ and for the latter cites Manning’s *Her Privates We* (1930) as evidence of the colloquial language used by the men.\(^{244}\) The soldiers are not exactly romanticised figures; they are shown in a grounded fashion, portrayed with human flaws and petty differences, not as heroes. With this film Boyd, who is considered as a novelist to be a realist writer, seems to approach the Great War with a similar social realist style. James Leggott describes this stylistic tendency towards social realism as an ‘impulse shaping a significant proportion of British cinema’ which, broadly speaking, involves a style of filmmaking that ‘avoids the fanciful or epic-historical in favour of stories rooted in everyday experiences’.\(^{245}\) Many scenes and interactions in *The Trench* revolve around the small unspectacular moments between the men, not the wider concepts of cause, meaning, and impact of the battle itself. They talk and complain while digging latrines, smoke together, and bring rum supplies through communication trenches under shellfire. In one scene Victor offers to show the others some pornographic photographs in his possession, which most agree to pay a penny a glance for. Conflict arises when one of the photographs is stolen and Victor, unable to find the culprit, accuses Horace. He, in turn, denies it, telling Victor that he doesn’t need to see his filthy images as he is engaged, and has been since his last leave, a secret he has been keeping from George. Once discovered this causes a rift between the two Glaswegians that lasts until a stray shell kills George. In actual fact it was Billy who stole the photo as he felt the woman pictured looked like a girl who worked in his local post office. He can’t even recall her name, but the resemblance sends his thoughts back to home. Here the war in terms of combat and military structure is secondary to the inter-personal issues of these young men that are exasperated by the boredom of holding the line. For this reason I would argue that it is closer to a British social realist work in line with Ken Loach or Mike Leigh than it is in any respect a combat film that focuses on the spectacle of battle. This can also be witnessed in the film’s visual style, which follows the social realist drive for naturalism.\(^{246}\) For instance, in execution it has a restrained colour palette despite Boyd’s references to seeing the past in highly saturated Technicolor.

Within this realist style, as the *social* aspect of ‘social realism’ suggests, there is a notable preoccupation with one of Britain’s favourite subjects, class. In particular, social realism has a preoccupation with the working class and their struggles at the bottom of the

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\(^{244}\) Boyd, p. 451.


\(^{246}\) See: Leggott, p. 168. Particularly in reference to the naturalistic style of Ken Loach and Mike Leigh.
social hierarchy and thereby often invites ‘a socio-political reading’.\textsuperscript{247} Most of the soldiers are shown as working class, with noticeable regional accents, while the single representative of the officers for the majority of the film, Harte, speaks in Received Pronunciation. When one of the Harte’s superiors does appear it is brief and for the purpose of propaganda. In Chapter 6 I will be analysing this scene more fully, but briefly put Lieutenant Colonel Villiers’s only reason for coming to the front is to be filmed giving uplifting words to his men, and in the process lie about the effectiveness of the artillery barrage. British social structure and its unequal class hierarchy has been transported into some ditches in northern France entirely unaltered. The “lions led by donkeys” myth could be perceived here by the seeming ambivalence to the young men’s lives. Popularised in cinema by such films as \textit{Oh! What a Lovely War} (1969), this view claims that perfidious generals led the lionhearted infantry to their deaths needlessly, and are fundamentally to blame for the whole bloody affair.\textsuperscript{248} Yet there comes to be an issue with the naming of this myth, particularly in more modern representations, in that the soldiers do not to any real degree live up to the heroic model implied by the title of “lions.”

David Reynolds in \textit{The Long Shadow: The Great War and the Twentieth Century}, using the example of \textit{Oh! What a Lovely War}, the original play and film adaption, and A. J. P. Taylor’s \textit{The First World War: An Illustrated History}, enlightens us on one particular aspect of note in post-1950s retellings of the dominant narrative in Britain – a distinct loss of deference.\textsuperscript{249} Deference implies a representation that respects the image of the soldiers, and with this treats them in an almost sacred manner. The unromantic lives of the young men, with their arguments around pornographic photographs, their lack of proper military discipline, and their admissions of fear in \textit{The Trench} depicts these soldiers not as “lions” but as young men out of their depth. It is not to any degree disrespectful, as such, but nor can it be said to be providing an admirable model of the average British soldier in the Great War. In relation to the Somme in particular Boyd claims:

Innocence seems to me to be the abiding feature of the Battle of the Somme, and its sibling, Ignorance. The war had been going for two years yet everyone – from the generals to the private soldiers – thought the battle would be a walkover.\textsuperscript{250}

\textsuperscript{247} Leggott, p. 167.
\textsuperscript{249} Reynolds, pp. 333-335.
\textsuperscript{250} Boyd, pp. 450-451.
Ignorance, often being the characteristic of the commanders, and innocence, as Boyd highlights, becomes that of the ranks, the archetypal Tommy. Their individual deaths fundamentally are meaningless. The loss of deference remains from the first phase of this post-1950s revisionism, yet the ironic tone and much of the biting satire of *Oh! What a Lovely War* is missing. Instead, *The Trench* and works of its era, such as Sebastian Faulks’s *Birdsong* (1993), replaces this attitude with fatalism. These men will die, in large part due to the ignorance or ambivalence of their commanders, and they do. What provides this film with meaning instead is the flawed humanity displayed in their hum-drum, unspectacular final hours. The characters wait together, bored and naïve, for the Big Push that the audience knows will likely be their end. The futility underscoring much of Britain’s cultural perception of the Great War is reflected by the hopelessness of their situation.

*As The Trench* is a narrative fiction situated within the understood framing of the days preceding the Somme it cannot show the entire territory, that of all trenches in intricate vivid detail, or even, as a map might attempt, to indicate the overall layout of the British and German lines. Film’s power and particular abilities lay elsewhere. *The Trench* attempts to reconstruct one stretch of the frontline for the characters to inhabit that can be recognised by the audience as a prototypical, or even generic, trench. In this way, the film’s recreation of a portion of the frontline is naturally more fragmented than the map of said landscape. We, the audience, spend a significant amount of time in Petticoat Lane and Haymarket – both trench lines borrowing their titles from London street names – and get glimpses of further areas, but are by form trapped within the voyeuristic confines tethered to the camera following this select group of young men. As a consequence of the claustrophobia affected by the setting, control of the environment was vital for this reconstruction. It should be noted here that Wolfgang Petersen’s *Das Boot* (1981), taking place inside a German submarine during the Second World War, provided a model for its contained setting, its constant tension, the implied danger, and ‘the war confined to a few dozen men in a few yards’. For *The Trench* they needed to recreate a warren of

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251 Something that John Masefield’s *The Old Front Line* (1917) supplies affixed to the interior of the back cover.
252 Boyd, p. 453.
earthworks where the drama could unfold. They did this inside Bray Studios, Berkshire. Editor Jim Clark, who completed the first cut of the film before handing the duty over to his wife, Laurence Méry-Clark, describes in his autobiography the reasoning behind recreating the trenches inside a studio, rather than beneath the open sky:

I initially thought it was for budgetary reasons but Will told me it was a control issue. No weather problems, no aeroplanes overhead, no extraneous noise, and more freedom of camera movement. It was always good weather in the script, which is just as well since mud, which we associate with the trenches, was impossible to contain in the studio. Will maintained that research had proved that the trenches on the Somme in the summer of 1916 were dry as a bone and in immaculate condition. No-man’s-land was a lush, unmown meadow full of wildlife without a puddle to be seen, and Will was determined to undermine the clichéd view of the trenches as knee deep in mud.²⁵³

This indicates a determination to move away from a certain aspect of the imagined image of the trench environment within the cultural memory. James Chapman describes the popular impression of the landscape of Great War in film being ‘the recurring images are devastated landscapes with ruins of buildings and broken tree trunks, tangled fences of barbed wire and, above all, mud: one could be forgiven for thinking that the First World War was fought entirely in the rain […] what the films represent, perhaps, is a visual imagining of the war rather than an accurate picture of it’.²⁵⁴ The Somme Offensive of 1916 was launched at the beginning of July, less than a fortnight after the summer solstice that year, and consequently was not the sodden muddy wasteland that has come by many to be the generic perception of the Western Front. There was heavy rain on June 27th and 28th, but the days immediately proceeding and that of the beginning of the infantry assault, the days the film is concerned with, were dry. This privileging of the element of rain in the popular consciousness could be seen as a result of the romantic ideal and connected pathetic fallacy attributed to such a landscape. The Somme was devastating and traumatic, and therefore one would not imagine it as they would any ordinary July spent in northern France. Nevertheless, the seasons are ambivalent to war and the landscape of the Somme depicted in The Trench tries to represent a contained portion of the battlefield that would

²⁵³ Jim Clark, Dream Repairman: Adventures in Film Editing (Crockett: LandMarc Press, 2010), p. 266.
be both meteorologically authentic and knowingly contrary to the common imagined landscape of the trenches.²⁵⁵

On the morning of June 30th, as the time stamp at the bottom of the screen states, the soldiers line up for the waking ritual of stand-to on the fire-step, ready for an enemy that never arrives. The camera moves along the parapet looking down upon the troops, some alert, some groggy, the morning sun illuminating their faces and the back wall of the trench (Figure 9). As Boyd explains, the studio filming allows the camera freedom to ‘weave through the trenches as if a disembodied spirit’, the camera’s relative freedom contrasting against the restricted movement of the soldiers within.²⁵⁶ Shell impacts and machine guns sound in the distance, giving the impression of the wider battlefield around them. After the all clear, Victor challenges Eddie to have a quick look through a covered loophole and describe what he sees. Victor makes it worth Eddie’s while by offering two bob for the knowledge of what lays ahead of them. Eddie agrees, lifts the cloth covering the loophole, and looks out. This is the only view of no-man’s-land shown before they are sent over the top. As Nicci Gerrard describes, ‘for the first few minutes of the film one longs for blue sky and large spaces; then gradually the trench becomes normality and safety’.²⁵⁷ Historically the trenches were cramped claustrophobic environments, to quote John Masefield in this regard he reports ‘the soldiers who held this old front line of ours saw this grass and wire day after day, perhaps, for many months. It was the limit of their world, the horizon of their landscape, the boundary. What interest there was in their life was the speculation, what lay beyond that wire, and what the enemy was doing there’.²⁵⁸ Much of the film, and this scene in particular, renders on-screen this core experiential characteristic of life in the trenches as existing in an horizon-less world full of conjecture.

This view of no-man’s-land cuts from a close-up of Eddie’s face to a point of view shot (Figure 10). When asked what he sees he reports “Nothing much. It’s like a grassy hill. I see a bit of earth at top, a bit of their wire.” A group of three, including Victor, listen. Eddie finishes his observations by saying “Grass is blowing. Sort of calm, like a sloping meadow, sloping up... it’s gentle.” With this Victor goes back on the deal stating “that ain’t

²⁵⁵ It should be noted that, as the battle extended on into the winter months, the weather did change in the latter half of the Battle of the Somme making a depiction defined by inclemency more suitable if set later.
²⁵⁶ Boyd, p. 450.
²⁵⁸ Masefield, p. 29.
worth two bob sunshine.” Eddie turns to argue. There is a gunshot in the distance. He falls back into the trench, half of his right cheek torn apart by a sniper’s bullet.

Figure 9: Waiting for the "Morning Hate" on the fire-step.\textsuperscript{259}

Figure 10: View through the loophole into no-man's-land.\textsuperscript{260}

In a short space of time this scene goes from depicting the mundane, everyday, aspects of what life might have been like in the trenches to the sudden, traumatic, unpredictable nature of warfare. The soundscape consistently reminds the viewer that this is taking place

\textsuperscript{259} \textit{The Trench}. 00:21:50.
\textsuperscript{260} \textit{The Trench}. 00:24:43.
within a wider battlefield; throughout we hear the ceaseless bombardment of the enemy, which British command hoped would incapacitate their defences in preparation for the forthcoming Big Push, after a while though it becomes merely background noise. Sandbags frame this glimpse into no-man’s-land, a landscape with a visible, and lethal, horizon, demonstrating the confined nature of the situation these soldiers are in. It is not just the trench that traps them, but the entire battlefield. Moreover, the landscape, when described as “gentle” reminds the characters, and audience, that it is anything but. The visceral nature of the inflicted wound illustrating this, even Victor, feet away at the moment of impact, receives a shallow cut as a chipped piece of Eddie’s tooth is imbedded in his forehead. Some accuse his dirty pictures of bringing bad luck. The innocence of the young men inhabiting the trench receives a sudden, brutal education here. The complaint that physically reconstructed trenches for visitors, such as the Trench Experience, fail to adequately express the dangers that would have been present could not be so easily applied here. In the making of The Trench, Boyd decided the historical moment he wanted to bring to ‘glorious Technicolor’ and from there has honed it down to a single representative group, all fictional but based on truths uncovered in his research, to reconstruct on-screen the abstract experience of British troops holding the frontline of the Somme. This film is able to show, to a certain extent, the impact of physical injuries by creating an environment where the audience can begin to empathise with the characters, where one moment all is seemingly banal, the next deadly, and engagingly reconstruct the perilous nature of life in the trenches.

4.2 Passchendaele (2008): Personal Trauma and National Identity on the Battlefield

It’s very important to me that I think we do what we can with this to encourage youth in our country to have some interest in our history […] It’s hard to keep it alive in an era when we’re so blasted by entertainments and cultural matters from outside our own borders and have so little of our own.262

Paul Gross, ‘The Road to Passchendaele’

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261 See Espley, p. 334.
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Like Boyd, Gross credits being told about his grandfather’s Great War combat experiences as what ignited a sense of affinity between himself and that period. Boyd had his grandfather’s stories recounted second-hand, with the shrapnel relic to hold as confirmation. Gross, however, received them first-hand. A particular experience his grandfather told him on a fishing trip – a strange deviation from his usual reticence on the subject – remained etched into the director’s mind, so much so that it was translated to the opening scene of *Passchendaele* years later. As Gross recounts:

> His back was to me as he recounted a story of being on patrol in a village in the Arras Sector of France when his patrol encountered a German machine-gun nest. The two enemies exchanged fire for quite a while until everyone in the patrol except my grandfather was dead, and the German machine-gun nest was silent. My grandfather fixed his bayonet and leapt over the parapet to discover one German gunner still alive. My grandfather described this kid as having “eyes like water, these watery blue eyes.” The German kid raised his hand to my grandfather, smiled and said, “Kamerad.” My grandfather bayoneted in him the forehead [sic]. My grandfather carried the burden of that moment for the rest of his life.263

It almost seems that, rather than being a cultural trauma, this episode became, through the retelling, a multi-generational, familial one. The film’s narrative then, one of redemption, framed in this way can be seen as both a navigation of the wider Canadian cultural memory and of Gross’s specific family trauma. In the film, Gross plays its protagonist Sergeant Michael Dunne, literally taking on the mantle of his grandfather and, in name at least, reliving his experiences in this opening scene.

After the opening title cards, the film begins with the remainders of a platoon, led by Dunne, attempting to take out a German machine gun nest stationed in a ruined church. Only one side of the great stone arch that would have supported its roof remains and, high on the back wall, above the gun, is a circular window with a slanting crucifix pinned to its centre. Following Gross’s grandfather’s story, the men attempt to take out the machine gun and one by one fall, leaving Dunne the last still standing. In the final moments of one of the platoon, a First Nation soldier named Highway (Michael Greyeyes), the man mumbles

263 Gross, pp. 2-3.
to Dunne “We’re a long way from the foothills Michael.” Soon after this Dunne looks around at the debris and sees a dirt covered black horse, still wearing its detached harness, trotting through the town square. War has taken over this small French town, making it utterly alien and highlighting the distance between this war-torn European setting and that of the idyllic rural foothills of Canada. After having thrown a grenade into the machine gun nest, Dunne runs through the church towards the smashed altar (Figure 11). Only one of the Germans remains alive, a young man, a boy almost, with deep blue eyes, he holds up his hand as if in greeting, repeating Dunne’s earlier plea of “Kamerad” and tries to smile (Figure 12). Dunne looks down at him, bayonet inches from the boy’s forehead, then, after a moment, plunges the blade into his target. After Dunne extracts the bayonet, a shell hits the altar, exactly where the German was laying, sending Dunne into the air, dust falling around him.

Figure 11: Sergeant Michael Dunne approaches the machine gun nest.  

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*Passchendaele*. 00:06:01.
The effectiveness of this scene is elicited by the unforeseen juxtaposition of the heroic, outgunned leader defeating (with losses) the well-positioned enemy, turning into a ruthless execution of a boy merely because of his uniform. The shocking nature of this bait and switch, traditional heroism turning to the pity of war, is magnified by the location of the ruined church. Christian iconography is used and called upon throughout the film, tying into themes of sacrifice and redemption. Admittedly the fact that a shell would have seemingly killed the German anyway does diminish some of the sense of responsibility from Dunne, in that he would have died either way, nevertheless his death was the result of Dunne actively plunging the blade into the boy’s head rather than an anonymous shell. Although this sequence has very specifically been stated as being based on a story told to the director by his grandfather, it also cannot be ignored how this incident reflects the Somalia Affair. On March 16th 1993, 16-year-old Shidane Arone was captured, beaten, and died in Canadian custody, resulting in an international scandal and eventually an inquiry that tarnished Canada’s reputation as the epitome of the peacekeeper ideal. In this way, the themes of sacrifice and redemption in the film can be seen not merely in terms of the character of Dunne but the Canadian military in general. Jeffery Alexander, when considering cultural trauma, asserts:

The truth about the experience is perceived, but only unconsciously. In effect, truth goes underground, and accurate memory and responsible action are its victims. Traumatic feelings and perceptions, then, come not only from the originating event but from the

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265 *Passchendaele*. 00:06:11.
anxiety of keeping it repressed. Trauma will be resolved, not only by setting things right in
the world, but by setting things right in the self. According to this perspective, the truth can
be recovered, and psychological equanimity restored, only, as the Holocaust historian Saul
Friedlander once put it, “when memory comes”. 266

Consequently, if, as Noah Richler theorises, Passchendaele came during a period of wider
national introspection about what it means to be Canadian, then the film may be an
example of memory coming to re-establish psychological equanimity through reimagining
its origins.

Where The Trench almost deromanticises its ensemble to ground them with a realist sense
of naïve innocence, Passchendaele elevates its soldier characters to a heightened dramatic
level. One model serves the British disenchantment/futility narrative of the Great War, the
other the Canadian foundational myth of it as a national proving ground. After the opening
scene Dunne returns to Calgary to recover, eventually to be released from hospital with a
diagnosis of neurasthenia, another term for shellshock. The following chapter will be
concerned with the representation of the landscape of home, but to briefly describe here,
Dunne works for a time in a recruiting office, where he disagrees with many of the
shaming and dishonest techniques that are used to get men to sign up, particularly those
used by British officer Dobson-Hughes (Jim Mezon). In this time he falls in love with one
of the nurses in the hospital, Sarah Mann (Caroline Dhanvernas). A second romance is
important for later plot events, that of Sarah’s younger brother David (Joe Dinicol) and
Cassie Walker (Meredith Bailey). It is in large part to impress Cassie that David eventually
signs up, despite his asthma. And it is due to him signing up that Dunne decides to reenlist,
forcing Dobson-Hughes to sign the papers, and the narrative returns to the Western Front.
Three months later, Dunne, David, and Sarah, having thrown herself into her nursing
duties, find themselves in Flanders not far from the German held village of Passchendaele.

As well as being a war film, it is a romance in that the plot is driven as much by
characters’ romantic relationships as it is by the historical progress of the conflict. On the
eve of the battle, Dunne’s falsification of documents is revealed by the arrival of Dobson-

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Hughes, who has been pursuing his vendetta, against all good sense, to the frontline. Lieutenant Colonel Ormond (Adam J. Harrington) rather than punishing Dunne, having previously witnessed his heroism, places him in charge of No. 2 Platoon. Soon after this briefing Dunne brings a wounded soldier to the dressing station to be treated and is surprised to find Sarah. They meet later, in private, where they have a romantic liaison. Neta Gordon in *Catching the Torch: Contemporary Canadian Literary Responses to World War I*, sums up this scene in relation to its cultural context thus:

> Even the scene of Michael Dunne and Sarah Mann having sex in an unused tent on the night before the battle recalls representations of similarly desperate attempts to revel in sexual passion in a place of death in *Broken Ground*, *The Stone Carvers*, *The Sojourn*, and *Three Day Road*.\(^{267}\)

Similarly, through analysing Canadian literature related to the Great War in the first decade of the twenty-first century, and the example of *Passchendaele* as part of this, Richler describes how many works framed the soldier as a romantic figure, even in the most extreme of circumstances, so that ‘the macabre is sanctified and not allowed to hinder the patriotic message’.\(^{268}\) This scene in particular, taking place on the eve of battle, mixes the horrors of war and romance. It is during this scene that Dunne makes a dual promise to Sarah, to keep David safe, and to stay alive so that they may meet again. Only one can be kept in the ensuing battle.

> It would seem then that the film exists in a peculiar liminal zone between the anti-war and propagandistic national mythmaking. Richler asserts that the film ‘adhered to the conventional Canadian presentation of the First World War battle […] in which the Canadians proved so effective that the Germans dubbed them “storm troops”’.\(^{269}\) The tenacity of the Canadian “storm troops” is brought up multiple times in the film and suggests that this skill in combat is an aspect of Canadian identity. This idea was part of the growing concept of the Canadian self during the war and defined by the perception of the superior physique of Dominion troops compared to that of the stunted British.\(^{270}\) Furthermore, Reynolds asserts that this belief is the result of ‘Canada starting to define

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\(^{269}\) Richler, p. 83.

\(^{270}\) See: Sheftall, pp. 155-156.
itself against Britain – yet at the time emphasis was placed on a new inclusivity’. An example of inclusiveness can be seen in the build up of the film’s platoon, as observed by Gordon, which includes a diverse group that represents First Nation, Francophone, and Anglo-Canadians fighting side-by-side. As with The Trench, there is a certain amount of diversity here, although that film’s treatment of its soldiers is not defined by national openness but rather a sense of social hierarchical entrapment. Furthermore, in the example of The Trench the importance to cast the characters as age appropriate to enhance authenticity was highlighted, in Passchendaele many of the men populating the battlefield of the film were in fact soldiers brought in for the combat sequences (Figure 13). What this creates is a direct link between the military and the filmmakers that could be read as simply a way of creating an authentic representation, particularly when marketing the film, as the men were experienced soldiers and not a batch of agency extras. Alternatively, it could suggest an underlying wish to portray the Canadian military of today, those fighting in Afghanistan, as something culturally central and directly continuing from those in combat ninety years previous. This connection to Canada’s role in the Afghanistan campaign can also, retroactively, be seen in Gross’s directorial filmography as his next film, Hyena Road (2015), shows modern warfare through the experiences of Canadian Forces in Kandahar and their relationship to the locals as they fight into Taliban territory. On this note, Gross argued that the lack of education in Canada’s military history had led to them becoming peacekeepers rather than the fierce infantries that they had been, upholding the war-fighter image. The change in Canadian society observed by Richler, amongst others, and the very fact that the Canadian Armed Forces were in continual active combat after a history of humanitarian efforts as blue helmed U.N. peacekeepers, including in Somalia, was certainly something that would need justification and even valorisation in media.
There is much nuance here between these conflicting identities. In ‘The Reluctant Hero: Negotiating War Memory with Modern-Day Myths in *Passchendaele* (2008)’, Janis Goldie sees the character of Dunne as embodying the ‘reluctant hero’ figure. Through this archetype, in her view, the film navigates the tensions between the valorisation of the Canadian military and the overarching theme of the futility of war. Dunne doesn’t support the institutions of war or display any nationalist sentiment. Instead, Goldie states that he is a contradictory figure who is simultaneously shown as superhumanly capable and ordinary, ‘the combination of these representations seems to be an appropriate mechanism to offer Canadian viewers a way to commemorate their country’s past military successes alongside the modern-day myth of Canadians as peace brokers’. She concludes her character study, in opposition to Richler, by asserting the theme of war’s futility makes it possible to argue that Dunne is a traditional presentation of the national identity of the peacekeeper. It is the life back in the homeland that matters in this view, and it takes the sacrifice of Dunne for David to realise this truth. This will be analysed in more detail in Chapter 6. In Gordon’s analysis of the change in Canadian attitudes towards remembrance and the contemporary complexity in forming a cohesive national narrative, she states:

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275 *Passchendaele*. 01:30:02.
277 Goldie, p. 29.
278 Goldie, p. 29.
279 Goldie, pp. 29-30.
In the late 1990s and early twenty-first century it was still possible to locate a moral substance within the lessons learned in the First World War, and to celebrate the kinds of Canadian values that were forged on its various fronts – quiet, dignified fortitude, a sense of duty toward community, an ability to appreciate justice, and a recognition that even though Canadian fighters were a force to be reckoned with on a battlefield, war should mostly be avoided in favour of mediation […] By 2008 it was no longer possible to figure Michael Dunne as this sort of emblematic figure, because the so-called national spirit was no longer an illusion that could be so easily articulated or accepted.  

