

RECOVERING THE PAST



By IAN ALDERMAN

EDUCATION RESOURCE

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www.recoveringthepast.com

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A comprehensive guide to *Recovering The Past* for teachers and educators.

How to use this resource

This educational resource is designed to be used by teachers and educators to assist with engaging upper primary and secondary school students with *Recovering The Past*. While this resource is aimed at students in that age range, it may also serve as inspiration as to how to engage audiences of all ages and backgrounds. We hope you find the background information, suggested discussion points and activities useful. This educational resource has been developed by project producer Trudie Leigo and artist Ian Alderman.

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About Recovering The Past

Recovering the Past is a unique photographic exhibition of 25 thought provoking images that explore the consequences of war. The exhibition portrays two separate groups of men with origins a century apart. The first group is the men of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) who fought in Flanders in some of the worst battles of the Great War. The second group is the Belgian personnel who operate the ongoing bomb disposal efforts of collecting and destroying the millions of unexploded shells from the Great War that still remain in Flanders today.

British photographer Ian Alderman is the only artist to have been granted unrestricted access to all aspects of the work of the Belgian Defence Bomb Disposal unit, DOVO-SEDEE, with their ongoing operations. Alderman's work has also been inspired by Australian artistic and cultural icons, photographer Frank Hurley and artist Will Longstaff.

The result is a powerful exhibition that explores the legacies of war long after the guns fall silent. Not just the physical ramifications of the continual unearthing of ordnance, but also the devastating psychological impact the war had on Australian society.

"We thought we managed alright, kept the awful things out of our minds, but now I'm an old man they come out from where I hid them every night".

Jim McPhee from Drouin, Victoria, a veteran of Gallipoli and the Western Front, interviewed about his wartime experiences over fifty years after the Armistice.

With its striking portrayal of the men of the AIF, Recovering The Past has humanised the Great War. The faces of the Diggers that stare out from the exhibition's images reveal individual men; men whose identities war has inevitably turned into a statistic.

Accompanying the photographs in the exhibition are artwork labels which offers the viewer both an insight into the scale of the ongoing work undertaken by DOVO-SEDEE, the Belgian Bomb Disposal team, as well as powerful historical quotes reflecting the significant psychological trauma the war caused.

In 2017, DOVO-SEDEE collected 220 tonnes of ammunition from the fields that were once the battlefield of Passchendaele. Founded in 1920, this permanently based team will dispatch up to three trucks on a daily basis to collect the



#Flanders 0825, Ian Alderman

unexploded ammunition routinely unearthed by the local population. In Flanders, this lethal legacy is a daily fact of life.

Emotional trauma caused by the Great War was inflicted not only to those returning men of the AIF, but on Australian society in general; the thousands of widows and orphans the war created reflects this.

These consequences are not unique to the Great War alone; they apply to all wars since and those to come, globally. This exhibition therefore carries a universal message and timeless relevance.

This exhibition does not give the Australian men depicted in its images a voice, but it does enable them to be seen and once again stand tall; this is something Recovering The Past can give them, this is something they have earned and deserve.

This ground-breaking exhibition was first displayed at the Palais des Nations in Geneva and more recently at the In Flanders Fields Museum, Ypres. It is has now been brought to Australia to tour nationally.

List of Themes

- The consequences of war
- Military history
- Military service
- Civilian encounters
- The Great War
- Conflict
- Grief
- Environmental consequences
- Psychological trauma



About Ian Alderman

London based artist Ian Alderman has worked as a professional photographer for over 20 years. His passion for photography developed as a teenager through his desire to capture the drama of the great outdoors.

Extensive experience as both a photographer and digital artist has given Alderman the broad, practical knowledge required to produce a technically challenging project such as *Recovering The Past*. Inspired by the brilliance and philosophy of photographers such as Frank Hurley, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Margaret Bourke-White and O. Winston Link, Alderman's work continues to evolve, *Recovering The Past* is a testament to this.

Alderman was allowed unprecedented access to photograph previously undocumented high-risk toxic environments for this project. The trust afforded to the artist by DOVO-SEDEE has enabled him to produce this unique study of the relentless and potentially lethal work of

this major bomb disposal team on the Great War's former Western Front.

