

London and the First World War

20-21 March 2015

Institute of Historical Research, University of London

Imperial War Museums

<http://www.history.ac.uk/podcasts>

25 year old farmer, Archie Barwick served in the 1st Battalion at Gallipoli and after, in 1916, he was stationed in France, along with most of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). In May 1916 he was looking forward to leave; *I am looking forward to my trip to the "Old Country"* he wrote.

Of course Archie had never visited England before, he was from a farming family in Tasmania, yet like most of the Australians serving in the war, he was merely a few generations 'Australian'.

The Australian population of 1914 not only comprised people of British descent, but nearly one in five of them had been born in the United Kingdom.

To many Australians in the early part of the twentieth century, Britain was seen as home, the mother country, even if the majority had not themselves visited. As Andrews observes in his book, *The Anzac Illusion*;

'Australians corresponded with their relatives in the old country, read British material in their newspapers, periodicals and books, learnt of the goings on in London and the British countryside, built houses on modified British lines and used British-style furniture, while the ladies aped British fashions. To both sexes, the highlight of a lifetime was the trip home to England.'

For some men then, volunteering to serve in the AIF meant there was the opportunity to visit the mother country. Unlike British soldiers, Australians (like other colonial troops) couldn't return home on leave.

As Andrews argues;

The men had many links with Britain. A significant number were British born (as many as 1 in 4 of the recruits in June 1915) and their parents or brothers and sisters were still living there. Others had cousins, uncles, aunts or more distant relations. The vast majority took the opportunity to call on them and see the home towns and villages of their ancestors. It was a touch of home... Many found a delight in England: its countryside and old buildings, its history and beauty. They were determined tourists, frequently over-staying their leave to see the sights.

And Archie was delighted with his first sight of the English coast; *'the first sight I had of old England's shore's were the white chalk cliffs which we have all read & heard about so often, who would have thought a short 2 years ago that I would be crossing the English Channel on my way for a well earned holiday.'*

The Australians who arrived on the train from Folkstone into Victoria station were mobbed by enthusiastic locals;

'we ran into Victoria Station about 7 o'clock, talk about a crowd of people they formed us up again & marched us out through the people how they clapped & cheered us, there's no doubt about the popularity of the Colonials.'

Archie proudly recalls, *'I was not long in striking a girl although I had my old clothes on I was looking about this evening for the South Western Post Office when a girl overheard me asking a chap for the direction of it she straight way took me in hand & took the trouble to take me around personally, it was not bad of her she seemed a decent sort too. When we were being marched down the street the Kids would carry our rifles for us & they are as proud as Lucifer over it.'*

A few days later, Archie went back to the station to meet a friend who was arriving from the front. He described the scene;

'waiting for the train, I saw something here that satisfied me about the popularity of the Australians, the first to come through the barriers & pass through the crowd was the British Tommy & then followed the Canadian's, when the latter appeared the people raised a feeble cheer I thought they were the last & no Australians had come but still the people stayed there I was just about to turn away, when for some unexplained reason the people began to surge towards the middle, then all of a sudden a mighty cheer went up & the girls waved their handkerchiefs & clapped the boy's as they came swinging along all dirty & mud stained from the trenches, swinging along in the free & easy style which belongs to the Australians only. Bravo boy's Welcome to London," Well done Australia" & so on, ... the people followed us along the street & the boys carried the rifles of the men down to the Australian Hq'r's They think the same of the N.Z. too. This is no silly idle vapouring but its true absolutely.

It does not seem fair in one way for the Canadians have done a lot of heavy fighting & have fought well for England, & so far as I have found them fine fellows but there you are the Australians & N.Z. have captured the English peoples fancy.'

A total of 331,781 Australian soldiers embarked for overseas service in the AIF, along with over 3,000 members of the Australian Army Nursing Service. With the majority serving in Europe, almost all Australians serving on the Western Front between 1916 and 1919 would have visited London, either as tourists on leave, or as hospital patients, working in hospitals, administrative headquarters, or even volunteering in the many charitable organisations established during the war.

Initially, the Australians were greeted enthusiastically by Londoners, as evidenced by Archie's diary entries. The Anzacs had made a name for themselves at Gallipoli and their distinctive uniforms, their happy charming demeanour and the fact they were the best paid troops in the Empire meant they were very popular in London, particularly with women.