In this way, the seemingly contradictory nature of the film, able to be read as both upholding military strength and an anti-war narrative, comes from a wider struggle to be able to fully articulate what exactly the Canadian national identity, and its role on the world stage, should be. In the characterisation of Dunne in particular there is, from the first scene where he kills in cold blood to his heroic sacrifice at the end, a difficulty in assessing the nature of the representation in terms of a binary peace-keeper/war-fighter image.

Figure 14: ‘Australian gunners on a duckboard track, Chateau Wood, Ypres, 1917’ by Frank Hurley.

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280 Gordon, p. 168.
Before we see Passchendaele we hear it in the sound of rain pitter-patter. The image fades in, and what is shown is a faithful reproduction of Frank Hurley’s photograph of Chateau Woods, Ypres, 1917 (Figure 14 and 15). The skyline shows the silhouettes of shattered, branchless trees blotting out an uninterrupted cloud of greyish white. A single soldier walks over the duckboards, the only solid ground in this drenched, pockmarked,

\[281\] Passchendaele. 00:58:03.

\[282\] Passchendaele. 00:58:49.
landscape. As he passes, more soldiers come into view, some seemingly emerging from the ground, and begin to cross in all directions as the camera tracks out. The effect of this sudden transformation, from a near lifeless landscape to an operating battlefield, serves to introduce not only the place but the frantic movement of troops that is required in the run up to a large-scale offensive. This establishing shot is followed by a series of vignettes – men pushing horses and mules through the mud, a young soldier falling into a water filled crater and being unable to reach out for aid, and finally another wide-shot of troops marching in line past a broken truck with the ruins of the Ypres skyline in the distance (Figure 16). These shots recreate the topography and bring it to life. The heavy shelling by the British and German armies, in tandem with the record amount of rain that autumn and winter on this below sea level ground, turned these Flanders fields into the pockmarked mire captured in the Hurley’s photographs. The generic landscape of the Western Front, described by Chapman in the previous section, is brought to the screen through representing the clear hardship of navigating this space in a way that highlights the emotive potential of this iconography of desolation.

David LaRocca’s introductory chapter to *The Philosophy of War Films* opens with a quote from a cinematographer, who when asked how to represent war through moving images replied “Hit the camera”. Although somewhat blunt, this technique is seen to represent the immediacy of war’s effects by the rough treatment of the camera, which demonstrates its spatial positioning thereby placing the spectator seemingly amongst the action. Most notably, *Saving Private Ryan* (Steven Spielberg, 1998) utilised this technique to add a sense of realism in its Omaha Beach sequence, mimicking actuality footage that was shot during the D-day landings in 1944 by military cinematographers. Through mobile camera work, this now common technique tries to simulate footage shot on real battlefields to make it believable to a contemporary audience who understand and are willing to accept this cinematic vernacular. *Passchendaele*’s battle sequences use this modern cinematographic technique to great effect. In opening scene where the Canadians’ attempt to take the machine gun nest, for instance, can be compared to that of *Saving Private Ryan*. The pacing of the editing accelerates with the action, cutting between the gunner and each of the men, the handheld cinematography serving to add a sense of ‘being

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there’ through the lack of artificial smoothness. The striking nature of this imagery, modelled on photographs with the aid of historical advisors, is what was most well received by many reviewers of this film. In an essay for the journal *Canadian Military History*, Tim Cook alongside Christopher Schultz question the role of *Passchendaele* in the popular culture and if it can, in any way, be considered an historical document.\(^{286}\) The two military historians contend that, although the battle is ‘shorn of much of its contextualization within the greater scope of the war effort’, the film’s ‘unflinching approach to the horrors of war and the brutality of person-on-person violence is precisely where the film remains effective as a cinematic piece. Though arguably not breaking new ground in the popular and contemporary First World War meta-narrative of tragedy, Gross should be credited with showing that our protagonist, a Canadian, is capable of such actions’.\(^{287}\) Therefore it uses, with the evocation of historic photographs, a variety of techniques to uphold the myth of the Great War as a proving ground for Canadian bravery, while simultaneously showing the chaos of combat and its dreadful impact on the environment through depicting the fictionalised Dunne navigating its complexities.

The narrative of futility or ideas of the ‘war fighter’ and ‘peacekeeper’ image could, arguably, be debated in terms of ‘pro’ and ‘anti’ war narratives. Modern war films, such as *Passchendaele*, seem to try to take a different direction to earlier films that could be placed into either camp. Chapman observes that since the 1980s there has been ‘a shift away from the “war is hell” theme […] towards the idea that while war is unpleasant it is also necessary and justifiable’.\(^{288}\) Arguably then, the qualifiers today are rarely is this film pro- or anti-war, does it glorify or condemn war; rather it is to what extent the film interacts with either of these ideals. Many try to demonstrate the destructive power of war without condemning its participants on the level of the soldiery, while ensuring that it’s a spectacle audiences connect with and pay to see. While noting points where the film stretches the realms of historically possibility, Cook and Schultz believe, due to the rare nature of such a high budget Canadian focused war film, that *Passchendaele* has become and will remain an important tool for future historians in assessing one of the ways that Canadians have accessed their shared past. It is an important pillar in our ongoing, shifting, and constructed


\(^{287}\) Cook and Schultz, p. 52.

memory of Canada’s Great War’. Different readings of the film, Cook and Schultz, and that of Richler, the former pair arguing the case of it showing the futility of war, and the latter stating it to be a kind propaganda for the warrior nation image, can co-exist albeit in a dissonant manner. The futility of war comes through in the depiction of the desolate landscape and the soldiers struggle within it, while simultaneously a patriotic message can be read in the representation of the Canadians inhabiting it being able to, in the end, gain both military and moralistic victory. Either way, whether it supports the war-fighter or peacekeeper identity, the Great War is pointed to as a foundational period in setting the country on this path.

4.3 Beneath Hill 60 (2010): Mining, Mateship, and Leadership

I wasn’t immediately bowled over by [Woodward’s story] as David and Bill were, because I had never imagined myself directing a war movie. I’d come from theatre, I’m very interested in the idea of Australian identity, and I had never imagined that I might jump in the deep end by telling one of our iconic war myths.

Jeremy Sims, ‘Digging Into History’

In the very structure of Beneath Hill 60 it draws upon the idea of memory through a bookending sequence that frames the film as a post-war memory of Oliver Woodward (Brendan Cowell). The main plot follows his experiences in the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company, with them arriving at Hill 60 in the second half and having to ensure that the explosive charges are not discovered by the Germans or compromised by groundwater. It also utilises flashbacks to his life in Queensland before enlisting to solidify the link between the Western Front and Australian society. Life in Australia, so distant from the Western Front, serves as a counterpoint to the war, yet the dominant national narrative of it serving as a coming-of-age for the nation is played out in the story of Captain Woodward and his relationship with the men. The film’s director Jeremy Sims has admitted that he

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289 One questionable aspect of the plot they highlight is the impossible timeline of Dunne being shell-shocked after Vimy (April 1917), convalescing back in Canada, re-conscripting (and presumably retraining), and then arriving back in Flanders in time for victory at Passchendaele (November 1917). See: Cook and Schultz, pp. 55-56.

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was never particularly interested in making a war film before this project, ‘but I do love telling Australian stories.’ This desire for Australian-ness can be further evidenced from the thematic underpinnings of the film’s script. In an article titled ‘Based on a True Story – Writing Beneath Hill 60’, screenwriter David Roach describes how the Australian trait of mateship naturally developed while adapting the historical experiences of the actual Woodward into a narrative film:

Director Jeremy Sims and I began to think about the connection between mateship and leadership. Does one cancel the other out? If Woodward was struggling to learn how to become a leader in wartime, must he relinquish his natural inclination towards mateship? What if he arrived to take over a company of men who already had battle experience, who had already formed strong bonds? What if he eventually proves himself to his men but confronts that ultimate dilemma for a leader in wartime: having to decide whether it is morally right to sacrifice one man’s life in order to save many.

These questions are established immediately when Woodward arrives on the Western Front, from the idea of mateship and leadership, how Australian mateship can exist in a distant battlefield environment, to the question of what is required of an officer and how this struggles to align itself with this fundamentally egalitarian national trait.

After the title cards it begins with a series of close-ups within a bright interior as a soldier straightens and buttons up his clean dress uniform. Although his face is not shown, this is Woodward, and this sequence, bookending the film, is in fact taking place on his wedding day in 1919. When all seems prepared, Woodward lifts a seemingly unremarkable wooden box from the dresser and rotates it in his hands as the orchestral score reaches a crescendo, signifying this is an object of significance, and, as shall become clearer, the object of memory that frames the film as a sequence of remembrances. With this mnemonic trigging, the image dissolves as the title, Beneath Hill 60, appears over a black screen. As the title, too, fades away, with the few final musical notes still dissipating, there can be seen a single point of light in the darkness moving towards the camera. There is the distinct sound of footsteps and heavy breathing, and as the flickering candlelight gets closer in this cramped tunnel Woodward’s face is illuminated, showing a man disorientated

and unsure of his current surroundings (Figure 17). After checking a piece of paper for instruction, and finding little to help him, he pauses to think. In this moment’s silence he holds his breath, now without the sound of breathing and footsteps there can faintly be heard digging off to the right of screen. Woodward moves toward it and text appears informing us it is May 1916, and this mine is thirty feet below the Western Front in Armentières, France.

Through sound there is emphasis on one noise, that of Woodward’s movements, which is lowered to draw attention to another aspect of the environment, the tunnellers. In this single shot it is clear that there is a code of silence in these tunnels, Woodward is not calling out and attention is drawn to noises often barely noticeable in the background, such as his footsteps. Following the sound of digging, Woodward reaches two tunnellers, a father and son duo, who help him with directions. Due to the enforced silence, to avoid detection from enemy listening posts, Woodward has to whisper the explanation that “I’m your new commanding officer”. This unassertive, muted delivery serves the purpose of highlighting, once again, the need for quiet underground, and additionally serves to portray Woodward as an unsure, newly arrived, everyman figure other than, as he says, a commanding officer. This first impression of Woodward upholds Roach’s assertion that he wanted to avoid a ‘predictable blokey yarn with a thinly disguised nationalistic message’ through the depiction of ‘outsider’ characters being central in this story.293 This cramped, quiet introductory sequence with a man unsure of himself, showing whispered introductions between himself, the newly arrived officer, and his men, who are experienced in this landscape, trades depicting idealised bravery of arrival on the battlefield with an empathetic uncertainty.

293 Roach, p. 17.
Taking the given directions towards the surface, and following the muffled sound of shelling above, Woodward comes across a young miner at a listening post, Frank Tiffin (Harrison Gilbertson), who is anxious about sounds he is hearing through a geophone. He believes it is the Germans mining towards them, but Woodward, after listening to the tunnel wall in the direction indicated, asks if it sounds like a constant beat, giving a demonstration. Tiffin confirms that that is indeed the sound, to which Woodward reassures him that it is only his heartbeat. Every single small noise beneath the earth seems amplified in the level of attention that is drawn to it at various points to build tension, from the adjusting of a helmet, the muffled shelling above, to the breathing of the men. In Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen, Michel Chion describes ambient sound as sound that inhabits a particular space to identify it and goes onto claim that ‘we might also call them territory sounds, because they serve to identify a particular locale through their pervasive and continuous presence’. These territory sounds place the audience within the wider landscape, expanding its realms to outside the screen. In The Trench’s case, the territory sounds were largely built up of the sound of the British bombardment that is heard throughout the film. Although we do experience the bombastic sounds of shelling in the few scenes above ground, the main body of Beneath Hill 60’s soundscape is one of quiet drips, scraping of dirt, the muffled sounds of the surface war, and whispering. Tonally, this dominance of environmental sound design is set up in this opening scene and plays a major role in the experience of the tunnels throughout.

294 Beneath Hill 60. 00:01:35.
Although Woodward has tried to ease some of Tiffin’s anxiety, he is still clearly frightened, and asks if he can be relieved of his post and follow Woodward. The two go further up the shaft to some living quarters where the main ensemble of miners are sat socialising, the shells above them are louder and causing dirt to fall from the ceiling at regular intervals. The introductions are quite formal, although there is no saluting or specific signs of respect given to the new C.O., nor is there any explicit disrespect. Corporal Bill Fraser (Steve Le Marquand) remains seated and staring at Woodward dismissively, sizing him up, with this interaction being shown in a number of shot reverse shots. It is clear from when Woodward enters the room that rank it not a sole pass to respect as one might assume in most military environments. Woodward, in the opening scenes, is a newly arrived outsider in the eyes of the men of the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company. They question why this new officer joined up late and display the common Anzac trait of a perceived disregard for authority. An important nuance, however, in this trait is the idea that it is a lack of respect for unearned authority. Woodward must show he is deserving of it.

Figure 18: Australian Tunnelling Company in their cramped dugout.

Woodward and his relationship with the characters that make up the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company is bound by conflict between mateship, its values, and his leadership.

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297 *Beneath Hill 60*, 00:33:31.
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Graeme Turner in his study of Australian national myths explains ‘what makes mateship possible is not the authenticity of the particular relationship. Its primary attribute is rather the negation of individuality or even specificity of character. The naturalness of the institution of mateship is never questioned, but is continually reinforced and applauded’.298 The reference Turner uses for this point is Henry Lawson’s short story ‘Telling Mrs. Baker’ where two bushmen make up a story concerning the cause of a mate’s death, transforming it from something shameful to an ordinary illness, to tell his widow. Turner believes that this lie, upheld as morally right in the story, is not so much told to protect the living woman’s feeling, although this is also the case, but to protect the memory of the mate. Mateship holds them to a kind of morally simplistic sense of honour, making them lie to a ‘good woman’ about the death of a drunkard who was selfish in regard to his family duty, and only showed some remorse on his deathbed, because of a loyalty between bushmen. His individual characteristics are secondary to their sense that his name should be protected after his death, or at the very least it should not be dragged through the mud.

In concluding, Turner highlights the ‘negation of individuality’ in the quality of mateship that demonstrates placing collective loyalty over personal interest.299 As established in Chapter 2, Turner sees retellings of national myths as mediated transformations that construct a way in which to view the national self.300 The sacrifices each character makes in the film’s narrative, putting themselves at risk for the group, show this continual reinforcement of the value of mateship in terms of a collectivist attitude.

Both the Anzac tradition and the mateship ideal in the Australian cultural identity revolve around the bonding of predominantly male groups. It is not inconceivable that in terms of a narrative tradition this is a hangover from earlier colonial days when men considerably outnumbered women, and involved a harsh life requiring them to undertake traditional male-dominated jobs in agriculture and mining, laying a clear foundation for the purportedly masculine ideal in the Australian national identity and therefore their cinematic tradition.301 In Jonathan Rayner’s estimation of Australian narrative cinema, ‘male-to-male relationships, though strained by rivalries and competition, are pre-eminent, and male-to-female relationships never assume equal importance’.302 It is through the

299 Turner, pp. 93-95.
300 Turner, p. 107.
interpersonal relationship of the male group of the Tunnelling Company, as they struggle together beneath the Western Front, that the film is able to deal with ‘the connection between mateship and leadership’.  

It is in such a situation, utterly isolated from the masses above, that the value of mateship is proved to be such an indispensible trait (Figure 18). In terms of trust, one of the main obstacles for Woodward from the start is simply his late enlistment, something that is questioned behind his back, as within the context of the Anzac myth it is usually those who enlisted early enough to land in Anzac Cove in April 1915 who are most valued.  

The Anzac lack of respect for unearned authority comes into play here. Ina Bertrand, in describing the development of the Anzac myth, states just this fact:

Building on the anti-authoritarianism of the earlier version of the bush myth, it was defended as a proper disregard for pomposity and elitism: discipline imposed from above was assumed to be unnecessary among egalitarian Australians who would always obey any reasonable order from anyone who had earned the right to give it.

Although he may be their new commanding officer, this does not give him any inherent respect within their group; Woodward must prove himself to them and in particular to the stoic Fraser, the de facto head of the men in terms of whom they look towards when making decisions. As such, Beneath Hill 60 follows Jenny Macleod’s observation that ‘since the 1960s, the Anzac legend and Anzac Day have been reinvigorated through the process of explaining it anew as a story of mateship among individuals who exemplify what it is to be an Australian’. The earning of his place in the Tunnelling Company’s social structure is one of the main challenges Woodward faces in the film.

In the film’s representation of mateship it expands the concept of the Anzac myth in its focus on the outsider characters of the tunnellers. It does this by bringing to the screen Australian stories of the Great War that have not been represented before, and not just in the character of Woodward. Roach describes that the men who Woodward worked alongside ‘while highly skilled and undoubtedly courageous, these tunnellers didn’t seem

303 Roach, p. 17.
305 Bertrand, p. 81.
to be traditional “warrior heroes”. In fact they were little more than civilians.\textsuperscript{307} As one British officer states in the film, the tunnellers are not real soldiers, and it is by acknowledging, to a certain extent, this fact that it moves away from the traditional nationalist image of the Anzac fighter and aligns itself more with the concept of mateship than strength. The Tunnelling Company ensemble is populated with a mixture of fictional characters alongside several who are directly inspired by historical individuals uncovered in the research process. As part of this Roach speaks quite candidly about the difference between a scholar and a screenwriter, seeing his duty as to ‘root around in the mulch of people’s lives with all the sophistication of a truffling pig’ to refashion the facts into a cinematic narrative.\textsuperscript{308} What he discovered became two such examples of historic individuals, besides Woodward, being fictionalised to serve the narrative while representing actual Australians who fought in the Great War. The first is actually two characters of Jim and Walter Sneddon (Alan Dukes and Alex Thompson) who were based on a real life father and son pair recorded in the Tunnellers Nominal Roll.\textsuperscript{309} These are the first characters Woodward meets. Later in the film, Jim dies in a German attack, as was the case in real life, and the knowledge of this connection to reality in something that could be overlooked as a mere plot point amplifies emotional investment and cultural specificity. The significance of this to communities in particular, having local stories adapted to the big screen, shows cinema’s possibilities as a form of memorial. A month before the film’s release, the Newcastle Herald, the local newspaper to where the Sneddons lived, published an article celebrating the fact that the filmmakers were ‘helping to transform their unsung heroism into a $9 million motion picture’.\textsuperscript{310} By including such Australian stories the film memorialises the experiences of a few to add detail to the more abstract Anzac myth.

This possibility of national memorialisation in cinema could be seen as more significant in the inclusion of an Aboriginal soldier. The Anzac myth has been criticised, particularly in more recent years, because of its monolithic image as being white.\textsuperscript{311} As a counterpoint, Roach states that ‘between three and four hundred Aboriginal soldiers fought

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{307} Roach, p. 17.
\item \textsuperscript{308} Roach, p. 15.
\item \textsuperscript{309} Roach, p. 17.
\end{itemize}
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with the AIF. So it would make sense that there would be at least one Aboriginal miner amongst the 4,500 tunnellers who were sent to the war’.312 In the film the topic of racism, prevalent in the period, isn’t approached, but the inclusion instead serves to better represent these overlooked volunteers in Australia’s coming-of-age conflict. Billy ‘Streaky’ Bacon (Mark Coles Smith) plays a significant role in the film, being liked for his creative resourcefulness, sharing bread he’s snatched from the supplies of the Northumberland Fusiliers, and eventually dies sacrificing himself when the Company first arrive at Hill 60. Although this could be considered just a small detail within the film, it does create a more inclusive impression of what the Anzac myth could be, and who is included within this model that continues to have notable cultural presence.

In its focus on tunnel warfare, the view of the Western Front in Beneath Hill 60 is cinematically unique. This is an inch-by-inch silent battle moving shafts through the dirt ever closer to the German line, while, at the same time, the German miners are burrowing with the same intention of undermining and countermining the enemy, in a complex interplay of offensive and defensive action. Only two films have come close to approaching this subject matter to any significant degree. The first being the British film Suspense (Walter Summers, 1930), albeit approaching the subject of tunnel warfare from the opposite angle. Tapping sounds from below a British dugout signal the close proximity of the German miners who are drawing ever closer; when the noise stops they know the detonation will soon follow. In his analysis, Lawrence Napper describes how the early sound technology ‘is crucial to both the psychology and the narrative of this film’.313 The other film that is close in subject matter, with a similarly tense situation, would be the G. W. Pabst’s Kameradschaft (1931), which focuses on French and German miners immediately after the war in a shaft split down the centre to reflect the new national borders. Kameradschaft was Pabst’s first synchronised sound feature and it consciously used this technology to emphasise its themes of nationhood and kameradschaft (comradeship), rather than mateship, transcending these bonds, by having the characters

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312 Roach, p. 18.
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speak their native languages and find one another after a shaft collapse by the acoustics of the environment rather than immediate linguistic understanding.\textsuperscript{314}

To depict this subterranean world, the soundscape’s territory sounds, especially the subdued kind, are made more discernible as a vital influence on the senses of the audience. From the immediate impression \textit{Beneath Hill 60} constructs of this landscape, the filmmakers weave the complex interplay of sound, image, and characterisation to represent the historical landscape of the Western Front experienced by the miners. In his in-depth study on contemporary surround sound, \textit{The Dolby Era: Film Sound in Contemporary Hollywood}, Gianluca Sergi highlights the fact that the process of sound design is a series of conscious choices made by the filmmakers to direct attention, and states ‘they become central to the narrative and often recur over time to punctuate, reinforce, or contradict the narrative or elements within it. These sounds can often also stand as a “spectacle” in their own right’.\textsuperscript{315} The Dolby era has shaped cinema architecture and created a standardised layout for home cinema setups, and it is worth considering \textit{Beneath Hill 60} in this context as it compellingly utilised Dolby 5.1 surround sound, with its directionality and systematic encompassing of the audience’s senses, that many of the audience, particularly those in the initial cinema run, experienced. The subtle sounds heard in the tunnels are core to the authenticity of the environment and the tension that the film produces.

As for the visual representation of this subterranean landscape, it evokes the constraint and claustrophobia of \textit{Das Boot}, trading that film’s tight U-boat corridors for the similarly restrictive tunnels of the Western Front. When it comes to the question of authenticity it should be noted that, due to the requirements of filming, the tunnels constructed for the film are slightly larger than those used during the war. Nevertheless, the tunnel sequences still feel tight, and the impression that the tunnellers are trapped with meters of dirt above their head is constant. Lighting level, in terms of dimness, is also a considerable factor in this regard. Although they were originally planning to shoot digitally, due to concerns about size of the camera rig in the tight spaces and of budget, the choice was eventually made to shoot on 35mm instead. As Sims explains, ‘the fact that we decided to shoot on widescreen 35mm and that we would use candles or very low lighting in all scenes was a


\textsuperscript{315} Sergi, p. 153.
really big decision on our part. There’s a warmth to the film’\(^{316}\). This sense of warmth, and restrained use of studio lights, creates a realistic atmosphere of gloominess with characters shown illuminated by flickering candlelight. Another positive of film over digital was that it replicates the cinematography of the 1970s.\(^{317}\) This decade has often been considered the golden age of Australian cinema, which saw films such as *Walkabout* (Nicolas Roeg, 1971) and *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Peter Weir, 1975). With these examples, and *Beneath Hill 60*, there is a very clear impression of place, not as a mere backdrop, but as an active participant. By the *Beneath Hill 60*’s use of sound, cinematography, and, of course, subject matter there is the constant sense of claustrophobia and an anxiety that a tunnel may collapse or there could be a breakthrough into the mines of the Germans.

Soon after Woodward’s arrival this reality becomes evident. Morris (Gyton Grantley) and Dwyer (Duncan Young) are stationed in the listening post of 102 Drive, the same location where Tiffin thought he heard something, and there is a breakthrough. The first sign of something being wrong is not so much the sound in this case as it is the candle Morris is holding. The sudden connection between the German tunnel and their own increases the oxygen and in turn the flame expands. A German soldier breaks through and is immediately taken by surprise by the Australians. Another soon follows and in the ensuing fight the candle is knocked over, leaving only the noises of a close combat struggle. Dwyer is able to defeat the German but is then caught by a charge set to collapse the tunnel. The danger of this enclosed space is made clear in this sequence, and the ease of which they can be plunged into darkness. When rescue comes Woodward insists that it is possible that they are trapped in an air pocket as he had worked in similar soil in his civilian career (Figure 19). Fraser is more pessimistic, not believing or paying much heed to Woodward’s comments as he is more used to life (and death) at the front. Eventually they dig through and Woodward is proved correct, as Morris was able to survive. The fact that Woodward was willing to continue searching earns him some respect from the men, particularly Morris. Fraser, however, notes that it was Woodward who insisted what Tiffin heard was only his heart when it could have been signs of tunnelling that they could have acted on sooner.

