

# First World War posters at Te Papa

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper examines a collection of international First World War posters held by the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa), in terms of its provenance, reception and display at the end of, and in the years immediately after, the First World War (1914–19). The paper details how and why the posters entered the Dominion Museum (now Te Papa) in 1918–19, their subsequent display from 1921 to 1924, and how they were received during this period.

The posters came to New Zealand as a result of transnational networks that existed in the British Empire. They were intended for the national collection and display in a hoped-for national war museum because they could illustrate important aspects of the war. However, their function and meanings shifted as they moved from the streets to museums and exhibitions. They became markers of imperial effort and relationships, but also reminders of the emotions of the war years. The paper discusses reasons for this memorialising impulse and continuing engagement with war posters.

The colourful and dramatic international posters in the collection are briefly compared to New Zealand's comparatively plain letterpress printed posters. The lack of pictorial content in New Zealand's posters, and the New Zealand government's reliance on imported posters for recruitment purposes, has led to absences in the relevant literature, which this paper addresses.

**KEYWORDS:** First World War, New Zealand, British Empire, Te Papa, Dominion Museum, propaganda, war posters, recruitment, transnationalism.

## Introduction

This paper explores the acquisition, reception and display of a collection of First World War (1914–19) posters held by the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa).<sup>1</sup>

Posters were a widespread form of propaganda and communication well established by the time of the First World War. They were predominantly used by industry and commerce to advertise products and entertainments, and were the most publicly visible and powerful medium available. For the first time, governments launched major publicity campaigns using the visual and emotional techniques of advertising to gain public support for recruitment, labour (including women's work), war loans and fundraising, conserving resources and food economy (Aulich & Hewitt 2007: 9).<sup>2</sup>

War posters were prominent and familiar in New Zealand towns and cities during the war, adorning a wide range of public buildings and spaces, such as recruitment stations, post offices, banks, shops, factories, tramcars, passenger ships, railway stations and train carriages (Fig. 1). New Zealand government posters were seen alongside British and Australian posters sent to New Zealand for display to encourage recruitment of men and money. American recruiting posters were occasionally seen as well.<sup>3</sup> Many of these international posters were large, colourful works of graphic art with hard-hitting emotional and manipulative images and messages (e.g. Figs 2–8). They were in distinct contrast to New Zealand's traditional notice-style posters, which were created to inform citizens of government decisions and regulations (e.g. Figs 9, 10).



Fig. 1 The Auckland City Recruiting Station on 23 April 1917. This photograph illustrates imperial networks in practice, with British, Australian and New Zealand recruitment posters neatly framed and displayed around the walls. These posters had been on display since at least March 1916, but would have been redundant by the time this photograph was taken as conscription had come into force eight months earlier. This indicates that the currency of such posters outlived their original purpose. For example, the large poster above the porch portrays soldiers in a Gallipoli-like landscape of 1915 ('Come Lads Give us a spell', 1915, by Annie J. Hope Campbell, published by the Victoria State Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, Australia). This landscape had long been left behind for the trenches of France by the time this photograph was taken (photo: Henry Winkelmann. Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries; 1-W1595).

What is of particular interest to this paper is the continuing engagement with war posters in the years immediately following the war until the early 1920s – a period when war 'moved to the heart of New Zealand identity' through increasing commemoration (Phillips 2000: 349). Posters were no longer seen in the streets, but were collected by museums, archives and individuals, and disseminated in publications and exhibitions worldwide. They were collected because they provided a window onto the war; they demonstrated participation and war effort; and they reminded audiences of the emotions of the war years. They were also

admired for their aesthetics and design, and poster exhibitions and displays were well received in this light. Regardless of their lack of veracity as historical evidence and their propagandist nature, war posters were considered important material culture of war until at least the early 1920s.

Te Papa holds about 130 such posters, published mainly in Britain, the United States of America and Canada. Most of these posters entered the Dominion Museum (predecessor of Te Papa) at the end of the war, when there were hopes of establishing a national war museum in Wellington. They represent a small fraction of the huge amount of war posters



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

Fig. 2 Poster, 'Come into the ranks', 1915 (printed by Roberts & Leete Ltd; published by Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, United Kingdom. Lithograph on paper, 949 × 630 mm. Gift of Department of Defence, 1919. GH016323, Te Papa). This poster is a perfect manifestation of attitudes towards men during the war – that they could be turned from passive civilians into seamless, purposeful and useful military columns.