Arriving in an English speaking country, away from the horrors of the Western Front, with much of the feel of home, the men clearly experienced a sense of relief and wonder at being able to sleep in clean sheets, enjoy a bath and a good meal of roast beef. London was an escape from trench warfare and being able to become a tourist for a week or two was clearly a refuge. They wanted to make the most of their time in the metropolis. For some, this meant seeing all the famous sites they had heard about, for others, an opportunity to visit extended families and travel to Scotland or Ireland or regional England. For others, it meant having a good time.

Australian historians have examined this theme of 'boys behaving badly' in London - that it didn't take long before the Australians good reputation became soured and the stereotype of the 'over here and over sexed' became prevalent. Lurid reports of drunkenness, rampant prostitution, crimes of theft, violence were reported in English newspapers.

The AIF Headquarters on Horseferry Rd became known (by the London press at least) as a notorious location and by early 1917 the *Times* was publishing some damning reports;

Bad conditions in Westminster: The Horseferry Road: rampant prostitution.

'the flaunting display of vice...a hot-bed of immorality, undisguised and unchecked...Prostitutes of all types and ages .. parade the streets and loiter at the corners...they solicit the soldiers who are about the district... No fewer than nine Australian soldiers were seen one evening recently coming out of a public house in this neighbourhood all of them more or less intoxicated and each of them with a woman hanging on his arm...' *The Times*, 24 February 1917.

Perhaps the quintessential bad boy Australian soldier on leave in London is Joe Maxwell. Joseph Maxwell, VC was the second most decorated Australian soldier in World War I. In 1932 he published his memoir of his experiences in the war, which he titled; *Hells, bells and madamoiselles*. Needless to say, it is a rollicking read.

His accounts of wartime London are vivid, lively, filled with dive bars and bad women. Joe's account is one that Australians are drawn to, it plays up Australians love of individualism, dislike of authority and sense of humour.

Joe and his mates could have been those nine Australian soldiers reported in the *Times*;

With my feet firmly planted on the wharf at Folkstone, I felt like one who had returned from hell: from the mud and the duckboards, from the whine of the barrages ... the infinite confusion and wreckage of war, to a spot where everyone spoke English. It was good to be alive...

London, however, with all my mental pictures of its glittering lights and its pulsing life fell below my ideal London. It was muffled in its wartime darkness and was utterly dreary. Four days leave! With a friend who had been wounded at Gallipoli I set out as the Americans say 'to see the elephant and hear the owl'. This pal of mine had people who pulled a few strings and he was "dug in" at Horseferry Road for the duration..

The pub seathed with men and women. Talcum powder in clouds, carmine lips, roguish smiles and white-and-pink softness. All this after the regions of war took on an exaggerated value in the scheme of things...Here was life, pulsing, swirling, laughing, cooing. I felt as one returned from the dust and the yellow bones of a family vault.'

At tables 'cuties' lounged and 'bandied phrases of Australian slang and among the drinking, flirting troops, Australians predominated. "Come sit here Aussie". "I've got the blues" she purred, "fair dinkum". Here was cajolery in one's own language indeed. Through the blue haze of cigarette smoke; through a murk peopled by faces, puffed and flabby from whiskey and gin; through a buzz of confidences... we got our first glimpse of war on the Piccadilly front.

Maxwell acknowledges it's the Australian's high wages that probably drew much of the female attention;

Australians were the highest paid troops who fought in the Allied cause and the lure of cash, always a powerful one with women, drew to them all the street girls, the lounge girls, the café girls and the romantic thrill-loving English girls in the first exhilaration of their new-found freedom... Of course... we came to learn that there were girls and girls. There were the parasites and the patriots, the lounge limpets, ready to sell themselves to anyone who had the price and the fine self-sacrificing girls, who did war work and formed many a clean and honest friendship that was an inspiration to men, jaded and embittered by two years of war.

Maxwell's observations of some of the London women was supported by the press where accounts of Australians soldiers who had been 'taken advantage of' were widely reported;

'A road of ill fame' reported that a young Australian soldier had been charged with breaking a door and window in Finsbury Park. It transpired that after receiving his £15 he met a women who took him to her rooms where he allegedly was robbed. He smashed the door and windows so that he would know the house again.

It sounds as though Campbell Rd, Finsbury Park was a place of ill repute, specialising in the naivety of foreign soldiers.

Preying on the Anzacs: A danger to soldiers in London

Again, the naivety of Australian soldiers (particularly those from rural Australia) was taken advantage of and the *Times* suggested that these 'birds of prey' should be warned about by posting notices to foreign soldiers in the train carriages.