\(^{316}\) Interview of director Jeremy Sims by Andrews, p. 17.
Figure 19: Claustrophobia and tunnel warfare in the 102 Drive collapse.  

Figure 20: Approaching the Red House in no-man’s-land.

As Brian McFarlane observes, the structure of the narrative, and therefore its representation of life at the front, is based around a sequence of explosions. There is the first that kills Dwyer, then the Red House sequence, right to the detonation of Hill 60 at the film’s climax. McFarlane asserts ‘there is a gruelling sense of the nightmare of this horrific war, of the cramped camaraderie below the ground and in the sodden trenches; the explosions are clearly distinguished from each other in their purposes and outcomes, and in

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318 Beneath Hill 60. 00:23:48.  
319 Beneath Hill 60. 00:38:08.
what they reveal of those who set them off and those who are endangered by them’. What this structure serves to do is set a series of challenges the tunnelling company are forced to overcome. In the scene described above an explosion surprises them, in the Red House sequence they set one. Woodward has been ordered to destroy a German machine gun emplacement, one that is endangering the men in the trenches, before sunrise. As it would take a few days to dig to this position, Woodward is forced to take two volunteers, Fraser and Morris, out into no-man’s-land and set a 50-pound explosive charge directly in the building’s cellar. In this sequence the warmth of candlelit tunnels is replaced with the cold white of the moonlight interspersed with the red of flares (Figure 20). Fraser, still distrusting of Woodward, is able to give him some useful advice in this scene, telling him to remain completely still and close one eye when a flare goes up so that he is not given away by his movements and able to see clearer when darkness descends. As the Anzac social model, as we may term it, depends on earned trust to create and achieve a tight bond of mateship, these exchanges of advice play a major role. Both Woodward and Fraser have expertise directly connected to the landscape that is able to help the group survive.

_Beneath Hill 60_ provides an example of contemporary Australian invocation of a national myth, that of the Anzac, through the cinematic articulation of a true story, namely that of Woodward and the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company. This cinematic articulation represents the historic battlefield these men inhabit as a claustrophobic hostile environment, not just in terms of the opposing force of the Germans but the ground itself provides much of the hardship that these tunnellers struggle against. With this claustrophobia there is also the eerie quiet of the tunnels. From the chirping of the caged birds used to detect gas, the whispers of the men, to the listening for enemy miners, the territory sounds are foregrounded as part of the historical experience. Through the utilisation of sound, particularly directionality provided by the widely used Dolby 5.1 surround sound, the filmmakers create a sense of being trapped within the wider Western Front, thereby using contemporary cinematic technology to connect the tunnellers’ story with the wider conflict. The thematic strength of _Beneath Hill 60_ comes from its exploration of the national trait of mateship, included within the Anzac myth but also separate from it, that demonstrates the interpersonal relationships of a group of men trapped deep below the front together with the only comfort being a sense of camaraderie between them. This camaraderie, however, is not a boisterous masculine display of

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strength, but rather the ability to cooperate towards an objective and something they can each gain a sense of trust and emotional stability from in this dehumanising landscape.

4.4 Conclusion: Cinematic Style and Authentic Reconstruction

The three territories on-screen in these films, although sharing the Western Front as a location, represent a greater diversity than the popular perception may take into account. First we have a restrictive, closed in on two sides, trench line made up of periods of quiescence cut off by sudden brutality. Secondly, a sodden, exposed, mutilated battlefield on the outskirts of a French town. And finally, the subterranean tunnels where sound, more so than sight, is the key sense required for survival. Ruins, barbed wire, and mud are all, to varying degrees, aspects of the Western Front shown in these films. Boyd’s colour palette is applicable to all, ‘ochre, sepia, chocolate, mud, burnt sienna, charcoal’ in a world ‘exceptionally vivid within its limited range’. However, the differing subjects and styles of each signal a number of highly noticeable divergences in approach. The focus of mundane to traumatic experiences in *The Trench* creates an environment where the enemy only intrudes occasionally; the struggle of life at the front comes from the sense of waiting that pervades the entire piece. *Passchendaele* takes a more combat focused approach to the subject matter, depicting battle in its Western Front scenes and the potential of both horror in it and the fortitude of those Canadians fighting. *Beneath Hill 60*, narratively set around a series of explosions, makes the mateship of the men at their task its core thematic focus. In their approaches, the dominant narratives come through in what each of the nations perceive as the valuable aspects of the conflict in terms of identity. The Western Front, when viewing these films in such a comparative manner, becomes a prism for the national consciousness to reveal itself.

From the opening sequences, and the statements of authorial intent, the chosen subjects create divergent narratives of the Great War that all, nevertheless, return to the concept of remembrance. *The Trench* begins through an understated introduction that is directly inspired by Boyd’s desire to bring the colour back to the monochrome impression many have of the Western Front. It is not sensationalised, focusing on the mundane aspects of the trench experience through a small ensemble that serve as almost a representative sample of

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321 Boyd, p. 452.
the historic figures. What defines it is a scarcity of resources for these young men that goes to highlight their sense of boredom at the long wait for action. Artillery fire can be heard in the distance, but in the trenches we are shown soldiers playing cards and killing nothing but time. In contrast, Passchendaele’s opening depicts a tense action scene inspired by the memories of Gross’s grandfather. The character of Dunne is depicted as an action hero for much of this sequence, surviving as his comrades fall around him, and taking out a machine gun nest single-handedly. This idealised image of the Canadian soldier, a proud part of much of the discussion surrounding Canada’s abilities during the conflict, becomes morally blurred in the scene’s final moments. The traumatic story Gross remembers his grandfather telling him is translated to the screen, with the young blue-eyed German being needlessly bayoneted through the head. It is a shocking moment as before this Dunne seemed almost a generic hero figure in this scene. A very real incident complicates any cinematic idealisation. Beneath Hill 60, in a similar fashion to The Trench, chooses to remain understated and focus on the central ensemble of characters and their relationships. Woodward is shown as a man unsure of himself on entering a world where most the others have been settled for some time. His position of leadership makes him an outsider in this group of outsider characters, set apart from the infantry moving above their heads. In line with The Trench again, the element of sound and the distant shellfire highlights the alienation of these characters from the actual fighting. In short, both The Trench and Beneath Hill 60 choose a more grounded, slow moving depiction of life on the Western Front, while Passchendaele takes an alternate more epic approach. In its symbolically charged action opening it interposes the concept of trauma and guilt, at least on the individual level if not the national. Reality seems heightened and several images, namely the black horse and the Christian iconography, make this a more intense set up instead of the clearer cut introductions to the landscape given by the other two films. Remembrance is approached with all three in different ways. The Trench through its incorporation of archival photographs, Passchendaele with the opening scene’s position as an adaptation of an actual memory, and Beneath Hill 60’s framing of the film with a post-war sequence that will gain further significance at the end.

Although Britain, Canada, and Australia have a close cultural affinity with one another, exacerbated by the fact that in the depicted period they were fighting on the same frontlines, the style of these three films are distinct alongside certain commonalities. As I have argued, The Trench takes a social realist approach, showing the majority of its ensemble as naïve boys waiting for what the audience knows will immortalise them in memory while extinguishing their individual personalities. The dominant narrative is
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do poignantly relived on-screen by the sense of the inevitability of the futile sacrifice in its representation of the closed in landscape to set up a tension that something could happen, and breaks the mundanity of waiting with sudden bursts of violence. In its representation, *Passchendaele* respectfully, although not unproblematically, represents its soldiers as “storm troops” and upholds the idea of Canadian exceptionalism. As Goldie describes, Dunne is a reluctant hero, and complicates the moral idealist elements with his guilt and trauma. Moreover, the film utilises modern cinematic techniques, such as quick editing and handheld camerawork, for its battle sequences. It, more than the other two films, focuses on combat and the horrors of battle. Furthermore, Gross seems to have been greatly influenced by war photographers like Frank Hurley through visual referencing in various shots. *Beneath Hill 60* broadens the Anzac myth to encompass more than it traditionally has. It highlights the efforts of the miners, not just the infantry. It includes Aboriginal contributions to the war effort. And, finally, memorialises an important Australian figure who enlisted after the original, and best remembered, Anzac sacrifice of Gallipoli. In its tunnel setting, the film establishes an environment of claustrophobia that, similar to *The Trench*, interrupts the working of the miners through explosive moments of conflict.

To conclude, through these representations of the Western Front one can gain an understanding of what particular cultures consider to still be important to them in relation to this period. By bringing together how the Western Front functions, how it is experienced by its characters, and the individual style the filmmakers use to convey this, these films raise questions of authenticity in the refashioning of cultural memory and the cinematic medium. Mundanity defines *The Trench*, the everyday element of survival in the trenches heightened by the knowledge that it is leading to the greatest tragedies in British military history. *Passchendaele* in its Western Front scenes focuses on the brutality of battle and the struggle to remain moral in it. The discomfort of the tunnels in *Beneath Hill 60* shows the value of mateship, while also its complication with the concept of military leadership, where decisions of life and death are on the table. To further this examination, the next chapter will turn towards the contrasting landscape of home and how it is treated in each of the films. Then Chapter 6 will analyse how the films represent their climatic final moments that memorialise very specific moments in history.
Chapter 5  

*Home Fires*: The Contrasting Landscapes of Home

In terms of cultural memory, the frontline is a place of action; it is a decisive landscape of life and death. Victories are often clearly defined and notable defeats forge solemn moments of remembrance. For both Canada and Australia the Great War, and in turn the Western Front, has been immortalised in their mythological understanding of the national self as a proving ground. Retellings of what was experienced have come to form part of their coming-of-age myths. For Britain it brought an end to an age of prosperity and took a generation of young men with it. Throughout this thesis we have, thus far, focused on this landscape. However, there is another landscape the war impacted, the domestic landscape, where life continues, where the lineal path of nationhood is in many ways less striking, although no less important when plotting the story of a nation. War impacts the society back home, whether that be over the Channel, over the Atlantic, or on the other side of the world. Now that we have examined the representation of the Western Front in some detail, it is now time to turn towards home to both get a broader view of the case study films’ representation of the national culture, and to discover how their depiction of the homeland relates to their dominant narratives.

In their introduction to *Cinema and Landscape*, Graeme Harper and Jonathan Rayner state that ‘with the presence in the frame of a significant, interpretable landscape, the products of national cinemas come to “represent” their countries of origin in ways which are at once realist, physical and tangible, and artistic, imaginative and metaphorical’. They go on to assert ‘film images of the landscape, therefore, have as much to offer the cultural geographer as they do the film critic or cinema historian’. As established in Chapter 3, these films can be recognised through their funding and authorial statements of intent, as well as the baser indictor of origin, as products of their national cinema. Nation in a physical sense, and its mapping out by artists who connect with its cultural memory, can give a clear indication of cultural values and beliefs. Through an analysis of the representation of home a fuller understanding of the cultural memory of the war can be perceived in how it maps out an understanding of nationhood during this formative period and what purpose it serves in the narrative.

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Chapter 5

As in the previous chapter, I am going to go through each case study before making a comparative conclusion, in this though I will be examining the way in which the homeland is represented on-screen and how this speaks to the cultural memory. To begin, however, with the example of The Trench, the absence of any homeland-set scenes is a defining characteristic of the film’s representation of the war in of itself. There is no respite. There is no romance narrative, an aspect the other two films introduce in their homeland sequences. Yet, just because Britain is absent visually as a setting, it is nevertheless present in the interactions between the characters and how they talk to each other about home. Following this I shall move onto Passchendaele and analyse how the natural landscape of Calgary, as well as its urban society, is depicted in the film. This will include the influence of other landscape imagery, such as painting, exploring the concept of national identity in terms of representing the homeland. Finally, I shall see how the flashbacks in Beneath Hill 60 introduce the contrasting landscape of Queensland to that of the Western Front. As with Passchendaele, although the war is taking place on a distant part of the globe its influence is seeping into some of the homely idyll of domestic life. Moreover, the use of such a contrasting, open space is also significant for the film structurally, as shall be examined. Representing the contrasting landscape of home, or even its absence, reveals much about the depiction of national identity and the cultural memory in terms of the war’s traumatic reverberations both at the time and contemporarily.

5.1 Absence: The Memory of Home on a Not-So-Distant Front in The Trench (1999)

When it comes to diversity of landscapes in the three case studies, The Trench is the outlier. Both Passchendaele and Beneath Hill 60 not only include sequences within Canada and Australia respectively, but also move around the Western Front in different stages of the film. When it comes to landscape The Trench is the trench. Before the final march into no-man’s-land, a frontline, a few communication lines, and a dugout is the claustrophobic final refuge of the young soldiers, their uncertain officer, and their seasoned sergeant. Famously, Paul Fussell stated ‘what makes experience in the Great War unique and gives it a special freight of irony is the ridiculous proximity of the trenches to
When understanding the British experience of the Great War in relation to the Dominions, there was less of a sense of geographic separation from home. It would not be unusual for a British soldier on the Western Front to be reading yesterday’s newspaper or receive fresh food packages from home. Keith Grieves describes how poets like Ivor Gurney and Edward Thomas ‘evoked home as a counterpoint to the sights and sounds of the Western Front’. There was comfort in the ideal of home, recalling the pastoral landscape tradition, the model of Britain, and England in particular, as a green and pleasant land in contrast to the destroyed villages and desolate former farmland they saw around them.

In *The Trench* we may not see the landscapes of the character’s pre-war life, yet their remembrances of it are expressed in the quiet moments of the film. Billy, on seeing one of Dell’s pornographic photographs, believes he recognises in the young woman’s face the girl who came to work in the post-office last summer. On the frontline, his mind is taken back to where he grew up in Lancashire, and to romantic notions of love at first sight. The 2nd lieutenant mentions to the sergeant how he misses fishing up in Scotland. In turn the sergeant opens up about having a wife and three children and shows a photograph he keeps close to his heart. Later, the sergeant is spooning down mouthfuls of homemade strawberry jam from his own garden to finish it before the Big Push. When he offers some to Billy, and he declines, the sergeant is taken aback, deeply it seems, not only by the knowledge that Billy doesn’t like jam, but the lack of value he places on this jar. This little piece of home is all the sergeant has and has immense value to him because of it. Fussell describes how ‘to be in the trenches was to experience an unreal, unforgettable enclosure and constraint, as well as a sense of being unoriented and lost. One saw two things only: the walls of an unlocalized, undifferentiated earth and the sky above’. As a way of combating this alien temporary space, local names are evoked in the signage indicating particular trench lines with Petticoat Lane and Haymarket being the setting for much of the film. Within the unlocalised space of the trenches, the soldiers turn their thoughts back to home, not just a national one but the specific one where they remember feeling safe, not hearing the constant barrage of the shelling or fearing the upcoming offensive. Although their homes are not shown they are palpable in much of their expression and characterisation.

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326 Fussell, p. 54.
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In British fiction, the Western Front, above other theatres of the war, has been represented and memorialised most. As an indicator of this, David Reynolds, amongst others, has noted a disregard in the cultural memory for the importance of industrial changes in Britain and the way the national landscape was reshaped.\(^{327}\) In terms of representation, the Western Front takes precedence. This is not to say that there have been no representations of the psychological and social strain put on communities at home in British fiction. In recent years two decade-spanning television series, *Downton Abbey* and *The Village*, touched upon how British public and private life was affected by the conflict. Each on different ends of the class spectrum. In cinematic terms, recent films set during the war do feature scenes of Blighty, even if they are often outweighed by frontline sequences. Two Michael Morpurgo adaptions, American/British co-production *War Horse* (Steven Spielberg, 2011) and the *Private Peaceful* (Pat O’Connor, 2012), both touch upon the pastoral tradition and the war’s intrusion into this space. *Testament of Youth* (James Kent, 2014), based on Vera Brittain’s autobiography, moves between home and the frontline highlighting the changing perception of gender roles as well as what it means to experience traumatic loss. Nevertheless, British cinematic representations have a tendency to focus on the experience of frontline infantry and the inherent anxiety of life on the Western Front. Three years after *The Trench*, *Deathwatch* (Michael J. Bassett, 2002) took the sense of terror and hellish desolation on the Western Front and translated it into a genre bending war/horror film. In 2018, in time for the 100\(^{th}\) anniversary commemorations, a new adaption of *Journey’s End* (Saul Dibb, 2017) received a theatrical release. The original play’s tragic depiction of shellshock, class, and the inevitability of death on the frontline brought to the screen once more.

Within this cultural backdrop the inclusion of a comforting scene of home in *The Trench* would have undercut the ticking clock element of the story as well as this sense of characters’ ensnarement in the ‘undifferentiated earth’.\(^{328}\) As I have shown, there is a notable amount of precedent in this lack, or, it could equally said, in this focus. So much British fiction and discourse has revolved around the trenches of the Western Front and the concept of disenchantment from the experience that *The Trench* becomes an exemplary instance of this aspect of the cultural memory. A century after the Armistice, the observation that British cultural products representing the Great War continue to have a

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328 Fussell, p. 54.
morbid fascination with the Western Front still holds ground. In the next chapter this will be further emphasised by the analysis of *The Trench*’s representation of the day most pointed to as the defining tragedy of the war, the first day of the Somme. One day the British national consciousness may be relieved from the trenches of 1914-18, and the morning of July 1st 1916 specifically, but it does not seem that this will be the case any time soon.

### 5.2 Romanticising the Foothills: Depicting Natural Landscapes and Urban Society in *Passchendaele* (2008)

From its very inception, *Passchendaele* was produced to memorialise two vastly contrasting landscapes. That of Calgary, its early years and struggles, and that of Passchendaele, the battlefield, itself. It is by means of these two landscapes, the domestic and the military, that the film explores the Canadian cultural memory of the Great War and national identity. It is for this purpose that it received funding unequalled by previous Canadian independent productions, a major source of this being the local Calgary government, and was predominantly shot in the area. Neta Gordon believes that these two spaces highlight the difference of the war insider and the war outsider, going on to state ‘the representation of both front line and home front activity is significant not because it confirms a plot of personal heroism or because an individual type of activity makes a statement one way or the other about the toll of war; rather, such activity operates as an articulation of citizenship’.

The contrasting landscapes of the national past, sites of memory where both pride and trauma can be found, may not come to any definitive conclusion on what it is to be Canadian, but rather formulate a version of the cultural memory in a narrative where values can be articulated. In a quote by Paul Gross he lists strength, resolution, and pride in one’s nation as what it means to be Canadian. The context for this statement being the foreword to *Passchendaele: An Illustrated History* (2008), an educational guide aimed at young learners, helps to place the project within the wider desire for national remembrance.

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Western Front’ can be read subtextually in this film that gains a perceivable amount of authority from its official backing as a memorial project. On the other hand, identities are never fixed and always disputed, and these three traits can be considered more in line with the war-fighter, with the foregrounding of strength, than the peacekeeper image.

Noah Richler’s main opposition to Passchendaele is that it transforms ‘a story of disgraceful, senseless industrial murder’ into a tale of ‘resourcefulness and triumph in which living, Canadians are able to take pride’. What concerns Richler, in a similar way to Jay Winter, is how cultural perceptions of war are articulated in art as these works can influence the wider perception of wars past, present, and future. Ideology, in Richler’s view, shapes cultural representations of past military conflicts such as Passchendaele while ‘history hardly comes into it’. This draws into question a potent characteristic of what it means not merely to be Canadian but to represent the national past more broadly. How can you even discuss the past without falling into an ideological mind-set as the purpose of remembering? It must be noted that Richler himself is not free from ideology, his sometimes abrasive tone, rightly or wrongly, to the conservatives within his country cannot be separated from the fact that, almost three years after the publication of What We Talk About When We Talk About War, he stood for election as a candidate in the New Democratic Party of Canada. His foregrounding of one version of history over what he perceives as a reshaping of the national narrative itself attempts to shape the national narrative for explicitly political ends. This notwithstanding, his book painstakingly and veraciously interrogates how the dichotomy of the “war-fighter” and the “peacekeeper” struggled to come to terms with one another in the decade of Passchendaele’s production. At the core of his argument lies the undoubtedly pertinent consideration of the Great War’s tangled place in contemporary society. Simplification, often along ideological lines, is one troubling result of this, deliberately removing aspects of history and turning characters into something that audiences can recognise as virtuous now rather than following what they would likely have believed then. Few today can empathise with motivations like fighting for King and Empire; most can understand a desire to protect home and loved ones. Of course, audiences should not be viewed as some homogenous entity whose views or opinion can be swayed by one or a dozen representations. Nevertheless, after the failure of

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331 Gross, ‘Foreword’, p. 3.
333 Richler, p. 91.
various humanitarian motivated missions, refocusing on the military competence and valour of Canadian’s against all odds in combat ninety years previous would seem a fitting topic for a publicly – meaning, in part, governmentally – funded popular film that depicts a past that seemed an appropriate arena to explore an aspect, at least, of Canadian identity and heritage.

Between the taking of the machine gun nest in Flanders in the opening scene and the recreation of the Battle of Passchendaele at the film’s climax, much time is spent on the home front. It is here, I argue, that the questions of unity and disunity, and the opposing identities of the war-fighter and the peacekeeper, begin to be explored thematically. The first view of Calgary, circa 1917, demonstrates the contrast between the landscape of home and that of the battlefield. This establishing shot is bright and open, stretching out to the distant snow tipped mountains, bathed in golden sunlight, allowing the spectators’ eyes to explore the vista presented (Figure 21). Of particular symbolic note in the composition are the two horses galloping up the grassy slope towards the camera, calling back to the earlier harnessed and dirt-covered horse trotting, head down, through the French town in the opening scene described in the last chapter. Calgary, in contrast, is positioned between the clean running waters of the Bow River, verdurous pastures, and the foothills backed by mountains. Therefore, what this establishing shot introduces is a landscape that is far removed from the destruction wrought by the war, its composition evoking the landscape painting tradition, with its sense of grandeur and distance as well as golden hued style. This connection to painting is made by the film itself in a later romantic scene between Michael Dunne and Sarah Mann, the nurse who helped him recuperate. After a sequence of shots of the two riding across the foothill, fording rivers, and passing by woodland, they sit in the grass gazing out over a valley. Here, Sarah asks Dunne to paint a picture in words of all before them. Dunne replies that he is not a painter, but he tries nonetheless:

“In this picture there is a river and… there’s a horse, and there’s a man sitting on that horse, and together they ford that river. And all these things are in the foothills. And the man rides to a place he thought he knew like the back of his hand, but there’s something about this day that’s different.”

Through this description, and in line with Canadian landscape tradition, the couple are able to draw inspiration from the natural landscape to express their desires. Nature, that is to say the landscape surrounding Calgary, is shown as an idyllic escape.
This sense of self-expression drawn from the landscape follows a long tradition of Canadian artwork in line with global art trends from the eighteenth century until the mid-twentieth, where self-realisation was strived for through envisioning, or perceiving, the national landscape. In the aftermath of the Great War this ‘self-confident young nation’, in

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335 Passchendaele. 00:08:38.
Brian S. Osborne’s view, began producing new, yet familiar, images of itself to bring form to the perception of Canada as a nation. In ‘The Iconography of Nationhood in Canadian Art’, Osborne highlights the core icon held within these representations as a sense of ‘northern distinctiveness’, the perception that they lived at the edge, bodily influenced by the clarity of the air, amongst the rolling hills and snaking streams, in the space between the mighty forests and mountains, and as something, a people, fundamentally separate from their cosmopolitan focused southern neighbour and of the European nations from which many of the now Canadians had migrated. Core to the meaning bestowed by such iconography is the fact that, as Osborne asserts, ‘an artistic icon must be revered to be meaningful and by a significant proportion of the populous if it is to be an effective symbol of nationhood’. Painters such as Homer Watson and Otto Jacobi had already established a landscape tradition in Canadian art in the nineteenth century, the high watermark of the landscape movement worldwide (Figure 22). However, it was ideas of nationalism spreading in the first half of the twentieth century that lent landscape imagery new significance through the possibility of realising the national identity by its setting. In the 1920s and through to the early 1930s, the landscape artist collective known as the Group of Seven were able to achieve not just approval from the fine art community but also popularity amongst the nation’s citizens, particularly Anglo-Canadians. Furthermore, Osborne, in a similar way to John Brinkerhoff Jackson for American cultural landscape studies, observes the foregrounding of the vernacular, the commonplace, amongst this turn toward the national landscape as subject in art. In this way, the iconography of the natural landscape became a vital aspect of Canadian identity. This can hardly be seen as a startling development considering that Canada is one of the largest countries in world by area and one of the least densely populated. Necessity often shapes identity and the necessity was to exist amongst this vastness, and to create a culture that, although separated by huge distances, could still be recognised as sharing that same national identity.

