

Americans, but they were hopelessly outnumbered and replacements grew increasingly scarce. The point is that Americans learned how to use what they had with great skill. Their campaign was not the mindless carnage

that Paul Fussell condemns, but a brilliant operations for a good cause. Doubler's magnificent book is a fine tribute to the U.S. forces in Europe and a salutary corrective to Paul Fussell's despair at the pointlessness of it all.

Gaynor Kavanagh, *Museums and the First World War: A Social History*

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Like other institutions in 1914–18, Britain's museums had to endure the initial challenges and ultimate exhaustion of a society falling into the first total war. How could institutions that symbolized the Victorian faith in progress adjust to the self-evident regression into barbarism. How could they even survive when public and private efforts had to be channelled into a struggle for survival? And how could that struggle best be memorialized when museums themselves were swept to the other edge of public concern and consciousness?

Gaynor Kavanagh, a lecturer in museum studies at the University of Leicester turned to the problem for her M.Phil. dissertation and has transformed it into a readable and surprisingly interesting book, covering provincial museums in England as well as the great national museums in London, Scotland, and other parts of the British Isles are left to their own chroniclers.

Amidst all the questions and problems that afflicted a profoundly civilian society trapped in a war of nightmare magnitude, museums survived on the margins. Their curators worried about risks to their collections, staffing shortages when younger members enlisted and their relevance to the national struggle. Faced with German air raids, the British Museum moved some of its greatest treasures into a new and unused section of London's underground railway. While the Museum suffered little damage apart from fragments of British anti-aircraft shells, deterioration from environmental conditions in the tunnel forced curators to plead for a major post-war investment to control deterioration. Good came out of evil, argues Kavanagh. A laboratory was opened in 1922 to

struggle with oxidation and mould. "The British Museum since this time has been at the forefront of scientific conservation, especially within the field of antiquities" (p. 35).

Bewildered by wartime problems it had never contemplated, Britain's government floundered badly. Faced with a fiscal crisis, in March 1916 it ordered all its national museums closed, not for safety but to save £26 000. *The Times* led the protests as indignant citizens raged that cinematic vulgarity would continue while the educational uplift of museums would be sacrificed — precisely when soldiers on leave, particularly from the colonies, could benefit most. Once closed to the public, many museums were converted to offices for proliferating wartime ministries. A public outcry kept the new Air Ministry from occupying the British Museum; it would have become a legitimate target on the dubious assumption that German bombers knew their targets. Instead, it became a warehouse for the property of interned Germans.

As servants of public institutions, museum staff were expected to do a little more than "their bit" for King and Country. Sir Frederic Kenyon, director of the British Museum, had encouraged his pre-war staff to join the Territorial Army. Once war came, he and many of his staff were soon on their way to France. Between volunteering and conscription, only 18 of the 253 men of military age had not offered themselves, "some of whom were incapable of service." More than half of Kenyon's staff were too old for military service. Women, volunteers, old men and disabled veterans took over the responsibilities as museum workers all over England enlisted. While half the women who entered the British workforce during the war remained after the Armistice, museums were conservative employers. Most kept their promise to

restore male employees after they were demobilized. Kavanagh found only one woman, Gladys Barnard of the Castle Museum in Norwich, who was helped by the war. Hired as a typist, wartime promotion to the curatorial ranks allowed her to become her museum's director by 1937.

As Britain's war effort intensified, museum's tried to make themselves useful. The British Museum of Natural History advised on the moth and beetle larvae that sometimes infested the army's biscuits and on sources of sphagnum moss, used as a wartime substitute for cotton in medical dressings. Museums played a more obvious role by organizing exhibits of war art, photographs and weapons. Patriotism and a positive view of the war were obvious themes. When that palled, provincial museums turned practical, with exhibits to promote health, hygiene, food conservation and, in Leicester, a "School for Mothers and Babies Welcome [sic]." Local war industries provided displays of their contribution to victory. With starvation imminent in 1917, showing people how to grow food was an obvious project. Kavanagh argued that museums also found a role in education. With schools disrupted by the enlistment of teachers and the takeover of buildings as hospitals, museums were an obvious learning resource. Manchester officials found that a little advance teacher training helped. Children enjoyed the experience. A Salford curator, Ben Mullen, observed schoolboys "removing their caps upon entering the building, an action

which I never observed until the establishment of the school systems."

While national and local museums struggled with shrunken wartime staffs and budgets, curators wondered how the war itself would be commemorated. As the enormous dimensions of the struggle and the sacrifices became apparent, many cities wanted a special war museum. Determined to scotch new rival institutions, veteran curators worked with the War Office to ensure that a Local War Museum Committee, Sir Alfred Mond, Charles ffoulkes, Sir Charles Oman and others were not easily sidetracked by officialdom, though their frustrations were many. A Canadian, Major I. W. M. Beckles-Wilson, was sent to France as one of their first employees. Even with practised bureaucrats in charge, the creation of the Imperial War Museum was still "a near-run thing."

While the war years saw their small victories and achievements for the British museum community, Gaynor Kavanagh reckons the war as a major setback. Faced with acute financial and social problems, the British government no longer had much energy or money to spare for museums. Even more serious in her view, the underpaid, untrained old men who valiantly struggled to keep their institutions going were seldom inclined to embrace museum-based education as more than a rude wartime interruption. In museums, as elsewhere in society, radical ideas developed in wartime were filed or forgotten. Peace invited a return to old ways.