But the experience of the majority of Australians in London during the war did not conform to the 'over here and over sexed' bad boy image portrayed in some accounts. The vast majority of Australians wanted a reprieve from war and wanted to see as many sites as they could fit in while they were in the metropolis.

Reading diary and letter accounts of soldier's time in London illustrates this move from being soldiers/nurses to being tourists. They become an audience to London during the war and in doing so, provide a distinct colonial response to British society and some historians have argued, caused to develop a distinctive Australian identity. For this talk, I have drawn on the diaries and letters written by Australian servicemen and nurses held in the State Library of NSW's collection. We hold a rich collection of personal papers, many of which describe in detail visits to the centre of the Empire.

The State Library's collection of WWI diaries and correspondence was formed immediately after the war when the Principal Librarian advertised in major Australian and British newspapers for returning Australian soldiers to sell their diaries to the Library. He advertising slogan was, "Good prices for good material' and only wanted quality accounts of Australians experiences in the various theatres of the war. This 'European War Collecting Project' as it was known was the first of its kind and material began to be deposited in early 1919. Around 240 collections of diaries and correspondence were received via this project and earlier this year; this collection was added to the UNESCO Memory of the World register. Over the years since, the Library has continued to receive additional diary and letter collections and now holds over 550 collections. In the past few years, the Library has digitised this collection and has had dedicated volunteers transcribe each volume. In the past year, we have made the collections accessible online with the ability to search across the diary volumes via a transcription search. This ability to keyword search across the collection has made researching for this paper remarkably easy, being able to search "London", "Londoners", "Horseferry Rd" etc.

So what do our diarists write about London? Their days are filled with a roll call of famous sites: Tower of London, Westminster Cathedral, St Pauls, the parks, the British Museum. All the sites are described in great detail, often diarists seem to be quoting back to themselves the tour guides facts and figures. These colonial pilgrimages to famous sites in British history can be likened to the Grand Tour – it was a journey of the provincial to the metropolis, to the older civilization. These visits were mainly educational, possibly civilizing? And the diaries that were written often

conform to the genre of travel diaries written during the grand tour and posted home to interested family members, to be read aloud in Sydney, Bathurst, Dubbo, Hobart.

Nights are spent at the theatre and the list of plays and musicals attended are varied, although 'Chu Chin Chow' at His Majesty's was the most popular, along with the 'Bing boys'. The tube is regularly described and the novelty of escalators and the lifts at the stations are much commented upon. Neither Sydney nor Melbourne, the two largest Australian cities had such facilities at that point.

Once in London, guidebooks provided information and structure to visiting colonials. And this is one of the main points I'd like to make; visitors guides were produced for colonial troops, here is the realisation that they are not from here, they were not British, however much their own culture told them that. They were visitors, tourists and they needed guidance to get around.

One such book, *Colonials' guide to London: for ANZAC, Canadian and other overseas visitors*, published in 1916 and again in 1917 for all those troops arriving on leave. It seemed that London tourism at the time was focusing on its history as most of the recommendations included the historic nooks and crannies of London neighbourhoods though with the warning, that newly rebuilt areas of 'towering blocks of flats and over-decorated mansions' may have ruined the ambience of parts of it.

The quirky names of London streets may have been of interest to visiting colonials, along with 'Peculiar names of hotels and public houses in London'. The London shops are highlighted, with a suggestion of a walking tour starting at Marble Arch tube station, along Oxford St to Holborn Circus, then start down New Bond St, Oxford St, through Old Bond St, then both sides of Regent St and Piccadilly Circus, Leicester Square, to the Strand, then Fleet St, Ludgate Circus, St Paul's Churchyard and up Cheapside... having done this you will be able to form some idea of London prices. (p. 163)

Warnings are made about crossing the streets (never do this through heavy traffic), especially since the introduction of the motor cars and buses (p. 164). Another travel warning is for pickpockets or 'dipper'. *'They are everywhere and watch their opportunity. They work in the tube lifts, at railway station, stopping places of trams, buses and other likely places where a number of people have congregated.'*

p. 168 A clear warning for overseas visitors. Don't talk up your own country, it's bad manners;

...we would advise our friends from overseas to refrain from comparisons, which generally do not compare, and without budging from the very proper standpoint that their countries are the countries of the future, to remember always that Great Britain is a country with a very vital and illustrious past – their past, no less than hers- and at the moment matters so enormously that her influence upon the destiny of the civilized world is incalculable.

p. 213

Australians should always be smart and properly dressed.

Slouch hat, turned up at side, puttees and belt to be worn in public.