A romantic vision of Canada is realised in Passchendaele’s nature sequences by its drawing upon this sense of northern distinctiveness, living on the edge of things, and

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338 Osborne, p. 172.
339 Osborne, p. 172.
340 Osborne, pp. 172-173.
through the vernacular of the ‘mundane not mythological’ settings. This nostalgic version of Canada is complicated, however, by a closer view of the town of Calgary where we witness the militarism and propaganda that have permeated domestic life. For instance, one of the first buildings we are shown is the 10th Battalion Recruiting Office with two of its staff putting up a propaganda poster depicting a burly ape, wearing an ill-fitting Pickelhaube, grasping with bloodied hands at a globe (Figure 23). War makes it mark on the high-street with emotionally inflammatory imagery driving military fervour. It is here that Dunne, following his medical review, is assigned under the unbearably pompous personification of the worst sort of perfidious upper class Englishman, Colonel Dobson-Hughes. Dunne has been diagnosed with neurasthenia, a medical synonym for ill-defined condition of shellshock at the time. His first real experience of this job is a shaming ritual in a gazebo where Dobson-Hughes makes all the young able-bodied men stand in front of their seated neighbours and questions why they are “not doing their part for their King, their country, and their God.” In this scene Dobson-Hughes becomes the embodiment of Richler’s “war-fighter” spokesman, and not a particularly empathic one, while the neurasthenic Dunne has flashbacks to the boy who he killed. If strength is one of the traits of Canadians then this way of pursuing it is shown as twisted and immoral, its admirability is in character rather than physicality and intimidation. In a way the town envisions itself as an extension of the battlefield, making it closer to the Western Front in its sensibilities than it is to the horses freely galloping on its outskirts. Furthermore, it approaches the painful question of enlistment and prefigures the divisive conscription under the Military Service Act. As already discussed, at the core of the Vimy Legend is the moral of unity, one that embodies more than just the single battle but the entire mythic framework of the Canadian experience of the Great War. As a result, the trauma of the Military Service Act, and the conscription troubles that occurred in Canada in the latter half of the war, comes through in these Calgary sequences without specific reference. Instead, the film shows young men being press-ganged into service, the multi-cultural, open Canadian society closing up to prejudice, and a society on a knife’s edge.

Osborne, p. 167.
An explicit indication of disunity comes from the persecution of the Mann family. Sarah and her younger brother David become victims due to the fact that their father, like Dunne, fought at Vimy Ridge, but on the wrong side. Once rumour of this gets out, their home is vandalised by their neighbours, with windows being shattered and the word “Hun” painted on the walls. This leads David to attempt to enlist, even though he has been deemed unfit due to his asthma. By this point though, David believes he is already at war, that the whole world is at war, and the battlefield is where he must prove himself. In particular, he wishes to prove himself to Dr. Walker (David Ley) as he is in love with his daughter. For their own self-serving reasons, Dobson-Hughes and Dr. Walker aid him in bypassing the medical and pronounce him fit for service. Sarah, however, is led to believe that it was Dunne that signed him up, splitting their relationship apart, causing him to re-enlist under the name McCrae, of course referencing the famed Canadian poet himself. Consequently, the aftermath of Vimy is depicted in *Passchendaele* as a cause of disunity, not a moment when the nation came together. This subversive deconstruction of the Vimy Legend actually reflects quite well Richler’s belief that the greatest threats to Canada’s relative stability are those within, the internal, possibly political, strife, not barbarians at the gate. Through the colonial stereotype of Dobson-Hughes, the film suggests that it was the imperial power of Britain, and its influence on Canadian society, that is in part to blame for much of the disunity caused during the conflict. The implication of this is that

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344 *Passchendaele*. 00:19:13.
345 Richler, p. 31.
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this brand of imperialism is distasteful to modern sensibilities but the Canadian troops as an independent entity are shown to be militarily capable and far more virtuous, as we see later. In this prelude to the battle, Gross gazes beyond the battlefield to the impact war has on a community outside of the combat zone. Within this contrasting landscape of home there is another dichotomy of rural and urban life. In the previous chapter the impression that the film’s idealisation of the military followed in many respects Richler’s belief that it is politically closer to the war-fighter image, yet the depiction of Canadian society itself in these scenes subverts much of this. While servicemen may be admirable, the institutions of war and its influence on national attitudes are shown to be the opposite.

5.3 Home/Front: Contrasting Landscape of Queensland in Beneath Hill 60 (2010)

*Beneath Hill 60* is bookended by a post-war sequence set on the day of Oliver Woodward’s wedding. The events of the film, within this framing, are put forward as the memories of the war that have been triggered by an object, a small wooden box. David Roach has described how, when adapting Woodward’s diaries into a script, the foundation of this framing device was in the fact that a few months before enlisting Woodward fell in love with Marjorie Waddell, and on returning after it, they married. Other than this there was very little information. He goes on to say that ‘it must have been a very common story at the time, a young girl falls in love with a soldier about to go off to war. The man who comes back is a completely different person than the one that left’. By showing Woodward’s life both before enlisting in flashbacks and after in these two bookending sequences the filmmakers are able to represent this transformation. As such, the post-war framing device of Woodward’s wedding is shown to be an emotionally intense moment for him. It should be one of the happiest days of his life, but the sight of one innocuous box triggers memories of his experiences, and of the boy who carved the box and never came home. This technique puts emphasis on the psychological strain the war had – one of the guests is clearly shellshocked and being cared for – while at the same time showing what Woodward goes to war for and what is worth coming back to.

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347 Roach, p. 17.
To show his life before the war, the film intersperses flashbacks of Woodward before he enlisted, creating a dichotomy where home, Queensland, Australia, is a bright, open site of romance that, in a similar way to Calgary in *Passchendaele*, contrasts vastly with the landscape of the Western Front. The sense of the rural and vastness, in comparison to the claustrophobic tunnels, comes through in these Queensland scenes. For instance,

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348 *Beneath Hill 60*. 00:13:59.
349 *Beneath Hill 60*. 00:14:17.
Chapter 5

Woodward’s horseback ride before reaching the Waddell household in the first flashback shows off the verdurous setting, the open spaces with the town far off in the distance, and his ease with the horse setting him within the outback model of capable Australianness (Figure 24). The household itself, with its veranda, its Queenslander vernacular architecture, and its welcoming family provides an immediate contrast to the hostile welcome Woodward received in the mines (Figure 25). Life in Queensland is shown to be pleasant and nostalgic in the sense that it establishes Woodward as being confident in this place of comfort, which is fitting within the framing of these as remembrances of Woodward while at war. These scenes feel more in the tradition of the period film, which has been one of Australian cinema’s most prolific genre outputs for many decades, particularly during the so-called ‘golden age’ of the 1970s and 1980s. This is in direct contrast to the gritty war film, with Australia offsetting the closed dark tunnels of France with sunlit and homely scenes. To be clear, it is not an idyll, the war is the subject of a lot of conversations, the Waddell family hear of the death of their son at Gallipoli around the kitchen table, and Woodward shows he has received white feathers from people in town to shame him for not being in uniform, indicating the impact it is having on the society. The landscape, however, is fundamentally peaceful, where the more densely populated Europe is torn apart by war, and human activity is shown to barely intrude on the open outback environment.

Focusing on the emotional structuring of the film, Brian McFarlane in his article ‘Beneath Hill 60: A Study in Contrasts’ sees this switching between periods of Woodward’s war experiences as crucial to the plot structure by asserting that the film’s psychological and emotional truth ‘is achieved through the skilful unfolding of its plot, which resists linearity in favour of a sustained process of alternation’. In his view, alternating between the claustrophobia, dirt, and danger of the Western Front, showing him proving himself without the need for Hollywood style heroics, and the Australian scenes that establish him as a ‘man of honour and integrity’, helps us to understand his situation. By placing Woodward in two distinct landscapes, one of dimness and perpetual danger, the other bright, open, and domestic, the audience is able to greater empathise with Woodward by viewing what he has left behind and witnessing, on two

351 McFarlane, p. 10.
fronts, an idealised image of an Anzac that is not necessarily a great fighter but embodies other valuable character traits such as mateship and resourcefulness. With these flashbacks then, whilst not depicting much of the wider social complexity and impact that Passchendaele attempts to do, the filmmakers provide the audience a respite from the claustrophobia and constant tension to develop an understanding of Woodward’s character. Furthermore, it establishes, as McFarlane notes, the reasons for Woodward’s late enlistment, his role in the mining industry, that was vital in keeping the troops supplied, and his eventual enlistment after the death of the Marjorie’s brother at Gallipoli and the creation of the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company, where his talents and experience, rather than ability with a rifle, were actually of use. In terms of the Anzac tradition, and its common idealisation of those fighters who first landed at Anzac Cove, this shows that there are other ways to be of use in war than in the obvious model of a warrior charging into combat.

Placing this within the cinematic tradition of Australian landscapes, the emptiness of Queensland, in terms of human settlements, is depicted while the impression of harshness that often comes through in representations of the environment, underlining the need for resourcefulness, is absent. In Gallipoli, for instance, there is a long sequence before the two main characters sign-up where they undergo a kind of ordeal in the desert. The sequence involves the two characters crossing this desert to eventually reach Perth to enlist and it is a formative moment for their relationship where the bond of mateship is tested. Following in line with Canada, Australians in the inter-war period idealised the landscape with a particular sense of the vernacular, and it is in this tradition that the landscape depicted here expresses national identity.

This perception of the “everyday” is at the heart of the scenes set in Australia where the romance between Woodward and Marjorie (Isabella Heathcote) develops. It is much

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353 See: Rayner, p. 12.
354 Sheftall, p. 162.
355 See: Turner, pp. 110-111.
simpler than that of the mines, with tea, walks, and open talk without fear of being overheard and fatally interrupted. The film’s male-dominated exploration of mateship treats the relationship of the, very literal, diggers as quite complex and multifaceted. Woodward must earn his place within a group who have already bonded, overcoming their initial opinion of him as a shirker who has avoided the war up to this point, while also having to balance this with the requirements of an officer and dictates of the commanders. In Queensland, however, the subplot is relatively straightforward, the only significant barrier being that Marjorie is only sixteen before the war, but time resolves that problem, and their marriage is shown at the end of the film. This may be seen as following in an Australian genre identified in Rayner’s study as male-ensemble films, which focus on male-dominated narratives that explore the complexities of mateship, whereas female relationships (female to male or female to female) become secondary.\footnote{Rayner, p. 96.} Simply put, life at the front, although directed by orders, is complicated from all angles, whereas the flashbacks in Australia are an idealised, uncomplicatedly romantic and, in a word, homely. In this way, these Queensland sequences compliment the Western Front through their direct contrasting nature to give a deeper understanding of Woodward’s character and impress upon the audience the value of home.

5.4 Conclusion: Contrasting Landscapes of Home

In the way the homeland is called upon and utilised in these films a clearer sense of the dominant narrative of the Great War in its contemporary form for each comes through, and they do this through utilising contrasts. Darkness/light, closed/open, violent/peaceful, the differences are made to be unmistakable from the very first establishing shots of the landscape. In Harper and Rayner’s estimation:

> The cinema’s power in the depiction of the landscape, be it rural, metropolitan, industrial, urban or suburban, has driven or led filmmakers of every nationality and political viewpoint, has fed and fed upon definitions of national identity and has been read by cinema audiences as one of the most conspicuous and eloquent elements in the idiom of the film culture from which it emanates.\footnote{Harper and Rayner, p. 24.}
By acknowledging the landscape of home in these films, the definition of the national identity as it relates to the Great War is articulated. In the case of *The Trench*, the absence of any scenes in Britain enhances the sense of being trapped on the frontline, aligning itself to the disenchantment narrative by not allowing any relief from this space or any nostalgic images of home. The irredeemable memory of the Somme is represented by the sense of ensnarement that is provided from having no break. Their situation is hopeless and within the cultural context this singular fixed landscape makes the film’s use of it almost fatalistic. However, home is evoked in other ways, mostly as a way for the characters to comfort and orient themselves as individuals with defined localities rather than just soldiers in a battalion. Home is something to feel nostalgic for, as the characters often express, but it never materialises. Once the countdown to the Big Push begins at the film’s opening, up to the point the whistle blows and they go over the top, all they have is the trench.

*Passchendaele*, in its depiction of the natural landscape, creates a space for the romance between Dunne and Sarah to blossom while calling to the idea of the nation’s northern distinctiveness. Analysing the use of landscape in Canadian cinema, Jim Leach asserts that ‘landscape interacts with narrative in these films to produce an often troubled and complicated relationship between nature and nation. If the landscape is an abiding core of the “real” in Canadian experience, its imaginary manifestations are as fragmented and contested as the nation’s cultural traditions’.359 Here, Leach detects an increasing tendency in Canadian films to depict both nature and nation as being obliterated by the twin contemporary threats of technology and alienation due to rapid urbanisation of the landscape.360 Through the use of contrasting spaces in *Passchendaele*, I believe, that this film too draws from this anxiety. Nature, that is to say the landscape surrounding Calgary, is an idyllic escape. Far from being a lawless wilderness, it is the last safe refuge. The town, on the other hand, has been tainted by war and is being torn apart by the disunity it ignites. The reality of this becomes further impressed upon the audience by the scenes of Ypres and the surrounding landscape, discussed in the previous chapter, that are desolate muddy hellscapes where nature has been destroyed by the instruments of man. Here nature

360 Leach, pp. 274-279.
and nation become complicated by modernity and alienation and it is on the battlefield where questions of identity, and its character traits, are reclaimed, though not without loss.

*Beneath Hill 60* uses flashbacks of Woodward’s life before enlisting, as well as a post-war framing device, for its polar opposition to the enclosed mines under the Western Front where much of the rest of the film takes place. Queensland is an unrestricted landscape with glaring sunlight beating down upon it, which is in direct opposition to the claustrophobic candlelit life of the tunnellers beneath the Western Front. The coming-of-age myth is highlighted by the challenges Woodward faces during the war, and the psychological impact it has when he returns. It idealises the outback life as comparatively peaceful, although the far-off war is shown to be affecting the lives of the people there. Woodward’s late enlistment is explained, and the reasons for him to enlist are shown. The contrasting landscape of Queensland in the structure of the story becomes a space that is nostalgically recalled by Woodward during the war, and his experiences during it become something that are triggered in his post-war life.

The contrasting landscape of home, no matter the distance from the Western Front, becomes embroiled in the cultural memory of the war and the impact it has had on the national identity. All three films associate romance with home, although *The Trench* does not show it. Nostalgia and the idealisation of the natural landscape is present in both *Passchendaele* and *Beneath Hill 60*. If the Western Front can be defined symbolically as a anti-pastoral landscape, then it is natural that both *Passchendaele* and *Beneath Hill 60* call upon rural imagery to contrast this.361 Home is something worth fighting for, and representing it can therefore be seen as patriotic in the context of a war film. In their approach, however, there are clear differences, *Passchendaele* has a complex view of the influence the war is having, and the disunity it is sowing, while *Beneath Hill 60* focuses almost solely on Woodward and the Waddell family, seeing the war through the domestic sphere rather than the societal. What can be concluded from this is that *Passchendaele* is striving more for the epic and dramatic filmmaking model, whereas *Beneath Hill 60* is aimed at the more personal narrative as a biographical film usually would. This can arguably be seen as the result of the two films’ origins, the former being a work heavily funded by the government, the latter receiving much of its support from the local people of Townsville. The way in which national identity is approached is very different from these two sources. Nevertheless, without at least an acknowledgement of the landscapes of home

361 See: Fussell, p. 251.
it would be difficult to establish how these films represent in an abstract way the national identity in relation of the Great War.

Now that these films’ divergent approaches to the Western Front have been detailed, and have been related to the national landscape of home, the textual analysis portion of the thesis will be concluded in the next chapter through an examination of the representation of the central historic events they lead up to.
Chapter 6  

*Lest We Forget: Cinematically*  

Memorialising and Marking Sites of Memory

British soldiers, some no more than 17, are cut down as they stumble forward into no-man’s-land. On a hospital bed a Canadian serviceman, nurse weeping beside him, makes a final declaration of love before being called up into the legion of the fallen. Deep beneath the corpses and mud of no-man’s-land a young Australian, scarcely more than a boy, waits for the detonation that will mean victory for his friends, and everlasting silence for him. These vignettes come at the conclusions to the three films discussed throughout this thesis. Central to each is the implicit representation of wartime death. With their framing as memorial projects, demonstrated in Chapter 3, these dramatic climaxes serve as reminders of past national trauma and through representation mark a place of loss. *The Trench* (1999), *Passchendaele* (2008), and *Beneath Hill 60* (2010) can all be seen as instances of what Pierre Nora defined as micro-histories, representative samples of the cultural memory, resurfacing for the specific purpose of remembrance. As Nora states, micro-histories are a kind of return, ‘we compensate for our alienated perspective by trying to view the past in close-up and artificial hyper-reality. And as our perception of the past changes, we discover reasons to look again at traditional subjects that once seemed to hold no further interest, the commonplaces, as it were, of our national memory’.

At the core of each of these productions is a specific historic event, a kernel of truth within the narrativisation, which is contemplated anew, and within this contemplation is the memory of loss. *The Trench* where the soldiers finally go over the top on the first day of the Somme on July 1st 1916. *Passchendaele* in the aftermath of the Canadian Corps capture of Hill 52 on November 10th 1916. And *Beneath Hill 60*’s detonation of a series of mines beneath the German’s position on Messines Ridge on June 7th 1917. Thus far both the cultural and specific production context of each film has been examined, and particularly in relation to reconstructing past national experiences, and of remembering national sacrifices, that were core motivations for their scripting, funding, and release. Moreover, through textual analysis of the way the contrasting landscapes of the Western Front and homeland refashion elements of the cultural memory, a careful mediation of the past has been

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demonstrated. This touched upon topics such as authenticity, examinations of each film's stylistic approach, and the characterisation of the soldiery. The subject of this chapter is the specific historic moment that the films’ memorialise.

In his study of secular commemoration in the immediate aftermath of the Great War, Jay Winter notes that, alongside a theme of hope, memorials marking sites of memory ‘were built as places where people could mourn. And be seen to mourn’. As such, those original physical monuments allowed survivors to express grief in a clearly marked and defined manner, and allowed them to ‘pass through states of bereavement’ as part of a process of ‘separation from the dead, of forgetting as much as remembering’. However, through their representations these contemporary cinematic works framed within the context of remembrance serve a contrary purpose. Rather than facilitating a process where forgetting, to an extent, was a way to move forward, these films serve to remind the audience, to give them a distant echo, of the loss that their culture previously experienced. These films are reexaminations of history, in line with Nora’s concept of micro-histories, which are brought back into focus so that the cultural value of the Great War can be reaffirmed in relation to the contemporary national identity. As Petri J. Raivo, in his essay ‘In this Very Place: War Memorials and Landscapes as an Experienced Heritage’, states ‘there is always a story inside a historical landscape and it is not a matter of indifference how this story is told’. Telling a story is always a choice; this is Raivo’s message. Figuratively we can say a story is ‘waiting to be told’, but in a literal sense it is up to chroniclers, historians, politicians, financiers, and filmmakers as to which are aired in public. Those who choose to memorialise history, particularly from a national perspective, focus on the affect to their present culture in the shaping of cultural memory. The past, to have any notability in the present, must be visible in the heritage of a nation. Exploring heritage as a concept purely constructed through interpretation, Ravio observes ‘historical reality does not pop up from the remains of the past; it has to be re-enacted. Heritage is a product of the present and is made for present needs, and sometimes these needs are no more than plain marketing’. The Somme, Passchendaele, and the Messines Ridge are sites that are marked on the landscape and re-presented in these films to a contemporary

364 Winter, Sites of Memory, Site of Mourning, p. 224.
366 Raivo, p. 9.
audience. The choice of what event should be depicted on the screen and how this is done is a very conscious and culturally determined one.

6.1 The Somme: Remembering July 1st and the Big Push

William Boyd begins The Trench forty-eight hours before the Somme offensive and it is not until the final few minutes that the whistle is blown, and history made. As argued in Chapter 4, the film would more accurately be described as one interested in depicting the experience of life in the trenches of the Somme, as the title foregrounds, and not one representing the Battle of the Somme in its entirety. It is about the run up to the offensive, and its devastating first morning, and not the entire battle that would continue until November 18th of that year. Britain’s continued, now century long, fixation with the opening day of the Battle of the Somme, July 1st 1916, as a tragic point of no return in the island’s military and imperial history is thematically key in the framework of the film. As David Reynolds notes, the nation’s blinkered fascination with not only one battle, but even more precisely one day, arguably skews the understanding of the conflict as a whole, which lasted four years, spanned multiple continents, and evolved in multiple stages as new technologies and strategies were developed on all sides.\textsuperscript{367} Yet, although this painful episode had been hovering over much discussion of the Great War, British cinema by the end of the twentieth century, other than in the documentary The Battle of the Somme (1916), had not yet approached it as a subject to any real degree. Therefore, The Trench not only represents a version of the personal experience of the Somme as it exists in the cultural memory, but it simultaneously captures a sense of the magnitude that the nation at the end of the twentieth century attributes to this historic turning point.

It must be kept in mind that any film is inherently representation not reality, and the way film as a medium is able to shape memory and perception is approached in The Trench itself. Not long after Eddie’s injury, the men are rounded up by Sergeant Winter, the only professional soldier in the battalion, and told to be on their best behaviour. When they are all tidy and lined up, Lieutenant Colonel Villiers, accompanied by a two-man film crew, one directing, one operating the camera, arrive to shoot a small scene. The man directing, Harold Faithful (Charles Cartmell), gets them all into position and within the

frame, with the men standing facing forward towards the straight-backed colonel who asks the director what he should say. Harold tells the colonel that the caption for this scene reads “senior officer addresses men on eve of the battle. Morale is high.” He suggests saying something uplifting. The film crew are aiming to show a sense of camaraderie in the trenches between the men and their commanders, a useful piece of propaganda, yet this is contradicted for the audience by the clear staged nature of the scene. Furthermore, the cinematography highlights the division between the ranks here, with the sergeant and officers framed together in one shot, and the lower ranks separately in another. Claudia Sternberg in her analysis describes how this scene ‘may be read as a symbolic rendering of the manifold interrelations between the actors and agents in war and on film’.368 She continues by stating:

While the treatment of the Western Front theme (emphasis on the first days of the Somme battle, irresponsible high-ranking officers taking no risks, naïve young men whose lives will be wasted and so forth) is conventional and reinforces its myths, the scene also – on a more abstract level – points out how important and how malleable an agent film has been in the transmission of the Great War. In a shot in which the trench camera is directed not at its fictional objects – the colonel and the soldiers in particular or trench culture in general – but directly at the audience, the spectator’s involvement and significance in the process of cultural memory is, literally, pictured.369

The fact that the camera is being operated by a man referred to as ‘Geoffrey’ can be read as a direct reference to the influential propaganda film The Battle of the Somme, shot by Geoffrey Malins and John McDowell. Arguably, with this in mind, the message of the scene seems to be that you can't always trust what you see on film, it is always a mediated process. Any figure knowingly placed in front of a camera and later edited is a product of the processes of film. Additionally, this is the second direct reference to the visual archive, the first being the photographs shown in the opening credits. In this way, The Trench’s dialogue with the past through interactions with the archive signals a critical acknowledgement of the continued questioning of the past’s true form. Once again, Boyd’s quote that it is the ‘challenge of art’ to bring the ‘unimaginable’ world of the trenches to life shows that, through the collaborative process of filmmaking, there is a desire ‘to make

Chapter 6

it as authentic and true-to-life as is feasibly possible’. Yet, this still returns us to the question of extent, discussed in Chapter 4, and of the meditated nature of film and art. It leaves room to question the images so that the spectator’s involvement in the transmission and understanding of cultural memory is made explicit through reference to one of the most recognisable artefacts of the conflict, namely Malins and McDowell’s documentary.

![Figure 26: The soldiers seen through the camera viewfinder.](image)

Once the camera is rolling, the colonel begins describing the battalion’s objectives, but is interrupted by the camera operator apologetically asking to restart due to technical reasons. When the colonel is given the signal to continue, as if he were any actor performing a role, he strikes a more commanding pose with one leg resting on the fire-step. What he then says gives the contemporary spectator a sense of prescience. The colonel assures the men that they will be able to walk over no-man’s-land with a walking stick, “success is guaranteed”, particularly as a result of the bombardment that has been underway since June 24th, and, most deceptively, that they expect “casualties no more than 10%”. As the colonel finishes his oration the director tells the soldiers to cheer, which they do enthusiastically. We see them through the sights of the camera holding up a banner exclaiming “God Save the King” (Figure 26). As the crew leave, the colonel instructs the men to win as many medals for the battalion as possible, to which one responds, “It’s alright for you, you won’t be there.” There is a moment of silence, apart from the sounds of

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371 *The Trench*. 00:35:51.
the distant bombardment of course, as it cuts between the groups, before the colonel replies “No I won’t be, but you all will.”