A complex project of over six years in the making, *Recovering The Past* has been produced with the centenary commemorations of the Great War and Armistice at its heart.

"With my own great-grandfather - George Henry Spearing - a casualty of that tragic conflict, this unique project represents my own personal tribute to him and all those men and women who lived, fought, suffered and died in circumstances and conditions we simply cannot imagine today".

Ian Alderman, London, 2018.



The Artist, Ian Alderman



#Flanders 2040

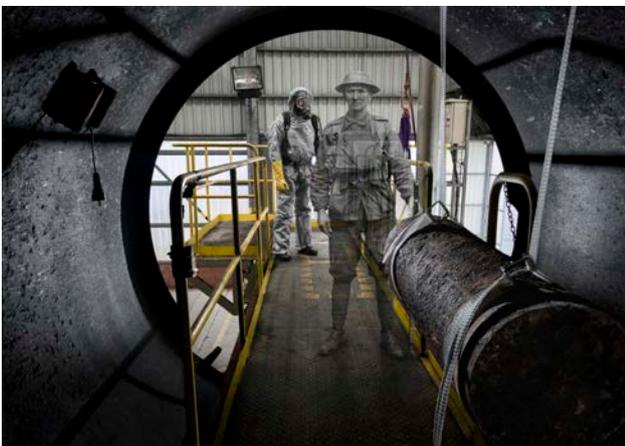
Crate number 143 of Great War vintage ammunition, recovered from Flanders' former battlefields, awaits its destruction; it is a sobering indication of the scale of the problem.



#Flanders 1422

"One of our men . . . went suddenly demented. The s.s. [shell shock] had a terrifying effect on him . . . [He] dropped his rifle . . . rushed out over the front line trench into No mans land, the Germans blazing away at him: then he turned and ran down between the lines of the two armies; no one seemed able to bring him down. Then he turned again, raced into our system, down overland through the support trenches . . . where men from the Battalion pursued him, overpowered him, and forcibly rolled him in blankets and tied him up with rope . . . He was unwounded but evacuated raving mad."

Captain R.A.Goldrick, MC, 33 Bn. of Paramata, NSW.



#Flanders 5050

"[...]we see some awful suffering from shell shock. One of the worst cases I have had so far is Lieutenant E -. [...] the nights I spent with him were very tragic. [...] thinking he was asleep, when he would start up and scream out, "Oh God, the shells are coming" and turning to me would say "Quick, lie down for your life!" [...] and his voice would rise to a scream [...]. Oh the sadness of it all! I would hold his hand and soothe him [...]. This went on for nights"

Matron Gertrude Moberly, Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS).



#Flanders 9044

Two soldiers of the AIF are montaged into DOVO-SEDEE's ammunition reference section, the most complete of its kind in existence. At least one example of almost every shell type used on Belgian soil in this theatre of the Great War exists in this section of DOVO-SEDEE's Poelkapelle facility.

1 Preparing for your visit

The following suggested activities are designed to help prepare your students for their visit to the Recovering The Past exhibition. These three activities provide useful background and context.



Understanding Flanders

Lead a classroom discussion on where Flanders is and why it was so significant in the Great War. You might like to set students their own research tasks, or as a group activity explore the region on a map using some of the electronic links listed on [page 27](#). A suggestion is