Conduct yourself in a soldierly manner – be a credit to Australia.

Pay strict attention to saluting. Officers should be careful to return all salutes in a smart and soldierlike manner also.

On the termination of your leave you are on your honour as an Australian soldier to parade at the time and place appointed for entraining back to the Depot.

p. 214

War Chest Club

There were a number of clubs specifically set up to host Australian troops on leave in London. Established by voluntary organisations who raised funds, these clubs were designed to be a 'home away from home'. The War Chest Club was situated across the road from the Administrative Headquarters in Horseferry Rd and it provided meals (with perfect cleanliness and efficiency) and accommodation in wholesome and thoroughly clean beds with an extraordinary capacity of 800 beds.

Arthur Moore was one of many of the diarists who makes use of the facilities. He stayed there in early January 1918; *'Had Breakfast at War Chest. It is easily the best place for a feed in London.'*

On his arrival in London in December, he initially went to the Australian Red Cross; *'here a chap gave us a sausage roll, and stale bun and a mouthful of cold tea in a cup. Various notices hung on the wall of the Hut informed us that this "splendid repast" was given to us by the Aust Red X ...* He then went on to the War Chest Club, *'where we had a good feed for the modest sum of a shilling. Then I booked a Bed for the night.'*

Men note that they went there for meals, to read the newspapers, to 'book a bed' for the night, they wrote their letters home from there (writing materials were provided free) and they took part in tour groups which left from the Club arranged and conducted by the 'ladies' who volunteered at the Club.

Another popular location was Anzac Buffet, originally established in 1915, which provided free meals and entertainment to Australian servicemen in London. It had originally been located at 130 Horseferry Road. In September 1916, it was relocated to 94 Victoria Road. The Buffet was open seven days a week and the staff at the Buffet generally fed and entertained 1000 Australian servicemen a day. In addition to serving meals, the Anzac Buffet had billiard, reading and music rooms.

Signaller Ellis Silas had been medically evacuated off Gallipoli and he eventually made his way to London in 1916. He frequented the Buffet. An artist in civilian life, he painted a watercolour scene of the interior of the Buffet. In a letter to the Library when he was negotiating the sale of the work, he described in typically flowery language that the Buffet was a 'home away from home'.

Only those of us (and our numbers are many) could quite realise how much this little spot meant. Thousands of miles of heaving ocean separating us from the Homeland. It seems aeons since we left the sunny coasts of Australia. There has been hard training in Egypt followed by the stress, privations and brutality of the battlefield, and now we find ourselves dumped into the murk and gloom of war ridden London. But the doors of the Buffet open and so after a long period we are enabled to once more get in touch with matters Australian. The Anzac Buffet is situated within a stones throw of the Terminus Victoria, which hourly is sending off trainloads of troops to the battlefields, and with equal rapidity vomits forth its sick and wounded, and not quite so frequently leave trains arrive, with war worn men seeking a brief respite from the horrors and fatigues of the Front line.

The Tommies, they have relatives to meet them, they know where to go but we are not of these, for our home is thousands of miles distant and we are not of the world's greatest metropolis but are marched off to H.Q. at Horseferry Rd, but this is anything but home, it is still the trying but necessary army regulations to which we are subjected. We leave our kit and pack in the cloakrooms- and with leave pass in hand ... we are free men; but what to do? Where to go? We wander out thro a slum, into the dimness of Victoria Street, still cogitating how to put in these most precious hours of freedom. Wondering wither to wend our way? This question is answered, for there upon a door is a mystic sign ANZAC Buffet, we push open the door and look in, and lo ! London is forgotten for there around us are Australian faces, womenfolk from our own shores, the red cover of the good old "Bulletin" and other Australian papers blink back at us, there are numerous tables whereon a plentiful supply of sandwiches and cakes and cups of steaming tea and coffee, one of these kindly women attired in green overalls addresses "will we have something to eat" – will we have something to eat! ... All the work of this enterprise was carried out by an indefatigable band of Australian women. How hard the work must have been only time can tell you, on some days they served refreshment to some 1000 men, it was not merely a question of just handing out a sandwich and cup of tea. It was served at tables, which meant much carrying of heavy trays.

For those of us who were attached to H.Q. staff it was quite a home not to say an allurements for the strict path of duty, at least I know I found it so, for many a time and oft did I slip away from my official duties and partake of a cup of tea or read the Aussie news – but I digress – concerts, dances and theatre parties and tours of the metropolis were arranged...