With the separation of the officers and men, and the colonel’s dishonest description of how the Big Push will play out, this scene markedly realises the “lions led by donkeys” cliché within the British cultural memory of the Great War. Attached to this is the idea of the generals leading from behind, as witnessed in this scene by the otherwise absent officer appearing only to give a pathetic impression of the traditional image of leadership. This scene can, additionally, be compared to an almost identical episode told in Martin Middlebrook’s First Day of the Somme, which quotes Private A. V. Pearson of the Leeds Pals as he tells of his experience in the immediate run up to the battle. He describes how, as they marched toward the front, their divisional general attempted some uplifting words: “Good luck, men. There is not a single German left in their trenches, our guns have blown them all to Hell.” Pearson continues, ‘then, I suppose, he got into his car and went home to his H. Q. to wine and dine, while we poor benighted blighters tottered our way to glory’. Simply, this demonstrates the dichotomy of officers and soldiers. Of donkeys and lions. Of those militarists who lacked foresight and those pointlessly sacrificed. With these tragic undertones, the memory of the Somme becomes framed, throughout the film, in a fatalistic manner where the countdown is not only to the start of the Big Push, but to the end of the young men’s lives. The scale of national loss, in this way, is made understandable to the contemporary audience through the empathy created by witnessing the daily struggle of life in the trenches that turns the war dead from statistics into representative individuals.

With an increasing British focus on the individual experience of the Great War, observed by both Winter and Reynolds, the Somme once again took centre stage in fiction and non-fiction during the 1970s. This decade saw notably Middlebrook’s The First Day on the Somme (1971) and John Keegan’s The Face of Battle (1976), both placing the individual experience of the soldiers as their focus. The first of these, as shown above, used testimonials to tell, in the veteran’s own words, their experiences of the run up to zero hour and the Somme Offensive. The second, Keegan’s work, is significant as it canonised the Somme alongside Agincourt and Waterloo as one of the formative battles of British history. It should be noted that Reynolds has gone into depth about the criticism from more traditional military historians that these works, like much of the war literature that had preceded them, over emphasised the British Army’s worst day on just one of multiple

fronts to further the lions led by donkey’s myth of pointless slaughter. Both of these, in line with *The Trench*, chose it as the touchstone for the war above all else. More recently, *Forgotten Voices of the Somme* (2008) by Joshua Levine, another book of testimonials, and Andrew Robert’s *Elegy* (2015), which focuses on the single day of July 1st, shows a continuation of this tradition in British non-fiction literature. The traumatic image of the Somme in the British cultural consciousness also comes through in other mediums, for instance *Charley’s War* (1979-1986), arguably the best known British comic dealing with war as a subject, begins in the immediate run up to the Somme and spends six issues on the first day alone. A particularly bizarre – in terms of both staging and outreach – yet powerful display of the dead of the Somme returning into the British consciousness took place on the centenary of the battle, July 1st 2016. In collaboration of the National Theatre and the 14-18 NOW initiative, Jeremy Deller and Rufus Norris conducted a performance piece titled ‘We’re Here Because We’re Here’ that was unprecedented in reach. One thousand four hundred costumed actors travelled across Britain via railway lines, remaining silent other than to occasionally sing a war-time favourite such as the that which inspired the performance’s title, and gave out identity cards showing the name, rank, and regiment of one of the those 19,240 who died that day a century earlier. Susan Owens describes how ‘the work was partly inspired by accounts of people seeing their dead loved one’s ghost both during and after the war’. With this in mind, Owens describes how ‘for a few hours that day, the Great War’s ghosts were made visible’. Within all these British works the sense of futility, the focus on the soldiery, and the morbid fascination with the first day of the Somme comes through. These core elements, similarly, are part of Boyd’s envisioning of the events.

*The Trench* culminates on the infamous date, July 1st, with the men waking and at the prescribed time preparing for the whistle that will tell them to go over the top. The group of young men the film has followed had believed, being the ones who held the line, that they would not be going over with first wave. However, due to miscommunications, these plans have changed. In a tense sequence there is a tracking shot looking down on the faces of the waiting soldiers from the parapet, then it cuts to a side long shot from inside the trench of them fixing their bayonets. To emphasise the seconds counting down to the impending moment we are shown the lieutenant looking at his watch, followed by a close-

373 Reynolds, pp. 362-367.
375 Owens, p. 263.
376 Owens, p. 263.
up of it with the minute hand nearing 07:30. The anticipated moment the film has been building to throughout, the very subject matter and object of commemoration, zero hour and the first day of the Somme, has arrived. When the bombardment halts there is an eerie silence, this sudden lack of noise asserts itself more than the constant thundering that has been underscoring the majority of the film for its alien quality. The territory sounds of booming artillery changing, for a brief interval, to a pastoral twittering of bird song. Billy asks the sergeant if they will get through this, the close-ups of their faces serving to highlight the intimate nature of this personal interaction. Before the sergeant has time to properly answer, to offer comfort to Billy, the whistle interrupts them. The Big Push has begun.

As the men climb the ladders out of the trench, the military soundscape of machine guns, shellfire, and rifles replaces the bird song with renewed zealousness. There is a low angle shot of the sergeant standing on the parapet offering Billy a hand, white light behind him, before he is shot first in the leg, and then several more bullets hit him in the back. As he falls into the trench he covers the camera, turning the screen black for a few moments before it cuts to a high angle of him on the duckboards convulsing. The sergeant goes from the figure of fortitude he has been throughout the film to another dead soldier, the depersonalising nature of trench warfare stripping him of his individual strength as he becomes one corpse amongst many. After Billy pushes himself out from under the sergeant’s body, the lieutenant points his pistol down at him ordering him up. The grass is a vivid green in no-man’s-land, as Eddie witnessed through the loophole, and we see the enemy’s line in the distance (Figure 27). The cinematography here uses wide shots to show shells exploding, and lines of men falling one by one as they approach the barbed wire on the hill up ahead. This openness is a noticeable contrast to the rest of the film. We see soldiers from head to foot from far off, as opposed to the mid-shots and close-ups that the cinematography has confined us to in the trenches (Figure 28). The sudden exposure to this vibrant open landscape is in no way freeing though. There is little consistency of movement from left to right or right to left, disorientating the viewer. Here in no-man’s-land each of the remaining core ensemble is killed, in mid-shots or close-ups, with the frame freezing as their face contorts in pain and recognition, making each death more impactful and leaving the audience a few moments of contemplation about the character.
Figure 27: July 1st 1916, Billy goes over the top.  

Figure 28: British troops march across no-man’s-land.

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377 *The Trench*. 01:29:56.
378 *The Trench*. 01:31:01.
Finally, Billy walks towards the camera, returning full circle to the first shot of the film. This time the screen goes white instead of black. Billy is shown from the side in this white void, completely isolated from the landscape he was marching through moments ago (Figure 29). The blood erupting from his neck is highlighted against this backdrop, and as he falls the image freezes once more while the sound of a rifle shot echoes. The screen fades to black followed by two final title cards:

On the 1st July 1916 – the first day of the Battle of Somme – 60,000 soldiers were killed or wounded, most of those in the first two hours of the attack.

It remains the bloodiest day of slaughter in the history of the British Army.

Mythic tropes of the Somme dead are represented in this final sequence, the closing image borrowing the freeze frame at point of death iconography from Peter Weir’s Gallipoli (1981) while also evoking Robert Capa’s The Falling Soldier (1936) photograph. Winter believes that war photography, through its still form of fixed poses, ‘started as a meditation on death and has never left that preoccupation behind’. By freezing on the moment of death to meditate on the character’s passing this repetition reinforces the pointless loss of

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379 The Trench. 01:31:50.
380 Winter, War Beyond Words: Languages of Remembrance from the Great War to the Present (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 36.
these young men’s lives. It is this pausing on death that Gallipoli and The Trench signal to the audience its significance rather than its possible rapidity in the heat of battle.

The Trench has followed a small ensemble of characters, charting their interpersonal relationships, the banality of military life, and the constant wait for the forthcoming infantry offensive. The film’s final sequence expresses the indelible mark of zero hour of July 1st 1916, an irreversible moment where the British army went over the top into no-man’s-land and were forever altered. Where such a moment in previous battles would likely have been depicted heroically in British art before the Great War, the Charge of the Light Brigade being the prime example, the losses of the Somme showed such romantic views of war to be untenable in the modern industrialised world. This zero hour before entry into a new age and that brief period preceding it was enshrined while the battle was still in full swing in the documentary The Battle of the Somme, and the trauma of it remained fixed in the mind of poets such as Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and Robert Graves. John Masefield’s The Old Front Line sought to immortalise this region, ‘our old front line’, so that its details would not be lost to history. Post-war novels such as The Middle Parts of Fortune (1929) by Frederic Manning deal intimately with the battle, and, released in the same decade as The Trench, Sebastian Faulkes’s Birdsong confronts both the personal trauma of the Somme and its generational impact. Following this British tradition of repeating the morning of July 1st, The Trench chooses to show the audience in its final moments, pausing each time, one of the most deeply personal, and commonly shared, experiences there is – death. Through this, accompanied by the title cards, the film positions itself as a kind of celluloid memorial to the British dead of the Somme, and particularly the immediate period approaching zero hour, through its reenactment at the turn of the century.

6.2 Passchendaele: Modernising the Myth of the Crucified Canadian

Atrocities, due to their abhorrent nature, become strikingly memorable episodes in any war, and of all the myths and legends that emerged from the upturned soil of the Western Front there are few more allegorically emotive and visceral in their essence than that of the Crucified Canadian. The very fact that the victim was quite consistently Canadian in the

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original legends and that, ninety years after the Armistice, this story became a core motif in *Passchendaele*, the highest budget Canadian film up to that point and one of the few to deal with the Great War in any detail, reveals the Crucified Canadian’s lingering impact. In the film, once Dunne has sufficiently recovered from his injuries at the start, he is put up in front of a tribunal to decide if he is fit to be discharged, and whether or not he should be punished for his deserting after his original convalescence in Flanders. Dr. Bernard (Dave Brown), the most compassionate of his inquisitors, asks him about his nightmares, which frequently include the crucifixion of a Canadian soldier. Referring to Dunne’s service record, Dr. Walker notes that he was outside Ypres in 1915, implying that it could be a memory rather than a nightmare. In response to this Dunne puts forward his rationalisation of this story, he believes if such an event did occur that it would likely have been the result of a person being thrown into such a position by artillery and that the belief that a soldier was crucified by the Germans was simply due to the fact that “a man in a trench is going to see what he needs to see.” In other words, it is better to have someone to blame than contribute it to a cruel and random fate. This sentiment is echoed in a later scene in Calgary where Dunne and his close friend Royster (Gil Bellows) sit and talk about current events. Royster lost an arm in an industrial accident before the war, but every day, through the newspapers, he tries to follow the conflict as if he were there. Through a brief exchange of dialogue between the two, Gross is able to illustrate the complicity ordinary citizens on the home front have in the dissemination of such rumours:

Royster: “And all this shit these krauts get up to, they crucified one of our guys for God’s sake.”

Dunne: “That never happened.”

Royster: “Still.”

Dunne: “No, it’s a good story, it just never happened.”

Royster: “Still.”

Truthfulness, in a sense, is inferior to the actual purpose of the tale, to dehumanise the enemy and vindicate the righteousness of the national cause. It would serve us best here if I lay out the traditional narrative of the Crucified Canadian so that the significance of this motif in the film, appearing again in the climax, can be fully appreciated.
From the earliest iteration of this macabre Flanders tale the victim was Canadian. Its source is usually attributed to a two-paragraph piece in *The Times* published May 10th 1915, where the correspondent relates the testimonials of a group of wounded Canadian soldiers arriving at a base hospital at Versailles:

They all told a story of how one of their officers had been crucified by the Germans. He had been pinned to a wall by bayonets thrust through his hands and feet, another bayonet had then been driven through his throat, and, finally, he was riddled with bullets.382

The phrasing of this is relatively perfunctory, describing simply the process of crucifixion of one Canadian officer by the Germans. I say relatively because, as is the nature of rumour, the descriptions become increasingly incendiary as the war drags on. To give an indication of the striking propagandistic rhetoric of the period, this incident is recounted later in 1915 in the periodical *The Great War: The Standard History of the All-Europe Conflict*, and put into inflammatory context by the paragraph heading ‘the fiendish cruelty of cowards’:

The madmen among them went to the extreme limit of cruelty. After bayoneting our asphyxiated and helpless troops, left behind in the continual retreats from the poison clouds, they took several of our wounded, both Canadians and British, and crucified them by means of spikes on the doors of Flemish farm buildings. According to the evidence taken on oath by the Mayor of Exeter, an extinguished fire was found beneath the feet of one of our dead, crucified soldiers. It was the Würtembergers under Duke Albrecht of Württemberg who did this thing.383

Now the men (plural) are ‘asphyxiated and helpless’ as they are crucified and accusations directly name the perpetrators. Such rumours even became the subject of an American propaganda film titled *The Prussian Cur* (1918) to further spread this story. Following the development of the legend it is never entirely clear if the incident was a supposed single, one-time, crucifixion, elaborated upon as time went on, or a bad habit of the Kaiser’s army. Although I would not personally wish to contradict the Mayor of Exeter’s testimony, taken under oath, others have since questioned the veracity of these more sensational claims. In

2002, through a Channel 4 documentary by Iain Overton, one case of crucifixion was verified to a reasonable, though not definitive, degree.\textsuperscript{384} It identified Sergeant Harry Band, Canadian Infantry, by private letters written at the time to his sister Elizabeth Petrie, and by notes of a British nurse found in the Leeds University archive, as the likely source of this misfortune that fuelled so much propaganda.\textsuperscript{385} Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that the German army had the almost Roman levels of avidity towards crucifixion that the Entente press reported. Other than the Harry Band case, these episodes of mass crucifixion have been refuted on multiple occasions by innumerable historians and archivists, in this way the Crucified Canadian has been expelled from the historical narrative and into the mythic. Simply, the essence of this story, even during the period, was not its realness but, as in Royster’s stance, its affect.

Analysing the prevalence of legends and mythmaking in the trenches, Paul Fussell observes ‘it was as if the general human impulse to make fictions had been dramatically unleashed by the novelty, immensity, and grotesqueness of the proceedings’.\textsuperscript{386} Fussell regards the legend of the Crucified Canadian as ‘an especially interesting fiction both because of its original context in the insistent visual realities of the front and because of its symbolic suggestiveness’.\textsuperscript{387} Crucifixes, it should be noted, were already part of the landscape of Belgium and France at crossroads, in place before the war started, and covering countless makeshift graves in greater and greater numbers as it dragged on. Additionally, the figure of someone being publicly displayed for punishment was a well-founded fear for soldiers as the field punishment for minor infractions in many of the armies was being tied to an immovable object such as a cartwheel. Through this narrative, in Fussell’s view, the Crucified Canadian’s ‘suffering could be conceived to represent the sacrifice of all, at the same time that it was turned by propaganda into an instrument of hate. No wonder that, serving both purposes, it was a popular legend’.\textsuperscript{388} In January 1919, mere months after the Armistice, sculptor Derwent Wood was set to unveil his bronze “Canada’s Golgotha” in London to commemorate this alleged atrocity. The subject and what it might re-ignite caused what Winter describes as a ‘diplomatic furore’ as it was seen to lack the ‘healing intentions of most commemorative art which referred to Christian

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Fussell, p. 127.
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Fussell, p. 129.
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iconography for consolation, not accusation.

As a result, this bronze sculpture was hidden away from public view until the 1990s, and is now on quiet display in the Canadian War Museum (Figure 30). The meaning that the image of the Crucified Canadian would produce had seemingly changed, and the uncomfortable accusation that was attached to this tragic sacrifice could no longer be considered just. Propagandistic narratives are useful in wartime, providing the emotional impetus for not only continuing the fight but seeing it as a righteous one, afterwards though few make their way unaltered into the history books as truths. In 1919, as in 2008, the vilification of the Germans would not provide a functional narrative on which to base one’s national identity. Why then was this legend re-imagined in Passchendaele?

Figure 30: ‘Canada’s Golgotha’ by Derwent Francis Wood.

In the film, Gross reframes the legend of the Crucified Canadian as one that brings to the fore the idea of sacrifice, the traditional semiotic interpretation of the sign of the cross,

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and in particular Canadian redemption through sacrifice, while tying it to the theme of the senselessness of war. At the end of the interrogation/medical review, Dunne breaks down at being reminded of the fact that he has been decorated for his service. In his view, he should not be praised for “sticking a 17 inch piece of steel into a boy’s forehead.” Dunne believes he will have to answer one day for what he has done, and that his return to the battlefield is inevitable. He is shown as a penitent man. The war has taken his three younger brothers, his mother through grief, and (almost) his humanity. War has mentally scarred Dunne, although as Tim Cook and Christopher Schultz observe, his shell shock seems mild so that ‘we receive a gentle version of the war’s horror which is more of a plot device to get the soldier home than an exploration into the madness of battle’.  

391 It is through this juxtaposition between the mythically elevated landscape of the front and the conflicted landscape of home in Calgary that allows the film to interact with the Canadian cultural memory of the Great War.

Figure 31: Dunne kneeling in front of a crucified David.  

392 Passchendaele. 01:32:45.
The battlefield is impressively represented and, aesthetically at least, the film can make some claim to being an “authentic” depiction of the actual events, particularly due to its emulation of historic photographs examined in Chapter 4. Yet narratively it mythologizes said event, through the moralistic figure of Dunne and the invocation of the Crucified Canadian legend. During the heat of battle David, who Dunne has sworn to protect, charges into an enemy trench. However, before he can be captured by the waiting troops, an artillery shell lands nearby sending him and the material of the trench flying. Once the smoke clears, he is seen with his wrists bound to upturned duckboards by barbed wire in a crucifixion pose (Figure 31). On witnessing this, Dunne attempts to cross no-man’s-land, but is shot in the shoulder trying to reach him. In a scenario similar to the Christmas truce of 1914, where the opposing side laid down their arms, a German officer orders his men to stop shooting to allow Dunne through. Struggling to drag the crucified David across the Via Dolorosa of no-man’s-land, Dunne slowly moves toward the Canadian line. The torrential rain has ended and now the sky is blue with only a few white clouds overhead. As Dunne drags the cross there is a bird’s eye flyover of the battlefield, showing the water filled shell craters and bodies in the mud (Figure 32).

By calling upon the sign of the crucifix the film creates a symbolic connection between Christ’s sacrifice and sacrifice of Canadian troops. Earlier in the film Dunne tells David “Christ didn’t die for our sins, he just laid down the template, that’s all.” He informs David

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393 Passchendaele. 01:36:57.
394 This comparison is also noted by Richler and Cook and Schultz.
quite plainly that if he is looking for romance then a trench is the last place he’ll find it. The theme of sacrifice is narrativised through this revisionist reappropriation of the Crucified Canadian myth where it is not the one crucified but the one who would willingly carry the cross, in some ways more in line with traditional Christian iconography than the wartime propaganda, that redeems, and they are able to win the battle as soon as support arrives due to Dunne and his battalion’s efforts. To a certain extent, *Passchendaele* struggles with the balance between displaying the futility of war against the valorisation of the Canadian soldiers. This is built into the structure of this film through the visceral depiction of combat and the theme of redemption through sacrifice, which is embodied in the symbolism of the film. Ultimately, this film deals with the cultural memory surrounding the Battle of Passchendaele, as well as the overall conflict, and what its relevance is to contemporary Canadian identity, but struggles to resolve the dichotomy of the war-fighter and peacekeeper roles being questioned at the time.

Neta Gordon’s view that *Passchendaele* was coming at the end of a wave of Great War reimaginings, and its release in 2008 coinciding with an increasingly unclear view of how to culturally incorporate Canada’s military history, particularly following Afghanistan, became ‘a matter of intense political manoeuvring’. 395 She goes on to state that there is:

> A sense that it has become more difficult for Canadian writers to make productive use of this part of our past, and to explore even the possibility of “promise, certainty, and goodness.” War is something real for Canadians again […] Paradoxically, as the centenary of the First World War approaches, those events themselves may have become a closed book. 396

When the wave of Great War reimaginings began in the 1990s, Canada’s understanding of what the purpose of its military, to be peacekeepers, was still intact. By the time of *Passchendaele*, war was a subject that Canadian society could no longer keep at arm’s length, and with this new closeness came a renegotiation with its complexities. As Gordon notes, between 2002 and 2005 there were eight combat related deaths for Canadian military personnel, whereas between 2006 and 2011 there were one hundred and fifty. 397 A particularly notable dissonance Gordon notes in the film’s narrative, that had come through

396  Gordon, pp. 170-171.
397  Gordon, pp. 167.
in many responses to it as well, is the clash between ‘two competing attitudes toward the war—one that Michael Dunne articulates in words, and another that he articulates in action’. His words avoid the glorification of warfare; no statements are made about how he is fighting for a cause, other than the personal reason when asked that he gives that it is “for love”. Yet in his actions in battle, such as in this final scene, he is shown to be a hero. As Gordon describes, a sense of discomfort is produced particularly by the comparison between the opening scene of Dunne killing an unarmed German, based on the real-life incident that haunted Gross’s grandfather, and that of the final scene where Dunne bears the cross across no-man’s-land. The former, Gordon states, is ‘deemed straightforwardly meaningful’ whereas latter ‘oversteps the boundaries of acceptable myth’. This discomfort demonstrates that war myths and its reality had become entangled by the influence of both in the film. For Noah Richler, he places the film in the warrior nation image and sees the film as an example where ‘the macabre is sanctified and not allowed to hinder the patriotic message’. Whereas, taking multiple reading into account, Janis Goldie believes that ‘by presenting a heavy-handed theme of the senselessness of war, the celebration of military successes by the Canadians doesn’t directly contradict the Canadian construction of identity as peaceful in nature’. All three, Gordon, Richler, and Goldie, recognise a complex questioning of Canadian identity in this period that can impact the impression of the film’s representation of the Western Front in a national context.

In saving David, Dunne suffers a mortal wound, and dies in a field hospital soon after. However, before he passes, he is able to make one final declaration of love to Sarah. Once back at home in Canada, an injured David, a pregnant Sarah, and Royster visit Dunne’s grave. The final shot symbolises the ideal of memorialisation for Canadian sacrifices that was central to the project (Figure 33). It moves from the single grave of Dunne to show the whole hillside covered with such markers. Then the final series of title cards follow:

On October 26, 1917 the Canadian Corps Entered the Battle of Passchendaele.

Within a week they captured the ruined village at a cost of 5,000 lives.

The entire campaign lasted four months and claimed 600,000 casualties on both sides.

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398 Gordon, p. 165.
An enemy offensive the following spring recaptured the hard won ground in less than a week…

This text notes the achievement of the Canadians at Passchendaele, yet also how the little that was gained was soon lost. Gross decided on Passchendaele as the film’s subject because, he believes, Vimy is so engrained in the Canadian consciousness as a success, that the futility of such battles – there was still a war to be won after Vimy – gets lost.\textsuperscript{401} In Tim Cook’s view, the thematic focus on the senselessness of war is potentially one of the main reasons Passchendaele was chosen as the subject rather than the more mythically packed Vimy. As he describes ‘it is striking that the film was not titled \textit{Vimy}, given the battle’s cultural prominence, but Gross’s emphasis was on the futility of war, and that is the narrative surrounding the October-November 1917 Passchendaele battle’.\textsuperscript{402} Vimy represents a nation coming together, with the Vimy Legend exemplifying its unity, whereas the Battle of Passchendaele has not been so conclusively defined. Without diminishing the theme of unity at the heart of the Vimy Legend, this value is transcribed onto the battlefield of Passchendaele by Gross, presenting an idealised image of the Canadian soldiery during the Great War, while acknowledging the futility of the losses.

\textbf{Figure 33:} Display of war graves in \textit{Passchendaele}’s final shot.\textsuperscript{403}


\textsuperscript{403} \textit{Passchendaele}. 01:43:23.
**Passchendaele** becomes a microcosm for the disparate myths and traumas that the Great War inflicted on the Canadian national identity. It does this while, by necessity, being an artefact of the period of its production, grappling with complex ideologies and actual combat realities during this time. Through the traditional, but nonetheless primordially affective invocation of war iconography such as rotting, mutilated corpses, rain and mud, rats, limbless bone-like trees, and the impossibility of escape, Gross recreated this landscape in a manner that pushes the viewer to the point of revulsion at what they see of the war. And yet, on this battlefield, the sixty troops who hold the line demonstrate the ideal of Canadian multi-ethnic exceptionalism. In reference to the contemporary “War on Terror”, Richler, quoting Carl Jung to support his view, sees at the heart of much warrior nation rhetoric the desire to identify an external enemy to supply a kind of moral relief for going to war rather than to face internal inadequacy.\textsuperscript{404} *Passchendaele*, however, does not seem to identify a specific enemy responsible for the war who the audience can despise. Borrowing from the unofficial Christmas truce of 1914, the two sides choose to lay down their weapons temporarily as a gesture of their common humanity. There is no Pilate to point an accusatory finger at, as the original myth of the Crucified Canadian did, instead it is war that crucifies and going beyond one’s duty that redeems. Dunne is constructed as a character to fulfill the function of the romantic hero, the wise father figure, the epitome of the tainted Canadian morality where the act committed seems completely disconnected from the figure who committed it. Furthermore, he is made to interact with Canadian history, hitting such “story” beats as Vimy Ridge, witnessing the recruitment troubles, then to fall in Passchendaele at the climax. The film’s purpose was to reignite interest in the Great War and it attempted this through mythologising the battle so as to create an opportunity, during the ninetieth anniversary of the Armistice, to consider the war’s meaning not only in the cinemas, but Canadian society at large. In the end, what *Passchendaele* shows is the complexity of commemoration when it comes to national identity, which will be further demonstrated in the next chapter’s examination of its reception.