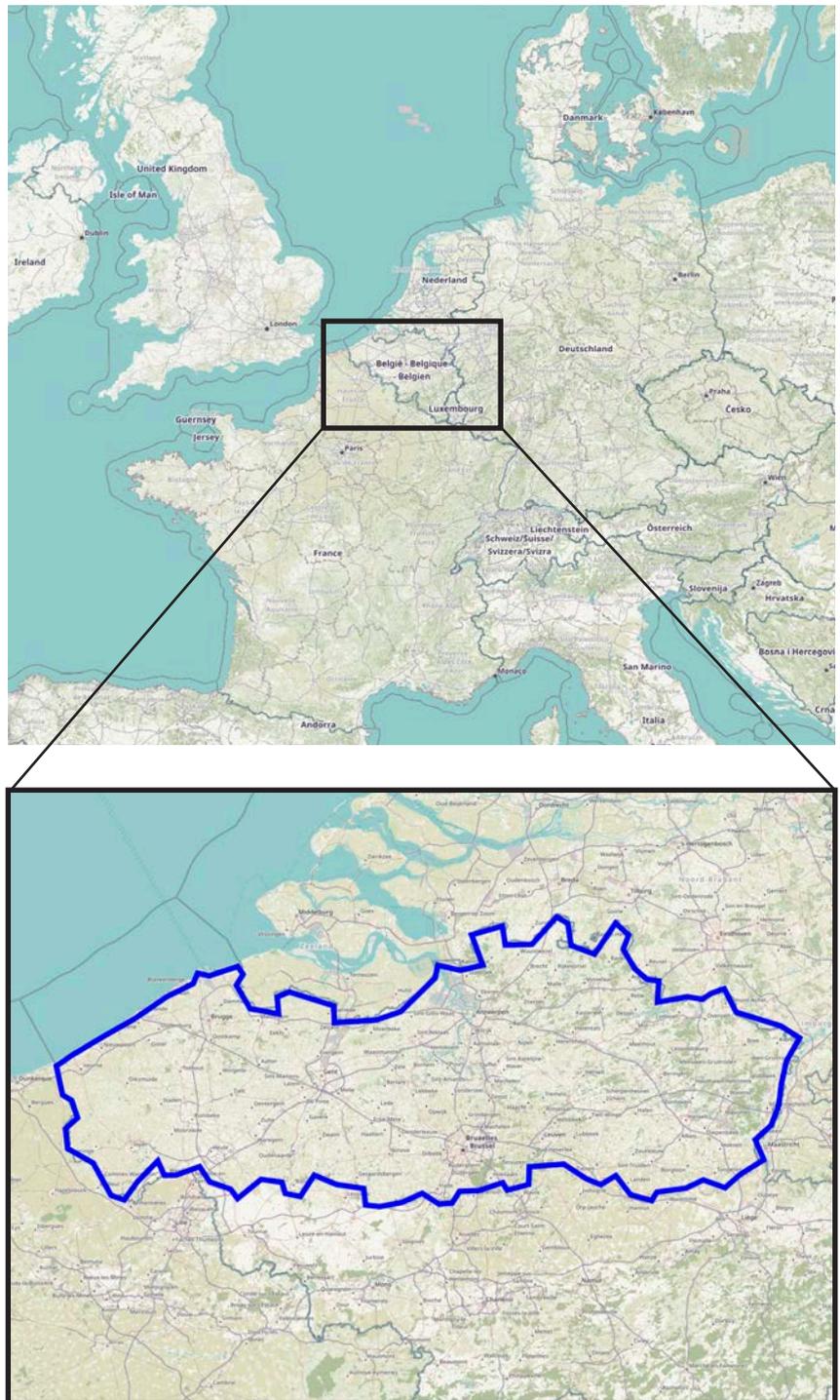
BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The location of Flanders has historically placed it in the crossroads between France and England, this coupled with the fact that it has been occupied by both Spain and Austria in the past means it's historically been no stranger to conflict, death and destruction, and has come to be known as 'the Fatal Avenue'.

During the Great War five major battles occurred in Flanders from 1914 - 1918. As the allied forces fought to drive the invading German army from the region.

- First Battle of Ypres (19 October - 22 November 1914)
- Second battle of Ypres (22 April - 25 May) 2015
- Third Battle of Ypres (31 July - 10 November 1917)
- German Spring Offensive (April 1918)
- The final offensive (28 September - 11 November 1918)

Map of Flanders



Composite Images



Frank Hurley/Australian War Memorial

Lead a classroom activity to discover who Frank Hurley was and why his composite images of the Great War are world famous. Your class can explore his photographs online in the Australian War Memorial Collection. <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P11025578>

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Australia's contribution to the history of the Great War as we know it is not limited to the fighting. Much of what happened in the trenches was revealed to us through the powerful photographs and montage images produced by Captain James Francis (Frank) Hurley.