Fig. 3 Poster, 'Women of Britain Say – "Go!"', May 1915 (by E.V. Kealey, United Kingdom; printed by Hill, Siffken & Co.; published by Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, United Kingdom. Lithograph on paper, 754 × 504 mm. Gift of Department of Defence, 1919. GH016292, Te Papa). Images of women and children were used to inspire or shame men into enlisting, regardless of the emotional pain and financial strain of losing a husband, brother or son to war.

Fig. 4 Poster, 'Remember Belgium', November 1914 (printed by Henry Jenkinson Ltd; published by Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, United Kingdom. Lithograph on paper, 1010 × 744 mm. Gift of Department of Defence, 1919. GH16304, Te Papa). Germany's violation of Belgium's neutrality was portrayed in several posters during the war to stimulate recruitment and fundraising. Such images and slogans had a legitimising effect on the business of war.

Fig. 5 Poster, 'Remember Scarborough!' January 1915 (by Lucy Kemp-Welch (1869–1958, United Kingdom); printed by David Allen & Sons Ltd; published by Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, United Kingdom. Photolithograph and block print on paper, 1510 × 985 mm. Gift of Department of Defence, 1919. GH016641, Te Papa). This poster portrays British anger over the German Navy's attack on Scarborough in December 1914, which killed dozens of civilians. It was probably seen in New Zealand during the war, and was at least discussed by the press, which singled it out as an example of 'the pictorial poster which has proved most attractive in securing recruits to His Majesty's forces' (Anonymous 1915a).

Fig. 6 Poster, 'I Want You For U.S. Army', 1917 (by James Montgomery Flagg (1877–1960, United States of America). Lithograph on paper, mounted on board and varnished, 1011 × 741 mm. Gift of Department of Defence, 1919. GH016374, Te Papa). This is the most famous of all American war posters, and was by one of America's best-known and admired illustrators.

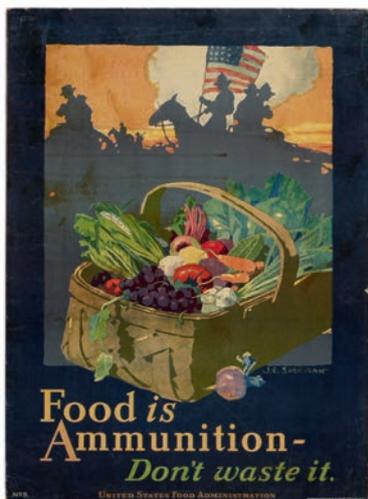


Fig. 7



Fig. 8

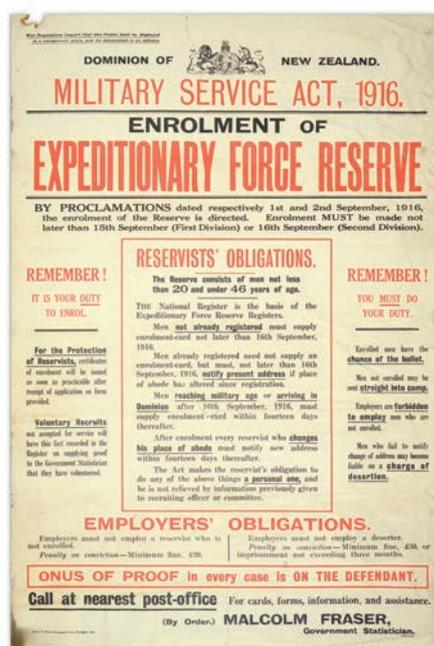


Fig. 9



Fig. 10

Fig. 7 Poster, 'Food is Ammunition', c. 1918 (by J.E. Sheridan (1880–1948, United States); printed by Heywood Strasser & Voigt Litho. Co.; published by United States Food Administration. Lithograph on paper mounted on strawboard and varnished, 738 × 534 mm. Gift of Department of Defence, 1919. GH016649, Te Papa).

Fig. 8 Poster, 'If ye break faith – we shall not sleep', 1918 (by Frank Lucien Nicolet (c. 1887/89–1944, Canada). Lithograph on paper mounted on board and varnished, 580 × 873 mm. Gift of Department of Defence, 1919. GH014067, Te Papa). Even though this poster was created for the specific purpose of raising money at the end of the war, the quote from the famous and enduring war poem by Canadian John McCrae (1872–1918) and the image of fields of red poppies would have resonated greatly with viewers in the 1920s (Poppy Day began in New Zealand in 1922).

Fig. 9 Poster, 'Military Service Act, 1916', August 1916 (signed by Malcolm Fraser, Government Statistician; printed by Marcus F. Marks, Government Printer, Wellington; issued by the National Recruiting Board, Wellington. Letterpress on paper, 765 × 504 mm. Eph-D-WAR-WI-1916-01, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington).