On a green board near the door (shown in illustration) all the latest news and shows, or anything that was going that would be of interest to us. The comfort and interests

of each individual man were studied as far as was humanly possible so to do. For all there was always a cheery welcome, a ready hand.

Silas is a fascinating character, who continued his artistic career after the war and was known particularly as a marine artist. His patriotic feelings for Australia are interesting in that he was a Londoner, his father was an artist and his mother an opera singer. He sailed for Australia in 1907 at the age of 22 and settled in Perth. Seven years later, he was enlisted in the AIF. Silas is one of these 'Australian' servicemen who really had taken on an Australian identity and even though he was from London, he now saw himself as an Australian far away from home and relishing the Anzac Buffet as a refuge in London.

Silas is like most of the diarists in their thoughts of being in London. They are recognising that this is not home, though it is a somewhat familiar culture, they are definitely visitors and not prodigal sons returning 'home';

What follows are some rather entertaining excerpts from various diarists echoing these thoughts – they are far from home... This brings me to the delightful Walter Edward Gillett, an orchardist of Kalamunda, Western Australia. He was 42 years old when he enlisted. He had served in France with the 51st Battalion, but had been transferred to a clerical position and immediately after the war worked at the administrative headquarters at Horseferry Rd. At first he finds London, *'the hub of the universe. The greatest city in the world, and the most wonderful. All nations of the world are represented here. The very best of everything is here ...* but he also found it bewildering;

A bigger fool than myself at finding his way about it would be hard to find. I was for ever doing something idiotic and stupid. I don't know why I'm sure, whether it was caused by extreme nervousness or simply by my own absolute stupidity, (which I do not hesitate to admit), but whichever was the cause, it succeeded in making an abject fool of me on very many occasions.

Directly I arrived in London my head seemed to be in a whirl, the traffic, the many people, the continuous yelling of the hawkers and newsmongers, the catching of trams and busses, the general excitement prevailing on all sides, must have "turned" what little brain I had left, I tremble when I look back on the stupid things I did and the narrow escapes I had during the whole time I was in London. One thing - thank goodness - always remained in my brain, and that was the number of the tram which would take me home – 58. When I first discovered this I would write the number down, and repeat it to myself as often as possible, and thus succeeded in committing it to memory.

Whenever I appeared to be hopelessly lost, I would request a policeman to direct me to the nearest 58 tram...

The underground railway had me fairly beaten. I remember on one occasion I wished to go to a certain place, and got my ticket, after going to the wrong window once or

twice, and took my seat in the train marked "Inner Circle" - as instructed by an obliging official. I was informed that the journey would only take a few minutes. If you have ever travelled in the underground you will perhaps agree with me that the names of the stations are not nearly so "pronounced" as are many of the advertisements which literally cover the walls of these stations. You will also agree that the space of time allowed during the stoppage at these stations does not admit of even a very hurried perusal of the many writings on the walls of the aforesaid stations. Taking these two facts into consideration - combined with the sudden blaze of light on the said stations, (after having been surrounded by darkness) which affects the eyes for a time - you will perhaps the more readily understand how it was that the journey to my destination lasted considerably longer than would have been the case had the names of the stations been more conspicuous. The names of the stations as they appeared to me were as follows:- BOVRIL - OSRAM - KEENS MUSTARD- OXO - P.D.CORSETS - and many other such. In sheer desperation I approached the conductor, and explained that it seemed to me strange that the railway people should sell me a ticket to a place which their trains did not appear to stop at. He informed me that I had already passed through the station I required twice, and stated that he thought I was only just out for a joy ride.

Poor Mr Gillett also had trouble using the escalators – a recent invention yet to be used in Kalamunda, Western Australia. He writes a detailed account of his experiences riding the escalator at a tube station;

At some of these underground stations is what they call an "Escalator" - which means a permanently moving stairway ... They say it relieves the pressure of the passenger traffic at these stations. The reverse was my painful experience. You just step on the thing and you are taken up or down without any effort on your part. That part of the business seems quite simple. You can walk down the "escalator" if you so desire, there is apparently no objection to your sitting on it if you feel that way disposed. The trouble is not in the going down or the coming up. The trouble is at the top and at the bottom, the "latter" mostly, at least so I found it.