\textsuperscript{404} Richler, pp. 125-126.
6.3 Messines Ridge: Anzacs and the Drive of History

The event driving the plot of Beneath Hill 60 is in the promise of the title; it is about mines being placed Beneath Hill 60 in order to destroy that German stronghold in an attempt to break through the seemingly impenetrable Messines Ridge. At the centre of this narrative is Captain Oliver Woodward, the protagonist and real-life Australian who pushed the plunger for the largest manmade explosion up to that point, and with him the core ensemble of the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company. The way they are moved about from one part of the line to another, namely to the dreaded Hill 60, shows the unit being propelled by forces beyond their control while simultaneously showing that the cohesiveness of the group is held together by the Anzac resourcefulness they are able to display. In terms of the Australian narrative tradition, this seems to follow an observation of Graeme Turner that ‘in a significant number of Australian films major characters are events not people’. After noting examples such as the social changes the characters have to face in the 1920s and 1930s in Between Wars (1974) and the Gallipoli landings in Gallipoli, Turner expands on this concept of events being the driving factor in many Australian films to state that ‘the characters are there simply for the events to act upon them; and their individuality resides purely in their readiness to indicate their vulnerability when confronted by events’. Similarly, Jonathan Rayner asserts that there is a ‘sense of the Australian male characters being prey to the forces of history’. In the case of Beneath Hill 60, the tunnelling company receives orders from on high, and they must follow them even to their personal detriment. When they arrive it is to relieve the Canadians, who have been guarding the already placed 50,000 pounds of ammonal, and their role is to protect this charge from German countermining and groundwater alike. It is the role of the characters to go with the stream of history and through this they are able to represent elements of the national character such as the ‘natural inclination towards mateship’, resourcefulness, and sacrifice.

Enemy mining, the difficult topography of the dripping subterranean tunnels and the thick blue clay, and commanders who either don’t understand or listen, make the situation more emotionally draining for both sides and thereby the film avoids traditional ideas of

406 Turner, p. 100.
408 Roach, p. 17.
nationalism, which creates an Other to direct antagonism toward in the form of defending values. The trenches above the miners are filled with predominantly British soldiers, who are treated in a more nuanced manner than in the earlier Gallipoli and a notable portion of Australian Great War fiction. Turner describes how Weir’s film allowed the national audience to ‘indulge in their preference for the Australians by finding the English ridiculous’. Moreover, Antje Gnida, and Catherine Simpson see Gallipoli as trading in much of the anti-British discourse that was alive in Australia in the 1980s. In contrast, many of the British characters in Beneath Hill 60 are shown to be on friendly terms with the Australians, a clear example of this being a scene of the Australian tunnellers playing rugby against the fellow British rank and file. When it comes to the British officers, the core two, Lieutenant Robert Clayton (Leon Ford) and Colonel Wilson Rutledge (Chris Haywood), are not shown as entirely incompetent, although I would compare Rutledge to Villiers from The Trench and Dobson-Hughes in Passchendaele in terms of how much respect is engendered in the audience by their portrayal. That is to say, very little. This reflects a wider lack of affection in these nations for high-ranking officers. Clayton, on the other hand, although quite terse when he first meets Woodward, is shown to be under clear psychological strain and in fact in his final moments he is able to save one of the miners, Fraser, from being caught by the same German machine gun as he had been. In its representation it avoids a prejudicial attitude to some figure of the Other and instead focuses on the struggles of the core group against the environment and the question of the viability of mateship in this space. The Western Front itself is possibly their greatest antagonist in the day in, day out struggle to keep the tunnels clear.

In its third act, the film introduces two German miners, the elder has begun to suspect that the enemy has mined well beneath Hill 60, and the younger talks about a postcard he has received from his mother. These two characters in many ways mirror Woodward and Tiffin, the older more experienced but struggling with the responsibility placed on his shoulders, the younger a fearful yet loyal boy out of his depth but trying nonetheless. The young Tiffin plans on becoming a carpenter when he returns to Australia as a way of escaping life in the mines, while Woodward’s hope is to return to Marjorie in Queensland. As the clock ticks down to the detonation, the Australians are able to dig towards the counter-mining Germans and fire a camouflet to stop them in their tracks. There is only a

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409 Turner, p. 115.
tainted sense of victory, however. The film cross-cuts between the charge being set and the young German in his tunnel. We see him almost weeping as he reads a postcard sent from home, turning it over to look at the image, knowing he shall die. After firing the camouflet, the Australians joke about how Fritz is probably “landing in Berlin right about now”, but the empathy produced for the German characters makes it difficult to laugh. By not depicting the Germans as ‘evil shadows’, as Roach puts it, or the British merely as incompetent and weak, the film is able to create a sense of the shared humanity of all those on the battlefield, and avoid any militaristic or nationalistic undertones that could be evoked by even small victories.411

This empathy for the Germans can also be seen as a contemporary form of what Gnida and Simpson described in their essay ‘ANZAC’s “Others”: “Cruel Huns” and “Noble Turks”’. What they propose is that in early depictions of Anzac fighters, namely those during and between World Wars, the portrayal of the Germans as the embodiment of evil established the Anzac’s moral superiority, whereas depictions of the Ottomans have often been portrayed as the “Noble Turk”, even going so far as to overlook the Armenian Genocide, to ‘put the Anzacs on a pedestal as courageous and heroic fighters, who had to withdraw in Gallipoli because they had encountered a “worthy opponent”’.412 Beneath Hill 60, in choosing to introduce empathetic German characters in the third act, does something similar to the Turkish model of opponent, making the two sides subject to the drive of history and approaches questions of morality through the shared helpless of the situation. Moreover, as Rayner states in regard to Australian film:

National character is explored through communal activities undertaken by composite heroes, with the stereotypical characteristics validated by their portrayal across and incarnation by groups rather than emblematic individuals. The groups’ frequent involvement in historical events of national and international importance again serves to define Australian-ness almost by default, in relation to other countries.413

The fellow inhabitants, the Canadians who they are replacing, the British whose officers they clash with at times, and the German tunnellers who are a danger but really not so

411 Roach, p. 18.
412 Antje Gnida and Catherine Simpson, p. 99.
413 Rayner, p. 172.
different, create a sense of Australian-ness in this landscape by making the Tunnelling Company alien but capable of fulfilling duties that no one else can.

_Beneath Hill 60_’s final sequence brings together the idea of Australian mateship having to bend to the forces of history by showing Woodward having to sacrifice the life of one of his men so that the destruction of Hill 60 goes ahead on time. Less than five minutes before detonation, Tiffin gets trapped in a tunnel collapse, and Fraser manages to reach Woodward, who is above ground ready with the detonator, mere seconds before it is scheduled to be set off. Fraser pleads with him to wait. For Woodward, a life or death decision needs to be made. Does he detonate the charge, or does he try to delay? It is in this moment where the dichotomy of mateship and leadership collide more than any other. Tiffin, with his resigned “Cheerio, lads.” seems to understand the impossibility of any reprieve; their Anzac bond of mateship is greater than he alone and must continue without him. In the distance other mines along the Messines Ridges are set off in steadily rising cacophony as it reaches the moment when the mines beneath Hill 60 are to be detonated. In this moment, there is an extreme close-up of Woodward’s face as the sound fades out to highlight his dilemma. This silence is finally broken by the sound of the detonator clunking into place, quickly followed by the eruption of Hill 60 (Figure 34). The dust from this explosion turns the screen to black, and it fades into an establishing shot of Queensland, before cutting to Woodward preparing for his wedding. As he clutches the wooden box, which we now know Tiffin carved from wood salvaged from Ypres Cathedral; it fades to a shot tracking towards Tiffin, a single candlelight illuminating the tunnel (Figure 35). The detonations get closer, and there is no question that Tiffin knows he is going to die. It returns to the post-war Woodward, looking at himself in the mirror. Woodward’s decision to sacrifice Tiffin, and Tiffin’s seeming consent when he tells the others to leave, demonstrates the conflicted nature of mateship in war, particularly as it applies to officers such as Woodward, as history drives their decisions forward. What defines this narrative, therefore, is an overriding sense of a group of tunnellers surviving in a deterministic environment and showing a sense of Australian stoic fortitude in the face of sacrifice.
Although it could be argued that it is the case in most war films, if not all – including the other two case studies – that ‘events act upon’ the characters, as Turner puts it, and therefore, in Rayner’s terminology, they are ‘prey to the forces of history’, there is a thematic specificity in the Australian instance that marks it out as a product of the culture in question. Turner returns to this idea as a dominant narrative principle when concluding his seminal work on Australian fiction, to observe that:

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414 Beneath Hill 60. 01:49:41.
415 Beneath Hill 60. 01:49:41.
416 Turner, p. 100 and Rayner, p. 107.
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Thematic representations of the self’s powerlessness and isolation are juxtaposed against the idea of one’s resourcefulness and commitment to community; and the resolution of this contradiction in favour of acceptance and accommodation is made possible by the effective denial of the contradiction’s importance. The ideology of the pragmatic, resourceful self runs completely counter to those very kinds of meaning and power which are represented as being beyond the individual’s reach, thus encouraging skepticism about both meaning and power.\textsuperscript{417}

Aspects of this, first published in 1986, and the paradoxical nature of it can be recognised in this contemporary film. The inevitability of the charge being detonated by Woodward, as the historic proceedings that the film is based on command, means that his choice in the film to detonate the mine and thereby kill Tiffin is no choice at all. He must. Yet, equally, the national trait of individual and group resourcefulness is clear in multiple scenes, with arguably the greatest achievement, resolved due to Woodward’s civilian mining expertise, being to pump water out of the mines to ensure the chamber holding the explosives remains dry. Furthermore, the characters’ ‘commitment to the community’ could be regarded in the Australian cultural context as a call to mateship. In the previous examples from the British and Canadian national cinemas the difference in the way the groups of soldiers are shown highlights the Australian trait of mateship by its very contrast. In \textit{The Trench}, the young battalion spend much of their time in conflict with one another, more often than not on trivial issues, and are often shown to be separated first by the clear class boundaries between them and the officers, but also regional differences that led them to socialise most commonly with only those they signed up with. There is not a shared ‘Britishness’ that is shown to hold them together. In \textit{Passchendaele}, the way the narrative unfolds focuses mainly on Dunne, with nurse Sarah and new recruit David being the closest secondary characters, rather than an ensemble made up of the soldiery. Canadian values come through in this one character’s redemption story. The cohesiveness of the unit, in \textit{Beneath Hill 60}, its ability to work together against the environment they are placed in ‘privileges the good of the community’, as Turner describes more generally, over that of the individual.\textsuperscript{418} However, it must be recalled that this film is about a man as much as an event, Woodward, and the result of this sense of powerlessness in the face of the drive of history on the individual is considered in the film’s bookending post-war sequence.

\textsuperscript{417}Turner, p. 143.
\textsuperscript{418}Turner, p. 143.
In the years immediately following the war, between 1920 and 1935, when its events were first being incorporated into the wider Australian national narrative, there was what Jennifer Wellington describes as a ‘need to understand “the sacrifice and suffering” of soldiers in an experiential sense, to empathise with the conditions in which Australian soldiers found themselves, was in the end seen as more important than explaining the broader tactical picture’. As part of this process, museum curators and exhibition planners ‘unabashedly sought to place the experience of men at war into the heart of the national story’. Their military experience was thereby deemed significant when constructing a broader, official, sense of the Australian nation identity. More recently, Tomasz Gadzina has noted that modern representations of the Anzac have evolved through a growing focus ‘on the negative experience of war and on issues regarded as “inconvenient,” such as post-war trauma’. Such works choose not to relegate their understanding of suffering caused by the war to the battlefield alone, but, as in the final scene of Beneath Hill 60, to the homecoming as well. This contemporary acknowledgment of post-traumatic stress is witnessed by Woodward’s changed nature from the kind of man

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419 Beneath Hill 60. 01:49:41.
421 Wellington, p. 264.
he was shown to be before enlisting to him at the wedding. Woodward in his dress uniform ready to get married, clearly emotionally distressed, looks at the wooden box that Tiffin gifted him. Here, the memories of the war, the guilt he feels, have got the better of him having been triggered by this box. In the scenes before he went to war he was shown to be playful and unreserved, particularly in his relationship with Marjorie Waddell (Bella Heathcote). When he comes out for the photograph of the wedding party, he is hard faced until, that is, acknowledging her and his expression visibly softens. The final shot of the wedding party (Figure 36) is followed by a series of title cards:

The 19 mines that went off on the 7th of June 1917 produced the largest man-made explosion the world had ever known. The blast was felt as far away as London and Dublin/ Messines Ridge was one of the most successful battles of the Allied campaign. But in a matter of months the Germans had retaken Hill 60. It was another year and a half before the Great War was finally over. More than 16 million lives were lost.

(Over the staged wedding photograph before fading to black)

Oliver Woodward returned to Australia in 1919. For his services to the First Australian Tunnelling company, he was awarded the Military Cross with Two Bars. One of only four Australians to receive this honour.

(Beside a photo of the real Oliver Woodward in uniform before fading to black)

Oliver Woodward and Marjorie Waddell were married in 1920. They had three children and remained together for 46 years until Woodward’s death in 1966.

(Beside a photo of the real Oliver and Marjorie together)

Unlike The Trench and Passchendaele, the first of these title cards chooses to highlight the loss of life on all sides, not just nationally. It then moves to the personal, describing Woodward’s life after the war. In these title cards, information is conveyed that further contextualized the historical events represented in the film, enshrining Woodward, and the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company, while simultaneously acknowledging the loss of life and the return of the veteran into Australian society.
6.4 Conclusion: Representing Sacrifice Within These National Traditions

When it comes to identifying the cultural memory of the Great War as it exists in these films they can be viewed as sharing many traits divided into layers of specificity to define how each is uniquely in touch with the nation’s dominant narrative. For instance, the focus on the soldiery, over that of the officers, and their experiences is a common element in many nations. Yet in the case studies, each of the films approaches this shared aspect in peculiarly divergent ways. When it comes to characterisation, The Trench shows young men whose fate is not only tightly controlled by the military hierarchy of the frontline, but on a baser societal level due to the British class system as well. Passchendaele displays how the Canadian soldiers distinguished themselves as “storm troops” in battle, which is often held up as an instance of the nation’s exceptionalism, using the singular figure of Dunne in the climax to heroically demonstrate almost superhuman capabilities when rescuing David. Then there is the Anzac myth for the Australians, which inherently is weary of authority, and idealises the men who actually do the physical work of war as part of a nationally bonded group. Through characterisation this sense of cultural specificity can be witnessed.

Another notable commonality shared within these nations’ memorial processes, one that is relatively consistent, can be seen in their depictions of the Germans, the historic enemy of the conflict. This evolution can be in part simply due to the fact that combative and negative depictions to vilify the Germans are no longer a functional narrative model, particularly in the context of the Great War, in an age where co-operation with people of that nation is no longer taboo. Mythic narratives have a complex relationship with good and evil, dictating how you should or should not act within the society where the myths originate. As war is so keenly concerned with death and sacrifice, identifying the force responsible for the killing has the potential to entirely change the work’s meaning. The one German seen in The Trench seems as scared as the British. In Passchendaele they show a shared humanity by allowing Dunne to return David to the Canadian line. Beneath Hill 60 goes a step further by showing scenes of German miners with multiple characters to reflect the suffering on both sides. Therefore, in these representations, the evil in the trenches is not personified in another people but is situational; the only measure of a person’s quality is how they act in that scenario, and not the role they are given. Your own officers,

423 See: Winter, Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning, p. 98.
comfortable and far from the front, can send their countrymen to die needlessly and repeat the slaughter the next week; the opposition across no-man’s-land can hold fire, displaying mercy and humanity in the carnage. This commonality is consistent between the three with only minor divergences. However, in other aspects there are more distinct differences pertaining to each nation’s cultural memory of the Great War.

If we return to examining the way the war was perceived in its immediate aftermath, Mark David Sheftall notes that ‘Australia, New Zealand, but Canada as well to a lesser extent placed the returned man at the centre of the commemorative function. Leaders in Britain, by contrast, steadily marginalized veterans, whose politics could be unconventional’.\(^{424}\) Sheftall later comments that in Canadian and Australian narratives of the war they idealised fighting men ‘as almost sacred symbols of the nation’s most sterling qualities, laudatory achievements and enormous collective sacrifice provided perhaps the most formidable obstacle to any widespread acceptance of the interpretation and representation of the war experience that characterized the “disenchantment” perspective’.\(^{425}\) In the films this can be witnessed in two key aspects. Firstly, through the narrative function of romance, in Canada and Australia there is a romantic subplot whereas the closest The Trench gets is one of the soldiers being reminded of a girl who worked at his local post office by a pornographic photograph, which he steals to covet. An emotionally authentic scenario, maybe, but hardly an idealised one. Secondly, in the final climactic scenes of these films they reveal their cultural origins in the attitude of the legacy of both the specific battle and the war more generally. The Trench is conclusive. The young soldiers die due to the incompetence and lack of foresight of their leaders. This is emblematic of the British cultural memory of the Somme. On the other hand, Passchendaele has an ending that imbues a sense of hope, of moving forward, as even though Dunne is dead his legacy can continue through his child with Sarah, a future literally conceived in the trenches of the Western Front, and in the matured attitude of David. Therefore his sacrifice, unlike the young men mowed down in the final sequence in The Trench, can be justified as a worthwhile one. Beneath Hill 60 rides an interesting line between these two films, as instead of the mature father figure sacrificing himself for the naïve young man, it is the other way around. Woodward is able to return to Australian life,


\(^{425}\) Sheftall, p. 167.
marry even, creating a similar sense of national continuation as the end of Passchendaele, yet he is shown as haunted by the memory of Tiffin.

In many respects, understanding the films’ relation to their established dominant narratives brings the remarkable consistency, as well as their evolution, into focus. The sacrifice made at the end of Passchendaele, as well as its depiction of the Canadian soldiery throughout, makes its message a positive one when it comes to displaying Canada’s capabilities. Unlike The Trench, which avoids a clear-cut protagonist in favour of more of an ensemble, Passchendaele has the figure of Dunne at its core with Sarah and David orbiting this as the two archetypical roles of the war-nurse romance and the foolish youth who runs into battle without fully grasping the consequences. With the endings to both Passchendaele and Beneath Hill 60, through their scenes showing life continuing after the fighting, there is at least a sense of potential, if not hope for a brighter future. By showing this, they reflect the coming-of-age narratives for the nations through the victories depicted, while The Trench with the Somme – which although a stated victory historically speaking, is culturally not considered a high watermark of British military achievement – just ends with the death of the boy it started with, Billy. When introducing him it was in a black and white period style still image, following those in the opening credits, which then began moving as colour was brought to it. He is left in a more stylishly symbolic pose of being bent backwards with his fresh blood contrasting with the glaring white backdrop. There is no future. The bleakness of its ending can be seen as an example of how the Great War has been viewed more widely in Britain, a view that took hold in literary circles in the 1920s, that it was an ending that took the potential artists, poets, and visionaries, strapped a tin helmet on them, and sent them out in front of the machine guns.

With the examples of Passchendaele and Beneath Hill 60, these endings too engage with the dominant narratives. Passchendaele seems to wrestle with the idea of the war-fighter and peacekeeper image that was a key question in terms of national identity at the time of release. Yet, the archetypal figure of the Canadian soldier as capable of doing what others can’t is injected into the redemption narrative of Dunne, who is able to single handily cross no-man’s-land with a bullet wound to rescue the crucified David, in an act that brings about a brief respite in the fighting, and in this sacrifice of rescuing one young man gains redemption for his earlier killing of a young German. By sacrifice in battle he is redeemed, and the Canadians gain victory. Death, in this instance, is not a tragedy as much as a display of heroism. In refashioning the history of the battle and the memories of his grandfather, Gross’s narrative seems to navigate the contemporary concerns of the 2000s.
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with the dominant narrative of 1914-18. As for the Australian narrative tradition of the Anzac and displays of mateship, this, as previously noted in *Beneath Hill 60*, has been opened up, maybe not radically but notably, to include individuals, such as Woodward, who enlisted after Gallipoli more in remembrance as well as in this instance bringing a significant achievement by Australian miners on the Western Front to national attention. The final scene of the wedding photograph, although haunted by the absence of Tiffin, shows many veterans together thereby implying the bond of mateship has not ended with the Armistice. In this respect it contrasts with the other two films, which in the case of *The Trench* makes the moment of death an individual one, and in *Passchendaele* leaves the surviving characters, two of whom are family, looking over the graves of the dead. Instead, Australian mateship can outlast a war and still be valuable in peacetime.

For all three films there is a connection to the period it is made, but also to the cultural memory of the period it depicts. Moreover, their closing title cards attest to the losses that were accrued during these battles and the Great War at large. To close this textual analysis with a quote from Nora, he believes ‘only certain works of history are *lieux de mémoire*, namely, those that reshape memory in some fundamental way or that epitomize a revision of memory for pedagogical purposes’.426 In their refashioning of the dominant narratives, introducing personal histories and individual style, while simultaneously being projects of their national cinema institutions, these films meet this criteria for *lieux de mémoire* by representing the Western Front anew. In the next chapter, as the final part of the filmmaking process, I will study how remembrance framed their release and what recognition they received in their nations of origin.

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426 Nora, p. 17.
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*Their Name Liveth For Evermore: Release and Reception*

It is not enough to mark a site of memory and hope that the past that is being marked will now be remembered. Attention must be drawn, moreover people must be drawn, to the marking for it to have any relevance in the realm of cultural memory. As Pierre Nora theorises:

*Lieux de mémoire* arise out of a sense that there is no such thing as spontaneous memory, hence that we must create archives, mark anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and authenticate documents because such things no longer happen as a matter of course […] These bastions buttress our identities, but if what they defended were not threatened, there would be no need for them. If the remembrances they protect were truly living presences in our lives, they would be useless. Conversely, if history did not seize upon memories in order to distort and transform them, to mold them or turn them to stone, they would not turn into *lieux de mémoire*, which emerges in two stages: moments of history are plucked out of the flow of history, then returned to it – no longer quite alive but not yet entirely dead, like shells left on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded.427

These *lieux de mémoire* are deliberate acts that are constructed, often carefully, to mark past events as worthy of remembrance for mapping out the nation’s path to its contemporary self. Within this process of selective safeguarding, key moments are chosen for the purpose of comprehending and shaping the contemporary national identity by deliberately plotting a shared history out in acts of remembrance. In questioning the role of war films in relation to the concept of the nation, James Chapman confronts this sense of constructedness:

We no longer accept the old-fashioned idea that national identity is an entirely naturalized phenomenon that is somehow inherent in the air we breath and the land we walk upon, nor, on the other hand, do we readily accept the view of the intellectual left that national

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identity is an entirely false or artificial ideology that is promoted by the ruling elites to encourage social cohesion and support for the nation state.428

Official institutions and the peculiarities of a given culture construct both the concepts of nationhood and national identity, but they are nevertheless fixtures in our daily lives. This dual understanding is, as Chapman observes, important to acknowledge in our contemporary comprehension of the relationship between culture, nation, and the past. The case studies of The Trench (1999), Passchendaele (2008), and Beneath Hill 60 (2010) serve, for their respective nations, as cinema’s contribution to this process of keeping memory not just “alive” but to the reshaping of the national past as something that is worth remembering. Each of these films clearly express that the sacrifices of their countrymen in the Great War are worthy of commemoration and, by the very act of their production, pluck Western Front experiences from the sea of cultural memory to be contemplated for a brief window before the ever encroaching tide of history takes them back into its obscuring mass.