Taking great personal risks to capture a true picture of the battle, his photographs graphically portray the daily existence of the fighting man in the shattered and torturous landscape of the Ypres Salient. Hurley's commitment to create battlefield scenes from multiple negatives brought him into regular conflict with official historian Charles Bean.



Over the Top, Frank Hurley, c1918, Australian War Memorial Collection.

His famed and celebrated composite images were an essential inspiration behind the concept of Recovering The Past. Hurley explained why he created such images:

"To Include the event on a single negative, I have tried and tried, but the results are hopeless. Everything is on such a vast scale. Figures are scattered. The atmosphere is dense with haze and smoke. Shells will not burst where required. It might as well be a rehearsal in a paddock. It is impossible to secure full effects of this bloody war without composite pictures. It's unfair to our soldiers".

A montage image comprised of 12 separate negatives.

Frank Hurley, quoted in Lennard Bickel, *In Search of Frank Hurley*, Macmillan, 1980, page 61.



Menin Gate

Menin Gate

Lead a classroom discussion to discover what is the Menin Gate and who was Will Longstaff. With your class, view Longstaff's celebrated painting online in the Australian War Memorial collection. Encourage your students to describe the painting and discuss the relevance of its narrative. What is the painting trying to say? You may like to get your students to read the poem *In Flanders Fields* by John McRae and ask them if they can draw a connection between the poem and the painting?

Useful links:

- Menin Gate at Midnight by Will Longstaff <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C172234>
- The Unveiling of the painting in 1928 <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1005007>
- Google Earth (your student's may like to look at the Menin Gate today) <https://www.google.com.au/earth/>
- *In Flanders Fields*, the Poem <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47380/in-flanders-fields>

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Menin Gate is a memorial located in the Belgium city of Ypres. Completed in 1927, the memorial commemorates the 55,000 allied soldiers who went missing in the battles of the Ypres Salient up until August 1917 and who have no known grave. Amongst the inscribed names on the memorial are 6198 Australians. The huge monument was designed by architect Sir Reginald Blomfield.

The celebrated *Menin Gate at Midnight* was painted by Australian artist Will Longstaff in 1927. Longstaff's artistic approach to depicting personnel in his painting is adopted and used to great effect in *Recovering The Past*. The transparent appearance applied to the Australian personnel in this project has imbued them with a sense of peace, greatly at odds with the war-torn environment in which they fought.

Menin Gate at Midnight commemorates those soldiers with 'no known grave' on the Western Front. Longstaff produced this most poignant of paintings after attending the dedication ceremony of the Menin Gate itself.

Touring Australia between 1927-28, Menin Gate at Midnight was seen by record crowds.



Menin Gate at Midnight, Will Longstaff, oil on canvas, 137 x 270 cm, 1927.

2 During your visit

Request a tour

Contact the gallery or museum hosting Recovering the Past before your arrival and ask if a staff member is available to lead your students through a tour of the exhibition.

If a staff member is not available here are some suggestions of what you could do with your students.



Upper primary students

Quick Orientation Discussion

On arrival to the venue give your students time to observe and move around the exhibition. Then ask your students to take a seat on the floor where they can clearly see the photographs on display.

Tell your students that the exhibition depicts two groups of soldiers, one hundred years apart.

Suggested questions:

- One group of men are from the present, who are they?

Answer: They are the men in colour. They are the bomb disposal squad.

- One group of men are from 100 years ago, who are they?

Answer: They are the men in black and white and are the men of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) or the 'Diggers'.

- What is each group doing?

Answer: The men in colour are removing unexploded ammunition of the Great War from the present-day fields, backyards and roadsides of Flanders. The men in black and white are Australian soldiers of the Great War, and who fought in France and Belgium.

- How do you think they find the bombs?

Answer: They are unearthed when farmers do their twice-yearly ploughing. They are also uncovered when new construction sites and roadways are built.

- What do you think they do with the bombs once unearthed?

Answer: The men of the Belgian bomb disposal team are called to safely remove, identify and destroy the ordinance.

Match the number to the fact

Print and cut out the following cards before your visit to the exhibition.

Give the numbers to your students, they can work individually, in pairs, or in small groups to find the numbers within the exhibition.

Ask the students to report back to the rest of the class what the number represents.