Having on military boots with a steel "heel-tip" made the "stepping-off" process decidedly exciting for myself and very amusing to the onlookers. Of course I sat down on that brass mat quicker than the crowd at the back of me expected. ... Someone immediately after was good enough to advise me to always step-off with the right foot, as I had done this on the occasion in question, the next time I tried with the left foot, with an exactly similar result. I tried jumping off with both feet at once, but the end was the same. I always landed with "high velocity" on the brass mat, in a sitting position. At last I decided to travel the whole distance in that position which I found to be far more successful and much less painful, if perhaps disappointing to the onlookers...

London women

The Anzacs were astonished to find that women were employed in all sorts of occupations during wartime, working in the place of men in many industries. Many diarists comment on the women bus conductors and those working in the Tube stations. This was not the case back in Australia.

An impressed 24 year old George Horan wrote back to his father;

the girls of London are as expert at jumping on & off moving buses as our paper boys on trams. They just grab the rail with one hand. There's a swirl of skirts & they are on. Not at all concerned. Nobody takes any notice. The little bus girls (conductresses) short skirts cocked hats & knee boots, climb up & down the stairs with the agility of monkeys. Punching tickets, & directing passengers, and working up to 12 midnight. Girls do everything. They are to be seen in all classes of work. Some with trousers & long coats, such as window cleaners, mill girls, carriage cleaners, farm girls etc., others with short skirts & knee boots, and they all look extremely chic. There's no doubt that for beauty in girls, - England leads. They knock all others I have seen, in Australia, France, & other places, easily. Slender, well built, refined looking, beautiful complexions, soft pink cheeks, regular features, really pretty. Then they are so well dressed, they look so neat. I was in the land of dreams. It was my first time among English speaking people for over two years and I appreciated it fully. The people will do anything for Australians; who are admired & respected everywhere.

George also noted that, 'Girls drive the lifts & collect the tickets' in the tube stations.

Walter Gillett is shocked by the lack of chivalry on the buses:

Politeness and chivalry are splendid virtues, but unfortunately often result in unpleasantness and inconvenience to some who practice such. It appeared to be the exception rather than the rule in buses, trams and trains, for the menfolk to offer their seats to the other sex. This practise at once becomes evident to the Aussies, who would never think of retaining a seat while a lady would be – through his selfish action – forced to stand. On more than one occasion I – like many others – suffered by giving up my seat on a tram to a lady. The conductor would tell me that as no standing was allowed, I would have to get off the car, and wait for the next, rather rough, after having gone perhaps half the distance to my destination, and the next car would probably make me late for an appointment. ...The Aussies would always do what was the recognised habit in their own country. It was most noticeable, this lack of respect for the fair sex, by the average Englishman. On more than one occasion I have seen an Aussie catch hold of some well-dressed chap and "yank" him out of his seat by the "scruff" of his neck, to allow a lady to sit down, the said lady protesting meanwhile that she does not want to sit down, but the Aussie would insist, to the admiration and amusement of the other passengers, and to the chagrin, consternation, and humiliation of the well-dressed, swanking "cad" who no doubt imagines that he is a perfect gentleman.

Charles Pryce, out and about in London, 'Noticed little girls dressed in pages clothes calling taxis &c.'

Girls usually ended up being included in the tourist descriptions of London: saw St Pauls, Westminster Abbey, London girls...

Jim Marshall, a teenager from central Sydney provided thorough descriptions of his time in London providing much comparison between architecture and features of London compared to that of Sydney. He didn't think much of the girls however;

Arrived at the Picadilly Circus where we stood for some time watching the people passing. The girls are a confounded nuisance, but I suppose, that it being Leap Year and Australians being made so much of, and thought so much of, there is some excuse.

We had also kept our eyes open for a pretty flower girl but all we had seen were of the big footed, fat, beery looking 'Lizer style, with straw boaters, and shawls. Near London Bridge we thought we had seen a pretty one. She was certainly young, but not handsome, and her voice was absolutely vile, a most ear splitting screech.

Londoners were also keen to engage the visitors in conversations. After leaving a theatre one evening, Marshall writes; 'We were out about 5 minutes when we were pulled up by a lady and her two daughters who asked us many & various questions of Australia. At first we didn't know how to take them as one hears all sorts of things of the London girls However we strolled along to The Mall and accompanied them halfway down Picadilly where we left them, after they had insisted on offering us the contents (cash) of their purses. It was however declined with thanks.'

'... Though we went a long way we passed very few other Australians, which made us all the more noticeable to the crowds of people. We went into a tobacconist's shop where we were kept for nearly an hour telling him all about Australia; I believe he must still think us liars.'