In Chapter 2 we established the cultural context of each of these nation’s dominant narratives of the Great War, from the disenchantment in British works to the conflict as a painful, yet vital, coming-of-age for the Dominions. This was followed by an examination of the production context of each of the case study films in Chapter 3, seeing how both cultural and familial memory influenced the films’ inception and how national institutions helped to fund their creation. In the following three chapters, through textual analysis, we journeyed through their representations of the Western Front, each fighting on a different battlefield more conducive to depicting aspects of the national self. Here we witnessed how the refashioning of cultural memory displays a remarkable continuity with the traditions and perceptions of the national experience of the Great War as well as charting the evolution in the understanding of the war’s place in the nations’ historical narrative. It is a logical next step, therefore, to close this thesis’ examination of these films – before we conclude – with a look at their release and reception in their nations of origin to better gauge their cultural impact, not just how they were culturally influenced. This shall be done in three parts, beginning with an analysis of particular marketing material to show how memory was called upon in attempting to draw audiences to the cinemas. Next, focusing on the examples of Passchendaele and Beneath Hill 60, we shall demonstrate

how tie-in materials and even educational programs can position a film within the broader discourse as a valuable moment of national self-representation, becoming a nexus for discussion and debate. Lastly, we shall examine how the films were received and what aspects of the discourse surrounding the nation and cultural memory they were viewed to either successfully or unsuccessfully capture on-screen. As Jay Winter observes, for better or worse, film is a powerful storytelling medium to shape the public’s perception of war, with a larger audience than fiction, non-fiction, and other visual arts. Cinema’s power to transmit stories marked as nationally significant continues to be displayed in its refashioning of the Western Front experience for what is now generation after generation of audiences. By the discourse surrounding them, these three instances, *The Trench, Passchendaele*, and *Beneath Hill 60*, are emblematic of this process.

7.1 The Framing of Remembrance: Marketing and Release

From drawing on the cultural memory of the Western Front within the texts, the films’ marketing needed to exhibit quite clearly the calls of nationhood and remembrance in the projects’ relation to these historical touchstones. Months before release, Portman Entertainment produced a promotional brochure, not widely circulated, for William Boyd’s upcoming war film that stated the title as *Somme*. In this it gave a rundown of the story as well as biographies of cast and crew. It not only highlighted the Britishness of the collaboration – ‘William Boyd has surrounded himself with an outstanding British crew’ – but also calls to the tragic element of doomed youth in the log-line ‘a story of a man’s war through the eyes of a boy’. By the time of the film’s release on September 17th 1999, the title had changed to the arguable no less culturally emotive *The Trench*. The theatrical posters give a most succinct, yet affective, description of the landscape: “It is a place 8ft wide, 600 miles long, man-made and God-forsaken” (Figure 37). The first two clauses given here serve to lay out the dimensions of the frontline, these can be seen as historical facts, if somewhat rounded and generalised for the sake of dramatic brevity. After these spatial definers, however, the tone seems to become more accusatory. This is a landscape formed by people, it is their responsibility, it is their fault. More than this though, it is “God-forsaken”. On its own, this sentence can be seen as a written reconstruction of the

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historical landscape as it exists within the British cultural memory – a tragic realm of death in the dirt – mapping out the Western Front, with all its associations, in the reader’s minds. The more they are aware of the period or other representations of it, the clearer the image formed. Furthermore, the continued prominence of the Somme in the British cultural memory is highlighted by the proclamation that this was a site that “no-one will ever forget”. The Trench provides a version of the mythicised Somme landscape explicitly through its reconstructive methodology and the way it situates the viewer within its confines. Promotional material here, both the brochure but much more notably the poster, serves to evoke the cultural memory of the Western Front, and the dominant disenchantment narrative held therein, ready for its distribution run in Britain.

![Image of The Trench (1999) poster.](image)

Paul Gross’s Passchendaele was produced for release during the ninetieth anniversary of the Armistice, and opened the 2008 Toronto International Film Festival. It was due to this coming anniversary that the film was able to receive funding from various national institutions, particularly the local Alberta government’s centennial legacy fund. In its imagery, this film’s poster calls upon remembrance in three notable ways (Figure 38). Firstly, the pose of the soldier in the top half, with his tin-helmeted head down in prayer or mourning, hands on rifle, resembles that of the so-called Brooding Soldier at The Saint-
Julien Canadian Memorial in Ypres. It is a pose of remembrance. Secondly, the lower half that the brooding soldier looks down upon imitates, like several shots in the film, the photography of Frank Hurley, in particular here his ‘Supports going up after battle to relieve the front trenches’. It borrows imagery from the archive to bring to mind clear associations with the landscape represented. Finally, its tagline calls on a sense of remembrance of national sacrifice: “In 16 days of fighting 5000 soldiers lost their lives”. Concluding this with “This is their story” implies a sense of a shared experience of the dead that will be brought to life through the film. Similarly, the film’s teaser trailer structures itself as a series of correspondences between Sergeant Michael Dunne and Sarah Mann, establishing the film’s romantic elements, with statements that he is not fighting for glory but for her, while simultaneously underlining a sense of personal tragedy, of mud and broken bodies. In contrast to the poster, the trailer states that “this is our story” becoming “A Major Motion Picture Event”. This sense of “our story” is echoed in the later full trailer, which goes on to explicitly state part of the nation’s dominant narrative that “as the world came apart a country came of age”. From the poster to the trailers, the marketing of the film was literate as to the broad perception of the conflict within Canada to advertise it as a motion picture of national significance.

Figure 38: Passchendaele (2008) poster.
Beneath Hill 60 received nation-wide release on April 15th, 10 days before Anzac Day. It did this, as with Passchendaele, to grasp hold of the mnemonic potential available at these annual periods of remembrance. A sense of remembrance and Australian-ness can be witnessed in the film’s trailer, which injects the humour of the men’s interactions using quotes, showing a clear vision of mateship, while at the same time establishing the sense of claustrophobia and the dangers of tunnel warfare. The construction of the Australian, as it pertains to identity, is highlighted by the dichotomy between them and the English officers in the film, with it underlining the fact that many of the tunnellers were untrained as soldiers. Moreover, throughout the trailer it highlights the fact that this is based on a relatively untold true story, before finally it concludes with the simple release date of Anzac Day 2010. Equally drawing from Anzac imagery and associations, the poster displays the tunnellers together in a companionable evocation of mateship (Figure 39). They are muddy but together, drawing on images of masculine Australian resourcefulness and an ability to pull through. Moreover, it announces: “After Gallipoli there was still a war to be won”, thereby making a connection between the emblematic Anzac fighters at
Gallipoli to those of the tunnellers in the later stages of the war. This statement is also, arguably, a reference to Australia’s seminal war film *Gallipoli* (1981), attracting audience interest by drawing them with the dual call to learn about the nation’s history, namely the experience of the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company, and cinematic history, offering a kind of continuation of *Gallipoli* in terms of telling the Australian story of the Great War on-screen. Through this marketing material, calling upon remembrance and the evocation national traits such as mateship, a clear line is drawn between the process of remembrance on Anzac Day and this event film as a site where this may take place.

In this brief overview of the marketing it is clear by the language, imagery, and sometimes even the release date, that all imbue a sense of national remembrance. Once again, the fact that they are products of their national cinema means that the marketing material can draw on a shared heritage to make the cinema a site where this can be communally memorialised through viewing the film. However, in the cases of *Passchendaele* and *Beneath Hill 60* they take this a step further by expanding the films’ potential reach in preserving this heritage to spheres outside of the cinema.

### 7.2 An Illustrated History: Educational Programmes and Tie-Ins

The release of *Passchendaele* was accompanied by the publication of *Passchendaele: An Illustrated History: Canada's Triumph and Tragedy on the Fields of Flanders* by the film’s historical advisor, Calgary based historian Norman Leach. As has been demonstrated in the previous chapters, historical films, particularly ones based on specific events, tend to use captions at the beginning to lay out the context and conclude with a postscript to enforce the impact and lasting significance of what the audience has just witnessed a representation of. This *Illustrated History*, in turn, exemplifies how cultural memory is shaped in a multimedia age because, inversely, the history is framed by the film. The book opens with a foreword by Gross and concludes, in its final two paragraphs, with a justification for the film as an important moment for Canadian remembrance. The final line attests that Gross’s objective was to bring to life ‘a defining moment in Canada’s history when the nation’s youth played a distinguished role in the War to End All Wars’.431 This sentence lends credence to Susan Fisher’s claim that the *Illustrated History* was

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‘intended, not for gift giving or the individual child, but for the school Remembrance Day market’. As a result, the film and the Illustrated History together were marketed as an educational tool, teaching a new generation of Canadians the history of Battle of Passchendaele and their forebear’s achievements in this conflict.

As well as the Illustrated History, the Dominion Institute released the ‘Passchendaele In the Classroom’ education guide. In its message to educators it claims that ‘its purpose is to enhance your students’ learning and appreciation of the pivotal role that this 1917 battle played within Canadian history’. The guide encourages students to analyse primary sources, such as soldiers’ letters and battlefield photography, while answering questions about their experience watching the film. One such question addresses the complex dichotomy between the perceived ‘realistic’ in opposition to the ‘Hollywoodized’, asking them to interrogate the film’s accuracy, while another asks the students to describe the landscape as witnessed in the film. This sense of turning students of the current generation into witnesses of a previous’ experiences can be seen in the competition set up as part of this educational initiative. Students were asked to pen a letter as if they were living during the war, all for the grand prize of a tour of Passchendaele in Belgium for them and their family. Through this collaboration with the Dominion Institute, Passchendaele positioned itself as a salient cultural marker in the ninetieth anniversary commemorations.

Cooperation with educational institutions seems to be a recurrent tactic of the war film genre, albeit a sporadic one. History is studied for a reason, and the curriculum of any country is often modelled in such a way as to instil in its students, the next generation, the unique significance of that nation’s history. As Edward W. Said asserts:

Memory and its representations touch very significantly upon questions of identity, of nationalism, of power and authority. Far from being a neutral exercise in facts and basic truths, the study of history, which of course is the underpinning of memory, both in school and university, is to some considerable extent a nationalist effort premised on the need to


Said’s analysis highlights how national identity always involves narratives, even though these narratives are rarely undisputed.\footnote{Said, p. 243.} There is a distinctive interest that a film like \textit{Passchendaele} brings to national audiences whose history is underrepresented on-screen, as in the case of Canada, which has been cinematically overshadowed in many respects by the more prominent industry of its southerly neighbour. There is value, both culturally and potentially financially, in the nation’s cinema being outspoken about its singular abilities to tell their national stories.

Another common practice illustrating cinematic and historical synergy, aimed specifically towards adult audiences, are non-fiction books published alongside prominent war films, the history drawing interest to the film and the film focusing public attention on the history.\footnote{For instance, in 1969, to accompany the release of Guy Hamilton’s \textit{Battle of Britain}, Pan Books published a slim paperback that conflated the two narratives of the film’s production and the events of 1940. To give a more recent example, \textit{Dunkirk} (2017) was released alongside a book written by historical advisor Joshua Levine titled \textit{Dunkirk: The History Behind the Motion Picture} (2017).} As such, \textit{Beneath Hill 60} was released alongside a non-fiction account of the 1\textsuperscript{st} Australian Tunnelling Company written by Will Davies.\footnote{Will Davies, \textit{Beneath Hill 60} (Melbourne: Random House Australia, 2010).} Before his \textit{Beneath Hill 60} book, Davies had edited Private E. P. F. Lynch’s memoir of his experiences on the Western Front in \textit{Somme Mud: The Experience of an Infantryman in France} and wrote its follow-up \textit{In the Footsteps of Private Lynch}. For his \textit{Beneath Hill 60} history, Davies similarly drew on Captain Oliver Woodward’s war journals, as well as the research of ex-miner Ross Thomas, an authority on the Australian tunnelling companies of the Great War, who had driven the early production of the film, as described in Chapter 3. In his introduction, Davies states that with this previously untold story ‘I felt it was important to tell it to the current generation, filling in the details that a feature-length movie cannot, and exploring the real story of the tunnellers’.\footnote{Davies, p. 2.} This sentence acknowledges the inherent weakness of film as a method of transmitting national stories, they are limited to just a couple of hours of audio-visual stimuli, while also indicating films’ power to get people greatly interested in a real historical story through refashioning it into a narrative. This
establishes the need for a non-fiction work, such as Davies’s book, to fill in the gaps of knowledge left by the film.

In many ways these strategies, both tie-in books and educational programs, raise an intriguing question, are all these supplementary materials following on the coattails of the films or are the films themselves supplementary material for the wider desire for remembrance? A case can be made for both sides, the solution likely lies somewhere in between. These books, for example, lend a sense of genuine historical authority through association with, often, professional historians. There is, of course, the more cynical factor of marketing and using such tie-in works as an additional source of income to keep in mind, but equally the interest that film is able to incite in the viewer can create a wider inquisitiveness in the actual history it is representing. Connecting this to Debra Ramsey’s study of ‘The Past as a DVD Bonus Feature’, these paratextual strategies frame historical films within the cultural process of historical reimagining. She states that ‘although histories of various kinds (fictional, factual, visual, and written) are literally “flagged up” by the bonus features in order to authenticate the films and define them, they also open the films up and present them as part of a network of interrelated texts, rather than as detached and closed narratives’. The framing of historical discussion within the context of a film’s release can be seen as a direct result of the prestige and influence of cinema on audiences and, therefore, large numbers of a nation’s citizens. The primary task of any memorial is to focus memory and in this way film is not merely part of the remembrance process; it is in itself a projected memorial that can put on display national histories to invigorate fascination in the national self on a broader timeline and do this, as both Leach and Davies note, multi-generationally.

7.3 Re-Viewing the Past Nationally: Reception and Debate

How were these films received? It is an important question if we are to understand their cultural impact and so, beginning with The Trench, it is time it was addressed. Criticisms against Boyd’s film indicate its generic approach to the wider conflict. For example, Anthony Barker believes that the film repeats the Euro-centric clichés and is ‘an extremely

441 Debra Ramsey, ‘Flagging up History: The Past as a DVD Bonus Feature’, A Companion to the Historical Film, ed. by Robert A. Rosenstone and Constantin Parvulescu (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 2016), p. 68.
worthy film, [that] nevertheless fails to escape the overwhelmingly “established” nature of trench war’.\textsuperscript{442} The film constructs itself on archetypes, re-treading the concepts of wasted youth, following traditional British class narratives, and its setting is once again the Western Front. Moreover, Emma Hanna highlights a number of the film’s flaws – the clear use of a studio set, the inaccurate ‘reflection of the regional make-up of the majority of “Pals Battalions” in the first half of 1916’, and the cynical, downhearted attitude of many of the characters as opposed to ‘the reality of the week before the attack was one of high expectancy and jubilation’ – and that it followed in a growing interest in family history that permitted a questionable amount of artistic licence.\textsuperscript{443} Lastly, the film’s lukewarm reception and, even for its low budget, box office disappointment all bring into question the veracity of its impact on the wider cultural consciousness.

Nevertheless, the film was not entirely without its supporters. Time Out Magazine’s review of the film demonstrates how the complexities inherent in a representation such as this can be navigated:

In some respects, novelist and screenwriter Boyd's directing debut doesn't have a lot going for it. First, it covers much the same hallowed ground as Great War dramas like Journey's End and Paths of Glory; secondly, with its modest budget and Boyd's slightly stolid approach to the visualisation of his story, we're never able to forget it's set throughout in a studio trench. That said, the claustrophobia contributes to an effective build-up of tension, and the film is actually very engrossing, partly due to the clarity, wit and assurance of Boyd's writing, partly to an excellent cast. Not original, then, but in its own old-fashioned, unpretentious way, impressive and affecting.\textsuperscript{444}

Its ‘old-fashioned’ way, meaning its conforming to the ‘hallowed ground’ of accepted myth, can still be affecting, that is to say, make the audience emotionally connect to events. Similarly, and addressing the contemporary millennial viewpoint, Andrew O’Hagan in his review states ‘I believe that [Boyd] offers something that will linger after

the smoke of our millennial celebrations and wonderings has disappeared’. As to its lasting legacy, Phil De Semlyen, writing for Empire around the time of the centenary of the Battle of the Somme, describes the film as ‘an earnest and ultimately heartbreaking microcosm of Britain’s costliest battle’. In this way the title is especially apt. This film is not attempting to show a trench, but the trench – the prototypical model of a trench – that is mediating upon the inchoate conception of the British experience on the eve of the Battle of the Somme. It is an abstraction, a fiction, an imagined recollection of life within this site of memory. Returning to The Old Front Line, Masefield in the introduction to his description of the Somme in the days before the battle informs the reader that ‘it is a difficult thing to describe without monotony, for it varies so little […] if the description of this old line be dull to read, it should be remembered that it was dull to hold’. If nothing else The Trench was able to represent the claustrophobic anxiety, and often mundanity, of the lived experience as drawn from the dominant narrative, following a tradition of trench reconstruction, rather than attempting a dramatic, combative militarily speaking, broad view of the battle itself. The director has since stated that ‘The Trench can sit on a shelf with of my novels because, although it’s a huge collaboration, it’s exactly as I hoped it would be’. It may not have caused a great impact, but nor has it been entirely forgotten for all its faithful minimalism.

Passchendaele was released as an “event film” for Canadian audiences, its very Canadianness part of its draw. Writing in 1990, Manjunath Pendakur saw the significance of self-representing the Canadian past in cinema, asserting ‘reclaiming and reinterpreting history ought to be a high priority for decolonized nations. Films and other media can play a vital role in that process, but if the films are made to profit from the American market, they can hardly serve such a purpose’. Similarly, Tim Cook and Christopher Schultz state ‘if a Canadian does not take on this project, we will be consigning our stories to others, and they are under no obligation to tell them’. It is up to filmmakers in the

culture in question to perform this task, to tell their stories, and to pass on the cultural memory. *Passchendaele* was made for this purpose, as a bulwark against forgetting. As Gross himself declares ‘we must not let this happen’. First impressions and box office numbers in Canada seemed favourable, albeit restrained in praise. Some felt the romantic elements drew attention away from the history; the general consensus though can be seen to be one of appreciation that such an enormous film representing Canadian history was produced. In a review for *The Toronto Star*, Peter Howell called the film a ‘testament to Canada’s sacrifices’ that ‘recalls war films of decades past, when patriotism, valour and integrity were presented without irony’. In this sense, the film seemed to display a certain sincerity in its representation, if a somewhat out-dated one. A few weeks later in an opinion piece for that same paper, John G. Dawson publicly thanked Gross for producing the film proclaiming that it is ‘a must-see for Canadians’. Stephen Hunt of the *Calgary Herald*, gives the film credit for being a coming-of-age story, on the part of David, that shows ‘sometimes, it’s more heroic to stay home and live a normal life in a relationship than it is to buy into the war hero smack that gets sold to naive young men […]. It’s a particularly Canadian take on warfare and on masculinity’. Moreover, it received several Genie awards from the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television, including Best Picture, and was the highest grossing Canadian film of that year. Produced for the 2009 Governor General's Performing Arts Award, Gross gave a monologue in the short film *Remembrance* where he states ‘movies are a national event. I think we need to tell stories we can see each other in. Stories that resonate across the country and bring us together as a nation. Art, especially cinema, has that capacity for deep connection’. Although many reviewers seemed to think that he did not fully achieve, as he stated here, an ‘equilibrium between the head and the heart’, they did appreciate the noteworthy scale of this Canadian work. In terms of the film’s communal importance then, the very fact that is a self-representation of the Canadian cultural memory makes its production a significant one by its subject and its scale, and this was recognised by many.

451 Gross, p. 3.
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However, this recognition of the significance of the film’s production does not change its content. Brian D. Johnson, writing for *Maclean’s Magazine*, supported the level of ambition, but his opinion of the character of Dunne is less favourable:

> In trying to forge a Canadian alternative to gung-ho stereotype of Hollywood heroism, Gross has forged a construct that’s equally far-fetched. His character is no Rambo; his glory does not come from the barrel of a gun. But he turns out to be a kind of Captain Canuck Christ figure, dedicated to the salvation of a weaker comrade and performing a stunt of magic-realist peace-keeping in the thick of battle.456

In this way, the melodramatic portrayal of Dunne, his actions heightened above reality and touching upon the religious or mythic, can be seen to complicate any claim of authenticity. The alternative put forward, against what is perceived as the traditional American hero, is a similarly ungrounded moralistic figure rather than a representation of lived history. Value could be taken from scenes in *Passchendaele*, namely the moral shock derived from the opening sequence, and the fact it was inspired by the director’s grandfather’s memory, a moment of real trauma, and portions of the final section during the battle itself. Unfortunately, however, as a narrative work it has few supporters. Neta Gordon, in her overview of the film’s reception, states that ‘critics tend to praise the battle scenes for their gritty authenticity (which is considered all the more remarkable given the relatively meagre budget of $20 million), while panning the romance plot for being too clichéd and heavy-handed’.457 She continues by theorising that:

> What is interesting about Gross’s film, and its reception, is the way the inclusion and subsequent popular rejection of a romance narrative reveals a refutation of the narrative of personal heroism and glorious sacrifice in war evident at the end of a decade of Canadian First World War reimaginings.458

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458 Gordon, p. 163.
The romantic tradition that the film belongs to seems to have become out of touch with contemporary perceptions of how war narratives should be represented. Even more pessimistically, Robert Niemi gives this description:

Essentially a comic actor by profession, Paul Gross seems to have been motivated by naïve nationalistic ardor; he lacked the sort of tragic historical consciousness needed to lend his subject the gravitas it deserved. Lambasted by critics and unable to garner theatrical distribution outside Canada, Passchendaele proved to be a costly flop.\(^{459}\)

This account sounds uncomfortably similar to what occurred in 1928 with a comic writer, Bruce Bairnsfather, being placed in the driving seat for Canada’s expensive attempt to achieve Hollywood levels of production quality and box office success with Carry on, Sergeant! and the resulting aftermath. Fortunately, this twenty-first century Great War film did not cause any damage to the national film industry as a whole, the only casualty being Gross himself who would not direct again until Hyena Road (2015). Interviewed by The Beaverton in 2017 at the Vimy Ridge centenary ceremony, Gross expressed his disappointment for the final result:

“Many Canadians who watched the film were traumatized with boredom,” Gross said with a sigh. “Audiences as young as 14 told me my movie sucked until the last 15 minutes.”\(^{460}\)

There was much disappointment with the film, yet even this, like many of the above quotes, notes the praise that the film got for representing the landscape of the Battle of Passchendaele itself.

Returning to the historians Cook and Schultz, their analysis of Passchendaele concludes with this sentiment: ‘whatever the film’s strengths or weaknesses, Gross has brought the history of the Great War to hundreds of thousands of people. Canadians who would never have picked up an academic history book, might have been intrigued enough after seeing the film to push further into the past’.\(^{461}\) The film’s depiction of sacrifice, the


\(^{461}\) Cook and Schultz, p. 56.
futility of war, and Canadian exceptionalism seemed to have struck a chord with a portion of the audience who were willing to consider it on its own terms. Neither the peacekeeper nor the war-fighter image is fully condoned, yet it is possible to argue a case for both. It is more concerned with the melodramatic representation of the past than the painfully fractured present, and with bringing form to a memory, not a definitive one, but one that could be used, through its accompanying educational initiative, to keep those sacrifices at the opening of the last century illuminated in the minds of Canadians in the new. John McCrae’s plea to pass the torch seems to have been heeded in his homeland, the foe referred to in his poem has been long defeated but the quarrel now, however, is formless and, at the time of Passchendaele’s release, an internal one.

With its Anzac Day target release, Beneath Hill 60 was certainly produced with the ideas of memory and myth in mind. In regards to this national holiday, Jenny Macleod claims that its continuing popularity lay in its contemporary sense of universality, no longer under the guardianship of the generation who first helped form it, ‘it has been revivified thereby and perhaps transformed into something more generalised that is widely palatable once more’.\(^{462}\) Describing the film’s place within the cultural memory of the War, screenwriter David Roach explains:

> We used the stories of Oliver Woodward and the First Australian Tunnelling Company as the basis for Beneath Hill 60. Hopefully, in years to come, others will come along and tell these stories in different ways. We tell and retell our stories so as not to forget. And in the retelling we refine them. They become poetic and powerful, they become part of our myth.\(^{463}\)

Although not a radical evolution, the subject of Beneath Hill 60 provides an amendment to the Anzac myth revived by the Australian New Wave war films of the 1980s, with such films as Gallipoli and The Lighthorsemen (1987), that focused on the Eastern conflict against the Ottoman Empire. This change of focus was noted in Daniel Reynaud’s review of the film, ‘Digging Up New ANZAC Legends’, where he describes much of the characterization as ‘mercifully less polemical film than the Anzac productions of the 1980s’ and states ‘without contradicting the Anzac legend, it moderates its more jingoistic


expressions and offers, if not an entirely new perspective on Anzac, at least a change of focus and a gentler, more open reading of our most cherished national myth’. In Tim Kroenert’s review of the film he expresses the complexity of national feeling that comes with the Anzac myth, with its call for celebration and commemoration:

_Beneath Hill 60_ is not unkind to the Anzac myths [...] But neither does the film glory in myths. During its climactic moments director Simms employs one or two nifty plot tricks to the effect that, even if you find yourself barracking our boys to victory, you are left with no doubt that doing one's duty comes with a cost. The viewer is not permitted the moral luxury of a 'faceless' enemy; the same cannot be said of the characters. But a sombre coda indicates that the spoils of war are not just patriotic pride, but often include physical scars, psychological damage and emotional paraplegia.