197.7

136,000

7

11,000

54,896

148

8

Six

100

820

Cut out the cards to match the figures to the facts

Create your own Narrative

In this creative writing task, ask each of your students to choose one of the photographs. Ask them to look at the faded, almost transparent figures of the Diggers. Ask them to write their own short story based on what they see these soldiers doing. Encourage them to write what one digger might be saying to another.



Secondary students

Humanising the Great War

Give your students time to view the exhibition. On display in the exhibition is a show reel which demonstrates the process of how the artist Ian Alderman has created his artworks. Watch the show reel as a group and lead the students in a discussion about the artists techniques.

Suggested questions:

- If you took the people out of these images, could you understand what was happening?
- How engaging would the images be without people?
- How has the artist been inspired by Will Longstaff's depiction of soldiers in his painting Menin Gate at Midnight?
- What does fading the Diggers achieve?
- What if the artist hadn't faded the Diggers? Would that impact how you interpret the photographs?
- What if the transparency was reversed? What if the Belgian bomb disposal team and landscapes were faded and the Diggers were opaque?
- Ian Alderman has used the photographs of other photographers, including those of Frank Hurley, within his own image - is this appropriate?
- How important is composition, placement and perspective in making the diggers look like they are really in the same landscape or room as the Belgian soldiers?
- How important are colour to these images? What would the result be if the whole image was black and white?

Other Conflicts

When your student's have finished viewing the exhibition, lead them in the following discussion on the consequences of war.

Suggested questions:

- What other countries in the world are also having to deal with such deadly leftovers of war?
- Is it just bombs? Or are there other lethal legacies left behind by war? Encourage your students to think of more modern conflicts as well as our world's farmlands, cities and waterways.
- After reading the quotes in the exhibition - is it just soldiers that were psychologically traumatised by the war? Or were there are groups of people impacted?
- Answers could include: Nurses, mothers, wives, children, Frank Hurley and the farmers and labourers finding the bombs today.

3 Following your visit

On returning to the classroom you may want to undertake some additional activities to extend your student's understanding and experience of the exhibition. Below are some suggestions.



Upper primary students

Literature & Craft - The Poppy Story:

The poppy has a long association with Remembrance Day. Once the conflict was over the poppy was one of the only plants to grow on the barren battlefields of the Western Front. The significance of the poppy as a lasting memorial symbol to the fallen was realised by the Canadian surgeon John McCrae in his poem *In Flanders Fields*. Which he wrote during the Second Battle of Ypres after a friend and former student died.

As a group read McCrae's celebrated poem and discuss.

Suggested questions:

- Who were the dead in the poem?

Answer: Allied soldiers, e.g. British (and nationals of the British Empire: Canadians, New Zealanders, Indians, etc.), plus French, Russians, etc.

- How old were they, do you think?

Answer: Mostly young men, in their late teens/early twenties.

- Why did McCrae choose to write the poem as if it were spoken by the dead?

Answer: The dead no longer have a voice. It was McCrae's way of given them a voice, and asking the living to remember them.

- Who are the dead speaking to?

Answer: What if we forget what happened to them? They are speaking to the living, to us. They are telling us never to forget the horrors of war, or they will never rest.