Fig. 10 Poster, 'Help to Win the War!', 5 August 1916 (signed by Joseph George Ward, Minister of Finance; probably printed by Government Printer, Wellington. Letterpress on paper; 570 × 450 mm. Eph-D-WAR-WI-1916-02, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington).

created and printed throughout the world. But their presence in New Zealand is a manifestation of British imperial culture and the transnational networks of cultural consumption of visual and print culture that operated at this time.

The visual plainness of New Zealand's own war posters, and their lack of national distinctiveness, has led to virtual silence in the relevant literature on war posters. This would not have been a surprise to the Director of the Dominion Museum, James Allan Thomson, who said in 1920: 'I have to advise that no war posters of artistic value were issued by the New Zealand Government' (Thomson to Hislop, 20 July 1920).

This paper begins to redress the absences by focusing on the history of Te Papa's First World War poster collection.

## War poster literature

Internationally, the key works on First World War posters are virtually silent on New Zealand's particular experience (Hardie & Sabin 1920; Rickards 1968; Darracott & Loftus 1972; Stanley 1983; Rawls 1988; Paret *et al.* 1992; Aulich 2007; Aulich & Hewitt 2007; James 2009).<sup>4</sup> There is very little analysis of the mechanics and experience of war posters on New Zealand's home front apart from minor references and reproductions as general illustrations. This omission is arguably due to the small numbers of posters produced in New Zealand, and that most were traditional letterpress notices. Two publications survey posters in New Zealand, both of them briefly noting First World War posters: Ellen Ellis's *The New Zealand poster book* (1977) and Hamish Thompson's *Paste up* (2003).<sup>5</sup>

As soon as First World War posters were printed and displayed by the warring nations, they attracted comment and analysis, initially in terms of their artistic merit and the degree of success achieved in design. An early text on First World War posters is *War posters: issued by belligerent and neutral nations 1914–1919* by Martin Hardie and Arthur K. Sabin (published in London, 1920). Their central premise was that posters were the one form of art that could meet the propaganda needs of warring governments. The merits of each country's war posters were judged as to whether they contributed to poster art in general. It is unknown whether the authors had seen New Zealand's war posters.<sup>6</sup> This focus on pictorial qualities dominates the subsequent literature and helps to account for the absence of New Zealand's experience.

Maurice Rickards wrote what is considered to be the classic text on First World War posters, *Posters of the First World War* (published in London, 1968). He observed discernible phases in poster creation, and that most of the warring nations' posters exhibited more similarities than differences. Again, New Zealand is not mentioned.

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, war posters continued to be investigated as important and relevant cultural objects of the First World War by scholars of history, design, literature, communication studies, and visual and print culture. Walton Rawls's *Wake up, America!* (1988) and Aulich and Hewitt's *Seduction or instruction?* (2007) provide detailed research on the production, distribution and reception of posters in the United States, United Kingdom and Europe. Aulich and Hewitt briefly note that countries such as New Zealand produced posters in an ad hoc manner, but with similar results to other countries within the empire (2007: 59). There is no further analysis.

Most recently, a wide range of international authors in Pearl James's *Picture this* (2009) interpret how posters functioned in various contexts at their time of production. New Zealand's experience is implied when James acknowledges that posters could function as messages between nations and 'from colonial powers to their imperial outposts' (James 2009: 4, 25). There is much to investigate in this observation and it forms a key idea in this article.

## Transnational posters

Transnationalism is an important area for study because New Zealand belonged to both the British Empire and to the trans-Tasman world (Byrnes 2009: 14; Pickles 2009: 223). Most poster scholarship is dominated by the nation as the major category of analysis, and ignores other models of consumption in which print and visual culture were imported, as was the case in New Zealand during the First World War.

Colourful and dramatic British recruitment posters were sent to countries within the empire to encourage recruitment. The New Zealand government periodically received such posters from late 1914 to early 1916 (Mackenzie to Massey, November 1918). The decision to rely on these imports would have been pragmatic and economic, as New Zealand's advertising industry was relatively undeveloped in this period, and the Government Printing Office was hard hit