Through its subject being an “untold story” and the outsider characters of the tunnellers, _Beneath Hill 60_ was able widen the confines of the Anzac myth to make a place for Western Front narratives, and, in a more unorthodox expansion, make a commemoration that is distinctly Anzac but which avoids the nationalistic overly masculine “fighter” image, and chooses instead to focus on the Anzac traits of resourcefulness in hardship, egalitarian mateship, and resolve. The film’s place as part of the commemorative calendar demonstrates the continuing popularity of Anzac Day and the Anzac myth in Australia at the time of release in 2010, while also demonstrating its malleability.

Reviewers of the film praised its Western Front claustrophobia, but the flashback sequences received a more mixed reception. For example, Reynaud was unenthusiastic about the romance sub-plot because he believed it threatened to slow down the main Hill 60 plot and, in more forthright terms, Kroenert describes these sequences as ‘embarrassingly mawkish’. As with _Passchendaele_, the question of romance’s place in such stories was questioned even as the actual Western Front scenes were praised. In Australian Screen’s ‘Curator’s Notes’, however, Lynden Barber is more even-handed in his estimation. Although he does describe the scenes as lacking the intensity of the Western Front sequences, he gives them credit for the feeling of emotional accuracy between the characters, stating ‘the language and manners of its characters appear entirely

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466 Reynaud, and Kroenert.
believable for the period. This is especially true of the flashback scenes, where Woodward approaches his courtship of Marjorie using manners and speech that are highly formal by today’s standards.\textsuperscript{467} Overall, the film achieved a notable amount of success, remaining in the top ten of the national box office for the better part of two months, and received a broadly positive reception in Australia as a uniquely homegrown product. It seems Bill Leimbach’s belief that ‘there will be a lot of people who will want to see Beneath Hill 60 because it’s part of their history’ was at least moderately well founded.\textsuperscript{468} When earlier predicting the future of Australian cinema and its vital government subsidisation in 1993, Graeme Turner highlighted the importance of its role as ‘cultural flagship’ that would make any ‘disengagement from the rhetoric of nationality is potentially risky’ as without this sense of national responsibility by filmmakers support from within the government would erode. This understanding of cinema’s place within culture and heritage resembles Pendakur’s examination of Canadian national cinema. At the heart of Turner’s claim is that Australian ‘films simply will not be produced unless they are subsidised and our governments may not subsidise them if they do not produce returns – either in commercial or cultural capital’.\textsuperscript{469} This observation may, I believe, be broadened to most national film industries that rely on government subsidisation and, in such an environment, it is unsurprising that such films produced, including The Trench, Passchendaele, and Beneath Hill 60, deal so unambiguously, although not particularly subversively, with the cultural memory of the Great War.

7.4 Conclusion: Re-Presenting the Western Front to National Audiences

The cultural memory of the Great War, the conflict that witnessed cinema’s transition from sideshow entertainment to vital national mode of self-expression, is still being preserved on-screen. The Trench, Passchendaele, and Beneath Hill 60 all display the sense of ‘commemorative vigilance’ that marks a lieux de mémoire.\textsuperscript{470} The marketing, and

\textsuperscript{470} Nora, p. 7.
particularly the posters analysed, drew on a sense of remembrance in both language and imagery. Furthermore, in the cases of *Passchendaele* and *Beneath Hill 60*, paratextual material was produced to expand the film’s potential social reach to spread remembrance through education, while simultaneously adding a sense of authority to the films’ depiction. Through these strategies they reveal themselves, from funding, narrative content, to release, as part of the remembrance process. In his study of historical films, Robert A. Rosenstone asserts:

> Films show history as process. The world on the screen brings together things that, for analytic purposes, written history often splits apart. Economics, politics, race, class, and gender come together in the lives of individuals and groups. This makes history like life itself, a process of changing relationships where political and social questions are interwoven.\(^{471}\)

Moreover, in much the same way as Cook and Schultz, Joan Beaumont believes, in the case of the Australian memory of the Great War, ‘much as the empirically-minded historian might lament the inaccuracy, subjectivity and chauvinism of popular histories of war, these tend to dominate sales of war history, illustrating that “memory” has perhaps a greater hold than “history” at the public level’.\(^{472}\) This can be witnessed in the perception of these films through the terminology used to describe them. On release, all three were acknowledged for the prestige that cinematic representations of the past bring to exhibiting their national history. They were homegrown productions and just the very fact of their existence was considered notable in an English-speaking cinematic world dominated by Hollywood. That was not all that was praised, and the reception of the representation of the Western Front for all three was considered well crafted in many respects. In the case of all three, each has had aspects of the nationally dominant narrative attributed to it, from the disenchantment of Britain, the coming-of-age of Canada, as well as the mateship ideal in Australia, placing them in these greater remembrance traditions.

As to the matter of the films’ legacies. In the *Empire* article quoted earlier, *The Trench* was suggested in a list of eighteen other Great War films around the centenary of the Somme, indicating that this particular periodical thought this would be something


audiences wanting to know more about the history through film would be interested in. Similarly, preceding Anzac Day 2018, *Beneath Hill 60* received an honourable mention in *The Sydney Morning Herald* as worthwhile viewing after *Gallipoli* for its Anzac representation. *Passchendaele* in particular out of these three, although the least favourably received, has during the centenary period been mentioned in regards to Remembrance Day and noted, even with caveats for its flaws, for actually attempting to approach ‘nation-building themes’ and the ‘sacrifice of Canadians’ that is so rarely shown on-screen. As part of the ‘Past Imperfect: A Canadian History Project’, it even received a special screening at the Art Gallery of Alberta in September 2017. This put it alongside over 120 other artworks that sought to, in the words of the organisers, ‘act as markers for important moments in Canada’s history’. In this regard, the view of *Passchendaele*, now the smoke has cleared, seems to be more generous than its first impressions would imply.

Although none of these three films were landmarks of cinema they did, and continue to, supply much needed Western Front narratives, preserving the cultural memory of the Great War. They show how its dominant narratives within Britain, Canada, and Australia have evolved, and give some insight into the perception of the conflict at the opening of the twenty-first century as well as how this relates to the contemporary national identity. Moreover, around the four years of the centenary there has been a renewed interest in the significance the conflict continues to hold in these nations. Yet, during this time, very few feature films were produced for theatrical release in them. Although to some extent the realm of television seems to be preserving the Great War in these nations’ memory in documentaries, mini-series, and TV movies, the view on the cinema screen is sparse. Britain had three, two being adaptions, *Testament of Youth* (2014) and *Journey’s End* (2018), and one being the documentary *They Shall Not Grow Old* (2018). Canada and Australia had none. As we move further and further away from the conflict how much

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wider will the gaps become between works set on the Western Front be? Does it come down to a matter of cost, distance, or our contemporary mind-set that makes filmmakers’ eloquence on the subject seem less and less able to speak to some greater thematic truth? Do audiences, national and international, still believe it to be relevant enough to desire seeing representations of it? Fortunately, once a film is made, much like a memorial, it may be revisited. Although there are other films pointed to as the great works on the Great War – All Quiet on the Western Front (1930) and Paths of Glory (1957) come to mind – these films nevertheless have their place alongside them in these three nations for the way they depicted the national self and plucked events out of the cultural memory to memorialise. In the four years of the centenary The Trench, Passchendaele, and Beneath Hill 60, to greater and lesser extents, seem to have had their pilgrims.
Chapter 8 Conclusion: The Western Front in Memoriam

In the course of this study I have sought to illustrate the place of film in the contemporary process of Western Front memorialisation. The three case studies at its heart, *The Trench*, *Passchendaele*, and *Beneath Hill 60*, have each been highlighted as unique examples of this in how they relate to Pierre Nora’s theory of *lieux de mémoire* within national landscapes of cultural remembrance. Nora’s theory highlights how works concerned with cultural memory are fundamentally a ‘phenomenon of the present’. They are very deliberate acts that attempt to hold specific sacredly held elements of the national past back from the neutralising effects of history. Memory and history in Nora’s dichotomy are in many ways opposed as memory is held as sacred, as felt, and part of living societies, tying them to an eternal present, whereas history is an intellectual examination to reconstruct something no longer extant. In our increasingly globalised world, this aspect is particularly pertinent in the construction of national identity or, as Jan Assmann terms it, the ‘concretion of identity’ by manifesting cultural memories to signal values. In this way, something that is part of history belongs in the conceptual sense to everyone, but cultural memory is a specific relationship to the past that a culture group, in this case the nation states of Britain, Canada, and Australia, have to their past in what they choose to memorialise. Nora observes that ‘when memory ceases to be omnipresent, it ceases to be present at all unless some isolated individual decides to assume responsibility for it’. In this process of cultural memory, selected ‘representative samples’ become narratively reconstructed micro-histories that together make up a great deal of the cultural understanding of the past. It is these two aspects in particular that I have centred my examination, on the idea that individuals, namely filmmakers, within societies taking on the duty of keeping memory alive, and on the concept of how ‘representative samples’ of the past are reconstructed on-screen.

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479 Nora, p. 3.
481 Nora, p. 11.
482 Nora, p. 13.
These three films each come from separate narrative traditions relating to the Western Front of 1914-18. *The Trench*, a British film, chooses as its representative sample the two days preceding the Battle of the Somme. *Passchendaele*, a Canadian production, chooses the Third Battle of Ypres, instead of the more obvious Vimy Ridge, as its central historic moment of Canadian triumph. And *Beneath Hill 60*, an Australian work, tells the biographical story of Captain Oliver Woodward and the efforts of the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company under the Messines Ridge. Using the map-territory relation to frame my discussion, I began this thesis with three research questions. First I asked how the cinematic modes and conventions utilised in these films serve to represent the Western Front within a larger landscape of remembrance? Secondly, what continues to inspire filmmakers and financiers to memorialise Western Front narratives and to what extent does the rhetoric of remembrance surround these films? And thirdly, how does the divergent cultural memory of the Great War in Britain, Canada, and Australia shape the differing visions of the Western Front experience and the contemporary meaning drawn from it? To answer these questions I needed to lay out the tradition of Great War narratives in these countries, analyse the films themselves, and question what aspects of the cultural zeitgeist in period they were produced influenced the films.

In Chapter 2, I established the dominant narratives of the Great War in these nations, with Britain, by the end of the twentieth century, forming a narrative of futility and disenchantment exemplified by the tragic losses on the first day of the Somme. In contrast, Canada and Australia’s perception of the conflict in their national histories is not so bleak as, although involving great sacrifice, it is an important keystone in their national coming-of-age myths.483 For Canada, this is epitomised in the Vimy Legend by concept of unity and the idea of Canadian exceptionalism that it implies. In Australia, the war brought with it an update to the bushman/digger national archetype with the rebranding to the Anzac model that embodies traits such as rugged egalitarianism, resourcefulness, and mateship. Once again, I should reiterate, a dominant narrative does not mean entirely agreed upon, it is merely the narrative model that has been favoured by the majority and can therefore be read in a large number of works from that nation. In Chapter 3, the linkages made to the significance that these narratives still hold in the national imagination was investigated in reference to the stated motivations behind the productions by both the filmmakers and the financiers of the case study films. Not only national, but familial links were made here,

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particularly in the cases of writer/directors Boyd and Gross, who have both described the close connection they feel to this conflict as a result of hearing of their grandfathers’ Western Front experiences. Although such familial links were made in reference to *Beneath Hill 60*, its primary motivation can be traced to researcher Ross Thomas and his interest in Australia’s mining heritage, and through this unearthing the diaries of Captain Woodward.

With the contextual foundation of Chapters 2 and 3 in place, I followed this in the next three by textually analysing the films to discover how they fit in, or revise, these dominant narratives. The first part of this, Chapter 4, examined the way in which each of the films reconstructed the landscape of the Western Front, analysing cinematic techniques used as well as the characterisation of the soldiery to discover what they can tell us about the memory of the Great War in relation to the national identity. *The Trench* begins by establishing the frontline as one of mundanity, of waiting, and its characters are grounded in a way that speaks to that nation’s tradition of social realism, it is able to capture the millennial anxiety as well as the disenchantment narrative related to the Somme dead. *Passchendaele* chooses to romanticise the Canadian soldiers as a whole, being notably more capable, while equally not shying from depicting the more horrific elements of war including the inhumanity that can witnessed on both sides as well as by the sodden landscape itself. *Beneath Hill 60* introduces the subterranean warfare of the Australian miners – moving away from the eastern theatre of battle that has had the most influence on Australian narratives of the conflict – and throughout much of the character progression comes from a questioning of that nation’s trait of mateship and how it is able to function in a battlefield environment.

Following this in Chapter 5, I examined the contrasting landscape of home in these films and how they relate to traditional, and often nostalgic, depictions of the nation. In the case of *The Trench*, the notability of the homeland’s absence I related back to the disenchantment narrative and the confined nature of the film itself, neither the characters nor audience are allowed to leave the trenches until the very end, at which point none of the ensemble will be returning home. *Passchendaele* followed in the tradition of much Canadian art by romanticising the natural landscape, here in the literal sense of being where the characters of Dunne and Sarah fall in love. However, within this contrasting landscape there is another dichotomy, that of the foothills, of nature, and urban life in Calgary. The war has increasingly influenced town life, where people with German linage are now shunned and young men who don’t sign up are shamed, whereas the foothills are
still free. *Beneath Hill 60* has a similar element of romance underlying the representation of the national/natural landscape, particularly in the flashback sequences. The scenes, as Woodward and Marjorie court, are very domestic, bright, and open, compared to those of the mines. The war does intrude, even on this distant continent, with news of Marjorie’s brother dying at Gallipoli, as well as the fact that Woodward is given white feathers by some who believe he is shirking his duty.

In Chapter 6 the focus was how the films cinematically and narratively approach their central event and what national myths are brought to the screen when re-presenting these historic moments. The tragedy of the losses on July 1st 1916 are dramatically re-enacted in the final moments of *The Trench*, pausing in freeze frame as the young ensemble one by one cut down in no-man’s-land to demonstrate the futility of the losses as well as the lack of foresight of the officers. The symbolic reinvention of the myth of the Crucified Canadian in the climax of *Passchendaele* as not one of accusation, as it was used during the war itself, but one of redemption for the character Dunne, who killed a young man at the beginning of the film and dies, at the end, saving the life of another. The themes of the conflict of mateship and leadership in *Beneath Hill 60* come to the fore in the final moments as the charges beneath the Messines Ridge explode, with Woodward having to sacrifice the life of Tiffin to do his duty. The film’s bookending wedding sequence shows the traumatic impact of his war experiences, but also the lasting nature of the mateship forged at the front, as many of his surviving mates surround him in the final shot.

Then, finally, in Chapter 7, I ended on an examination of the films’ release and reception to discover their place within the society’s remembrance traditions and contemporary culture. I have been viewing these texts as objects of their nations, an approach that I justify through the discussions surrounding the films from both the filmmakers themselves and the critical reactions within the country of origin. Through their marketing each evoked ideas of remembrance and highlighted the fact that they are home-grown products telling their story. Both *Passchendaele* and *Beneath Hill 60* supplemented this further with additional materials, particularly tie-in books, to expand their potential educational reach. In their reception all three were praised for their depictions of the Western Front, yet they also received criticism on other factors. *The Trench*’s low budget and minimalist aesthetic brought claims of inauthenticity by some as it was seen as overly staged. *Passchendaele*’s melodramatic use of romance undercut many reviewers’ opinion of the film as it seemed to take the driving seat for much of the narrative until the actual battle in the third act. Similarly, albeit not as strongly, *Beneath*
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*Hill 60* was questioned for its use of romance, although this can be seen as the most well received of the three. Overall, in the case of all three, there was an appreciation for their reviving of elements of the cultural memory. The memory boom of the late twentieth century that gave rise to an environment where the cultural interrogation of the past and reflection became tied so deeply to the idea of national identity has continued to have a profound impact in the rhetoric surrounding such works as these. In regards to cinema and the Great War in particular, it reveals an inclination that was established in Chapter 2 as part of the discussion of the development of cinema as a communal space, this being a desire for national self-determination when it comes to what is being shown on-screen of historic events that are considered foundational and, more importantly, to express the national self in these history defining settings.

Part of my hypothesis is the idea that the attractive element of this sort of fantasising within a historic setting is the *could have been* quality. *The Trench* being released in Britain around the turn of the millennium, depicting soldiers waiting to go into the unknown, having to leave behind such an uncomfortable yet assured situation, would have been congruous with the audience’s own countdown to an unknowable scramble into no-man’s-land. In the creation of the film, Boyd was drawn by the imaginative potential of trying to represent an aspect of his family history in an indirect way by focusing on the battlefield experience of soldiers rather than the specific experience of an ancestor. More significantly though, by his statements he seems not only to have been aware of the fact that any representation cannot be the thing it is representing but content with this. This is in line with Richard Espley’s assertion that ‘no museum, no heritage experience and no writer can reasonably hope to embody “the” truth of the Great War. Indeed, each attempt would be strengthened by resigning the rhetoric of total authenticity’. Making the film was an act of remembrance while watching it can arguably also be considered an act of committing these events, in its position as a cultural artefact, to memory for the creators and viewers. By experiencing these objects of cultural mnemonic origins one appropriates and cultivates memories, not of entirely their own, to gain an understanding of what occurred in specific place in the past and what this *could have been* like to experience. Paul Fussell observes that ‘the idea of “the trenches” has been assimilated so successfully by

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metaphor and myth (“Georgian complacency died in the trenches”) that is not easy now to recover a feeling from the actualities. *Entrenched*, in an expression like *entrenched power*, has been a dead metaphor so long that we must bestir ourselves to recover its literal sense. In this way, Boyd’s claim that the challenge and value of art is to bring to life past eras indicates a significant, sometimes melancholic and oftentimes relief bestowing, facet of the recreation and cultural relationship with it. The past is dead; life must be put back into it artificially in any act of reconstruction. The results range from the Frankensteinesque to the sublime, most sit somewhere in between. *The Trench* captured the dominant narrative of disenchantment and futility that surrounds the Somme and the Great War in general, turning it into a *Journey’s End* that, instead of focusing on disillusioned middle-class officers, places the focus on the naïve expectations and experience of the soldierly, in line with much British Great War fiction at the end of the twentieth century, embodied in its multi-regional battalion. From Masefield’s literary evocation to physical trench reconstructions to cinematic renditions such as Boyd’s tribute to those who held it, these are rituals of remembrance coagulating into national myths within the cultural memory manifesting Britain’s desire throughout the twentieth century to revisit the old front line, the site of a generation’s tragedy.

For the ninetieth anniversary of the Armistice, the Canadian Government, and more specifically the local government of Alberta, facilitated the production of the most expensive Canadian film up to that point. *Passchendaele*, inspired by stories told by the director’s grandfather as well as the Canadian victory at the titular battle itself, was a project that aimed to stoke the flames of interest in this formative period. However, in the present, the late 2000s, there was a questioning of the Canadian national identity as it related to its role on the world stage. This was a forking path where the options were often framed as either a return to a proud military heritage with the capable war-fighter image or continue along the United Nations peacekeeper route that had come into question following Canada’s involvement with several failed humanitarian efforts in the 1990s. Janet Goldie, Neta Gordon, and Noah Richler all noted this shadow overhanging *Passchendaele’s* depiction of the national self. From this ideological uncertainty emerges a film that takes no firm stance on whether Canada as a nation is either a war-fighting one or a peacekeeping, but rather is able, to a certain extent, to represent the troubling internal conflict of this dichotomy. In genre terms, James Chapman notes ‘there is more to the war

Chapter 8

film, however, than simply the reconstruction of battles and dramatization of heroism and suffering. The war film is often a vehicle for allegory: it is sometimes as significant for what it says about the present as what it says about the past. In some ways Passchendaele retreats to a romantic mode of representation where war, no matter how destructive, is a place to demonstrate bravery, leaving it feeling uncomfortably out of time. Yet Dunne’s anti-militaristic attitude, while needing to redeem his own actions, stands in as a kind of allegory for the tainted Canadian peacekeeper. The sense of scale that the film creates in its battlefield scenes brings to vivid life the mud and chaos of battle. Its Canadianness was recognised by many reviewers and audience members, not just aesthetically but thematically, serving as a centrepiece for that year’s remembrance rituals in cinemas and elsewhere. What Passchendaele demonstrates is the investment national institutions and particular individuals have in commemorating the Great War and the significance of cinematic self-representation to bring form to their remembrances as well as the complexities inherent in this process.

Beneath Hill 60 was released in time for Anzac Day 2010, and it is to the figure of the Anzac that the film is in many ways able to both express the traditional view while, simultaneously, serving contemporary efforts to reframe who may be included in this archetypal national model. It does this by, in its setting, changing the view from those men most memorialised in the Australian memory of the Great War, namely those at Gallipoli, to tell a narrative on the Western Front of, as screenwriter David Roach defines them, outsiders who are a conducting secret, not widely depicted since, style of warfare that changed the face of the landscape. Jennifer Wellington describes how the Australian emphasis became, in the inter-war period, the experience of ‘the rank-and-file soldier, and specifically on the achievements of the ordinary Australian soldier in battle [which] can be attributed to the curating of the Australian museum by men who were not previously museum or art experts, and who had been at more than one front as members of the Australian Imperial Force’. This tradition is shown as continuing as this film is representing the bonds of everyday mateship within the Tunnelling Company. Within this group are representations of real life individuals, most notably that of Woodward, but also examples of ordinary Australians in extraordinary circumstances, like that of the father and son duo, and the contributions of Aboriginal Australians to the war effort. Joan Beaumont

and Tomasz Gadzina have both noted that it is the flexibility of the Anzac myth that has allowed it to remain a powerful icon of the Australian national identity, and it is this fact that allows *Beneath Hill 60* to be both a supplement, opening up the legend, and a depiction that fits comfortably within this tradition.\(^{489}\)

Each of these films are framed by title cards that, in their first instance, contextualise for the audience what they need to know in a particularly selective manner to establish what aspects of the past their depiction shall be in reference to. This in followed at the end of the film, in the second instance, by title cards that briefly summarise the historic events that follow before finally indicating the wider significance of the events that have just been represented. In their narratives, as well as through the paratextual material, these films focused memory on their particular representative sample. Connections are drawn to the history in the films themselves further by specific references to the archive. For instance, in the opening credits of *The Trench* and the closing credits of both *Passchendaele* and *Beneath Hill 60* historic photographs are used to link the depiction of the past as represented to artefacts from the Western Front. Moreover, *Passchendaele* goes a step further by faithfully replicating the works of Frank Hurley in several shots. However, the image that most stands out as shared between these films is that of the young men sacrificed and traumatised by war. Whether that be those dying in the no-man’s-land of the Somme, the crucified David on the outskirts of Passchendaele, or in Tiffin waiting for his inevitable live burial when Hill 60 is detonated. This ties into Winter’s observation that, with the contemporary difficulty in aligning war with meaningful moral certainty, the representation of war on-screen has evolved ‘from studies of conflict to studies of combatants, their loves, their hatreds, their inner lives’.\(^{490}\) As such, these contemporary on-screen memorial projects place emphasis on the element of sacrifice, expressing the significance these formative Western Front experiences had on their identity within national, collective, living traditions.

By its interest in the dominant narratives of the Great War in Britain, Canada, and Australia, I hope that this thesis may stand beside Mark David Sheftall’s *Altered Memories of the Great War* and Jennifer Wellington’s *Exhibiting War* as another piece in the puzzle


\(^{490}\) Winter, *War Beyond Words*, p. 74.
of these nations’ continuing traditions of Western Front memorialisation in art. Those two works focused on different forms of art and exhibition in the interwar period, while in this I have shined a spotlight on how cinematic representations of the Western Front have (and do) serve an important part in the continuing legacy of the Great War in Britain, Canada, and Australia by memorialising sites and poignant events for more recent audiences. Additionally, it may be of some interest to scholars studying the relationship between landscapes and cinema. In the introduction to Landscape and Power, W. J. T. Mitchell indicates that, although none of the essays in that collection examine the cinematic landscape, the influence of the moving picture on the revived interest in landscape, as opposed to ‘traditional motionless landscape images’, is clear in that ‘landscape is a dynamic medium, in which we “live and move and have our being,” but also a medium that is itself in motion from one place or time to another’. In this regard, it has been my aim to demonstrate how filmmakers narratively reconstruct the landscape of the Western Front that exists in the cultural memory of these nations.

Lastly, by viewing these national cinemas, and these films in particular, this thesis provides in-depth analysis of a few notable Great War films in a way that illustrates cinema’s position as a site where cultural memory may be expressed. From the lingering presence of Western Front in the cultural memory have come these cinematic acts of remembrance that articulate how the sacrifices made there and those that fought are still held, as Britain, Canada, and Australia approached the centenary commemorations, as sacred parts of their national narratives.

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