

Media Release



State Library of NSW's unique collection of WWI soldiers' diaries recognised by UNESCO

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A unique collection of soldiers' intimate accounts of war has been included on the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register, just as the State Library of NSW releases 50,000 pages of digitised World War One diaries for the public to transcribe, announced today.

According to Alex Byrne, NSW State Librarian & Chief Executive: "With the centenary of the Gallipoli landing in April and growing interest in the personal accounts of war, I am thrilled UNESCO has recognised the cultural importance of the Library's collection of soldiers' diaries that tell of Australians in the First World War."

From 1918 to 1920 the State Library purchased 236 soldiers' diaries as part of the European War Collecting Project, an extraordinary collecting drive spearheaded by the forward thinking principal librarian William Ifould. Recognising the historic value of these diaries for future generations, Ifould advertised in Australia and overseas with the promise of "good prices paid for good material."

The State Library has been adding to its collection of World War One diaries and letters ever since. The collection has now grown to over 1,200 handwritten accounts by soldiers of all ranks, doctors, nurses, stretcher-bearers, journalists and POWs.

"The news from UNESCO is timely as we have just completed the major digitisation of our entire collection of World War One diaries and letters, 180,000 pages, made possible through the support of the NSW Government," said Dr Byrne.

"We are also just about to launch our very own purpose built transcription tool. We are seeking the community's support in the important task of transcribing our diaries and letters to help unlock the compelling stories held within them.

"The State Library has for a long time relied on its dedicated volunteers who have worked to transcribe over 700 diaries to date. Now, with this new tool, we are turning to the wider community for help so that we can provide global access to this extraordinary content."

According to Elise Edmonds, the State Library's World War One curator, "This important crowd sourcing project will introduce participants to the day to day experiences of the Australian men and women who served in the war, and help bring their tales of adventure, heartache and bravery to a global audience.

"The story of the 'Great War' cannot be fully understood without reference to these very personal and moving firsthand accounts," said Ms Edmonds.

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The Records of the European War Collecting Project is the third collection from the State Library's extensive holdings to be recognised by UNESCO, with the Library's Holtermann Collection of glass-plate negatives included in 2013 and its historic First Fleet journals in 2009.

The Australian UNESCO Memory of the World Program is part of an international initiative, which aims to safeguard the documentary heritage of humanity and recognise the significance of all heritage materials.

The Australian Theatre for Young People (atyp) have based their new play on the State Library's collection of World War One diaries, photographs and letters. *A Town Named War Boy* will be performed at the Library from 29 April to 9 May 2015. Tickets now on sale: www.atyp.com.au/

Alex Byrne and Elise Edmonds are available for interviews.

Media interviews, images and more information, please contact:

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