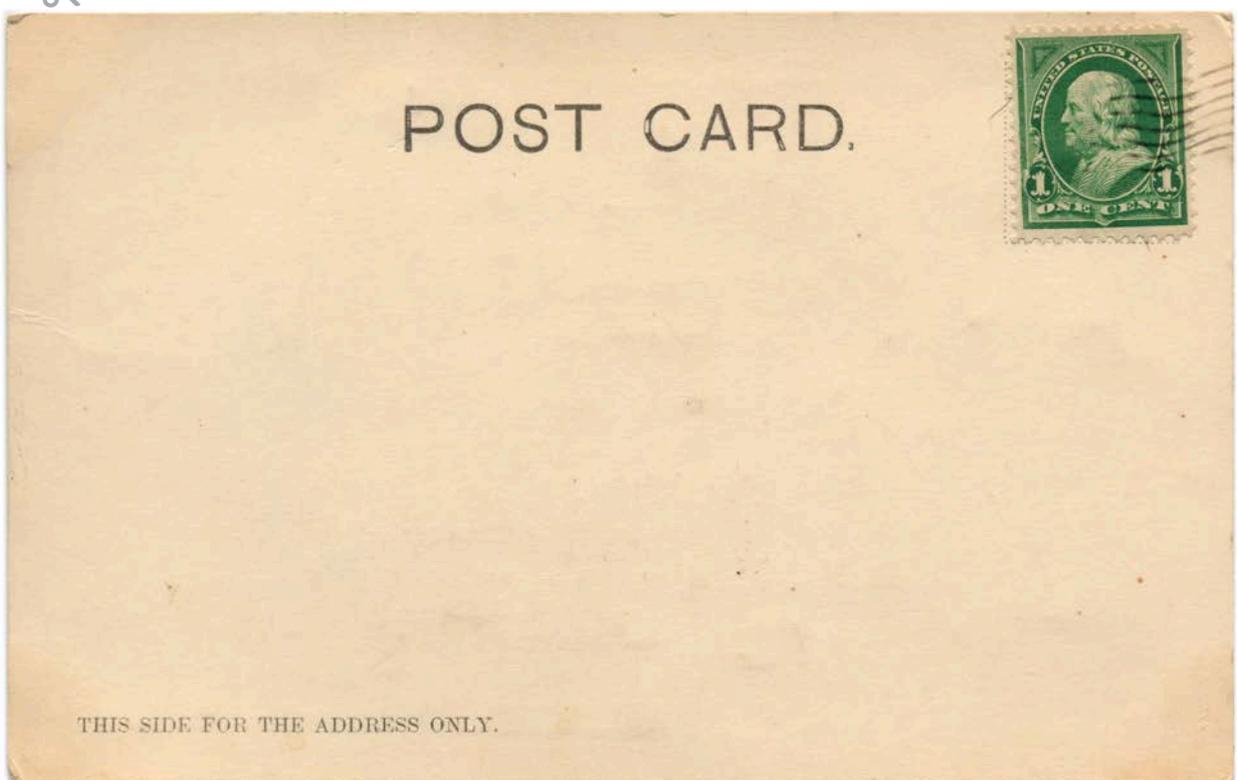
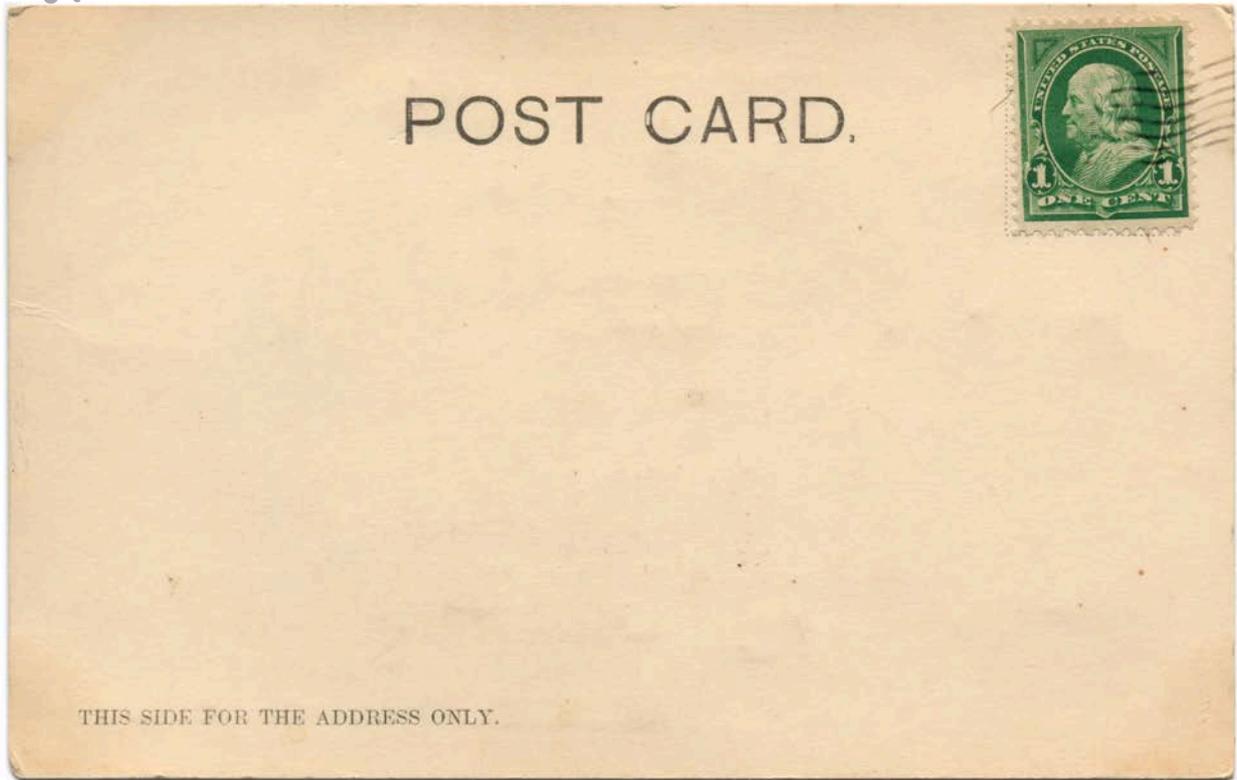
You can then guide your students in making their own poppy and/or write their own poem. All you will need is scissors, glue, rulers, pencils, red paper and green pipe cleaners.