George Horan's letter to his father is full of observations of Londoners, from the policemen who dispensed all sorts of advice and information to a listing of musicals attended to the fog that crept into the streets and the dark city vulnerable to zeppelin attacks;

The London Police are a splendid body of men, great six-footers good natured, possessed of a wealth of knowledge and nothing is too much trouble for them in helping a stranger. While directing a continual flood of traffic, they are telling you exactly what to do to reach your destination. They have everything on their fingers ends, and take such a fatherly interest in you, that makes you want to say "comeanava".

we went somewhere every night, where living reigned, & we were able to forget that such a terrible thing as war existed. We went into a fun factory and, Fired rifles, punched balls, threw darts, knocked dolls etc, every conceivable thing, they had, to

separate the mug from his money. We had expensive dinners had our boots cleaned whenever they got a bit dull – whistled taxis, and had about two shillings worth of barber every day. The London barber is an adept. The only thing free in his establishment is the air you breathe. We turned out neat & clean however & were satisfied.

Last Saturday a very heavy fog settled over London making the place pitch black, it was not possible to see more than a yard in front. Traffic was suspended on the surface altogether and the Tubes did a roaring biz. London was never very bright at night as the lights were subdued or out entirely, owing to the danger of Zeps. All windows of lighted rooms had to be shaded, also of trains, trams & buses. Hotels were only open from 12 to 2.30 pm & from 6 to 9 pm and the no-shouting order was rigidly adhered to. All street corners (pavements) are painted white, also all pillar boxes lamp-posts and other obstructions likely to be thumped in the darkness.

Darkness is a theme of diarists describing London at night and the extraordinary sight of the zeppelins in the skies, although even the sighting of an aeroplane flying over the city attracted a lot of attention reported Charles Pryce.

Thomas Crooks, visiting in September 1916, writes about zeppelin attacks;

Great excitement in London tonight. Zeppelins reported to be hovering over the City. All Trains and Trams running with lights out. City almost in darkness. About 10.15P.M. one of the Searchlights picked up a large Airship, it looked very uncanny gliding through space at such a great height, it looked like silver in the rays of the searchlight. Anti-aircraft guns soon got to work and shells were seen to explode near her, then the Airship went higher up. All searchlights were turned off. The streets were crowded with excited women and children. About 1.20A.M. the searchlights were busy again, and located another Zeppelin, Bombs being dropped by other Zeppelins in various parts of the City, and what a din they made, several fell near Stratham Station and done considerable damage. The Germans dropped several Parachute flares to light up parts of the City, no doubt to pick their way out. About 1.30A.M. there was a burst of flame high up in the air away over near Woolwich, it got bigger and bigger until the whole length of the Zeppelin was in flames and was crashing to the earth, one of our aeroplanes had flown over her and destroyed her. There was mad cheering from the people as she came down. It was a grand sight.

William Henry Nicholson was admitted to the 1st London General hospital and wrote in December 1917;

We have some air raids here some times. The "baby kittens" fly over and drop bombs on this benighted city. All the patients are shifted down into the basement. When the warning sounds, three incendiary bombs dropped into the Hospital grounds the other night, but did not explode. By the crashes I could hear all his bombs are not "duds". The gunfire from the defences of London is terrific, and the "Gothas" get a warm reception.

Nurse Anne Donnell arrived in London in 1915 on her way to the island of Lemnos and the Third General Hospital where she would nurse troops evacuated from Gallipoli. Her first days in London are very full and not surprisingly, she does a lot of shopping;

Lunched & then did the streets, Oxford & Shaftsbury Ave, Bond & Regent Sts. Wandered through St James Park to Buckingham Palace. In the front of it is the magnificent Statue of Queen Victoria. I couldn't resist doing some shopping. The things are very tempting, had tea & home again by 8pm, very very tired but firmly of the opinion that London is the leading place of the British Empire.

Two years later, Anne is back in London. She was based for a while at a hospital in Brighton before going onto the Western Front. She is an excellent observer, describing the food shortages and the community efforts of growing vegetables;

My conscience ought to be pricking me for not doing War Work or picking moss ... Before me now as I write, The ground is pegged out in small squares & There are women old men & children digging the soil where ever you go out of London you see the ground, being tilled & planted by them I suppose chiefly with potatoes. The food Controller is doing his best to prevent a bread famine ere the next harvest is ready & I think almost everyone is conscientiously doing their bit to help. It hasn't involved any great sacrifice from us. Though Sometimes I could eat more than my portion of bread and Sugar & I do enjoy the little potato allowed us twice a week. It seems strange to have all you eat weighted out before its given to you. We are allowed six Ozs of bread a day, 2 ozs of Sugar, 5 ozs of Meat for 5 days in the week. Beans rice, fish and eggs are being used a great deal and are very good substitutes. Fruit I miss most of all, it is so frightfully dear, though I do indulge sometimes. I don't enjoy it as much as I might for thinking of the money it costs.