Watch this short video on how to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qe0uqc6lmgQ>

Creative Writing - A Post Card home

Ask students to write a postcard home to a family member/ sweetheart from the perspective of a soldier fighting in Flanders during the Great War.

Following is a postcard template you may like to print, copy and cut out. Or perhaps you'd like to get your students to design their own.



Cut out the postcards and give to your students to fill out

Secondary students

Local History Activity - Research service personnel



Visit your local memorial or honour roll and research the service personnel from your town or neighbourhood who served in the Great War. Alternatively, students with a relative who served may wish to research them.

Then use the National Archive's Discovering ANZACS website to research their service record. <https://discoveringanzacs.naa.gov.au/learn/>



Photographic Project - Create your own 'Then & Now' image.

Bundaberg Railway Station 1911 and 1918.

Source copies of old photographs from the History Pin website <https://www.historypin.org/en/>. This useful website allows the user to search for photographs by location. Alternatively, you may like to ask your students to bring old photographs from home featuring local streets, landmarks or recognisable locations. Or you may also like to source images from your local or state library, or your local museum archive.

Ask your students to photograph themselves holding the photo in the exact location today.

You may want to display the resulting photographs as a group.

Further Reading

Educational resources relating directly to the exhibition:

- Recovering the Past <https://recoveringthepast.com/>
- Australian War Memorial - Frank Hurley <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P11025578>
- Australian War Memorial - Will Longstaff <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/menin/notes>
- History of DOVO - SEDEE http://beeoda.be/en/dovo_history.php

Educational resources on World War One:

- Australian War Memorial - Classroom Resources <https://www.awm.gov.au/learn/schools/resources>
- State Library of Queensland QANZAC100 - Research Hub <http://www.qanzac100.slq.qld.gov.au/research-hub>
- Discovering ANZACS, National Archives of Australia - <https://discoveringanzacs.naa.gov.au/learn/>
- Shell Shocked: Australia after the Armistice - National Archives of Australia <http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/snapshots/shell-shocked/index.aspx>
- State Library of NSW, World War One For Schools - <https://ww1.sl.nsw.gov.au/resources/for-schools>
- 'Our life goes on the same': The Great War at home, paper by Professor Stanley. https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/Vis/vis1516/GreatWar

Educational resources about the Ypres Salient and Flanders Fields:

- In Flanders Fields Knowledge Centre <http://www.inflandersfields.be/en/knowledge-center>
- <http://www.abc.net.au/ww1-anzac/passchendaele/teaching-resources/>

Examples of Newspaper Articles on the 'Iron Harvest'

- <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/britain-at-war/10172232/Lethal-relics-from-WW1-are-still-emerging.html>
- <http://www.flanderstoday.eu/living/iron-harvest>
- <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/first-world-war-bombs-still-3862370>