While there [at a shop] a well dressed & well nourished Englishman came in sat down near me. He became fearfully indignant and abused the Government well when he discovered it was a meatless day & he didn't like fish, finally he has 2 eggs. He vows this food question is absurd and unnecessary & says it just like the English to follow blindly the leaders of the Government without question. Then he wanted another cup of tea & felt like a naughty child when he humbly asked couldn't he have a little lump of sugar for it. Then he grumbled again & said that the fault with England. It treats you like babies and expects you to fight like lions. With amusement at his size I asked him if he found his portion of food stuff sufficient? T'was a needless question – his reply was "That what he couldn't get at one shop he got at another.

The visiting Australians were tourists. Their points of view were as outsiders, observers, who look on London and compare it with their actual home. Jim Marshall, with his critical eye and his penchant for minutely comparing London to his home town of Sydney has concluded that he is an Australian tourist, a visitor, not a native

son returned to the mother country. While he had an interesting visit, it was not his home (he is all of 17 years old at this point);

Well I had spent an interesting four days, and though I was not exactly disappointed, London did not come up to my expectations. I had thought I would be very excited on reaching the chief city of the world, but after Sydney, which has made such strides and has all that is modern, and some fine examples of all the leading forms of architecture, that London did not seem anything extra-special at all.

Sydney's streets are just the same, narrow, and running all over the place, and pretty well as much traffic, its buildings are quite as great, in their way. Though there is none like St Pauls, The Abbey or the Houses of Parliament with their old associations etc, London hasn't a building like the Daily Telegraph office or the Commonwealth Bank, and the G.P.O and the Town hall and the Queen Victoria Markets are splendid examples of their various styles of architecture. St Andrews Cathedral is a fine building of the Gothic style, and St Marys will be better.

Trafalgar Square is an imposing place, but though Sydney has no such square, Martin Place and Moore St together serve the same purpose and just as well too.

London has no street like Macquarie Street, and Centennial Park track is quite equal to Rotten Row, and Pitt Street equals Picadilly and Bond St, as does Paddies' Market equal Petticoat Lane.

Such monuments as the Admiralty Arch & the Marble Arch will come later, and the Central Railway Stn is I suppose as fine a station, with as magnificent an approach as any in England. It certainly beats London's stations.

Sydney, then, has her blue sunny sky always, not the perpetual haze of smoke above her, as has London, as well as the abominable frequent London fogs. Lastly Sydney has her unequalled position on the Harbour, and I am a native of Sydney and so I suppose I must be a bit biased, though I have made, I think a very fair comparison.

The girls of London, and England generally, are pretty but that is all. They haven't the attraction of the Australian girl, four good examples of whom I have for sisters. The English people though are all kind and good-natured and do all they can for the Australians many of whom, I am ashamed to say, do very little to return their kindness and rather take advantage of the donors in every way possible. However the least said of that sort the better.

As White writes in the Soldier as Tourist, there is always a respectful distance that both sides: the host and visitor preserve. The tourist's relationship to the host culture must by definition be that of the observer, never of the participant. Ultimately, the tourist's loyalties and sympathies must lie with the tourists own culture, not that of the host. Observations must necessarily lie with the visitor – their point of view provides a comparison that an insider, the host isn't aware of.

They were soldier-tourists on an accidental grand tour, finding refuge in sight-seeing, away from the horrors of the trenches. There, they were involved, in the thick of it. London was a respite, a chance to be passive observers. The opportunity to be detached from surroundings perhaps made them keep going, kept them sane, allowed them to return to France and the trenches. In four years, 330,000 Australian men, from a population of five million travelled overseas, mostly to Europe. It would be another 50 years before the tradition of the European trip and the obligatory tours of London would again be brought within reach of average Australians in the age of jet travel. White argues that the war prefigured this current age of democratic tourism.

Archie;... one of the finest cities of the world. I shall never, never forget the time I had there the kindness of the people, the pretty girls, the taxis, the play's & the roar of old London, it will sound in my ears for years to come & I shall always look back on it with pleasure...
at 10 minutes to 8 this morning we left her for good, for our leave was up & we are returning to; what.