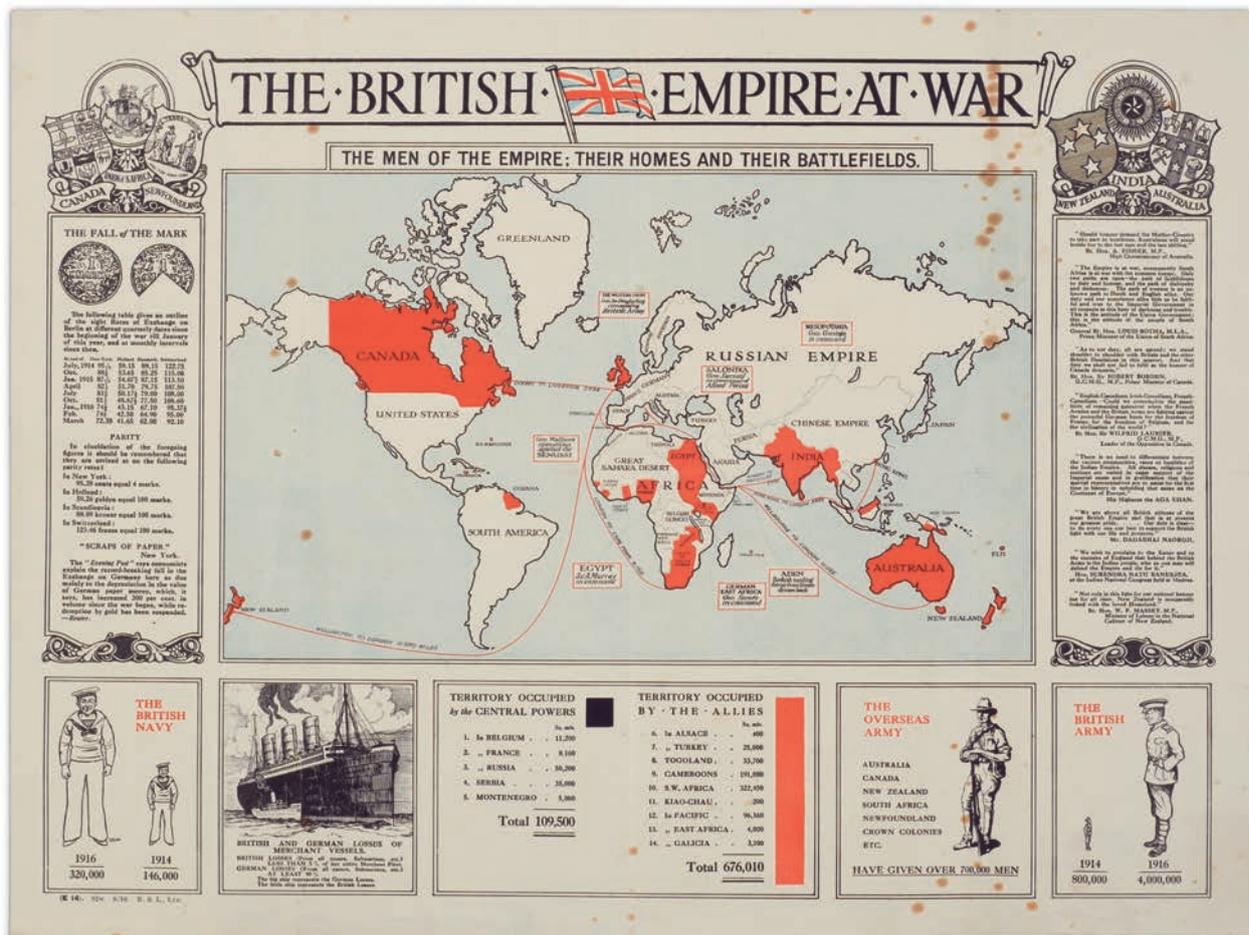


Fig. 11 Poster, 'The British Empire at War', 1916 (printed by Roberts & Leete Ltd, United Kingdom. Printed paper, 382 x 505 mm. Gift of Department of Defence, 1919. GH016657, Te Papa).

by the war, with many of its employees on active service, and paper shortages and antiquated equipment to contend with (Glue 1966: 99).<sup>7</sup>

Importation of British print culture also suggests that the New Zealand government relied on British posters to do the emotional and psychological work of recruitment, thereby acknowledging the shared imperial visual and textual languages of duty, courage and sacrifice prevalent across the empire at the time. The New Zealand government printed its own posters only when it needed to address local and specific concerns, such as the introduction of conscription and the raising of the war loans (e.g. Figs 9, 10). These concerns were based on legislation or government policy and therefore did not require pictorial content, or the techniques of advertising, to persuade the viewer.

New Zealand also belonged to trans-Tasman cultural, political and economic networks, which saw Australian war posters being imported by the New Zealand government to

help stimulate recruitment. For example, in March 1916 the New Zealand Recruiting Board purchased 100 copies of each of the 'eleven best designs' from the Victoria State Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, which were then distributed throughout New Zealand for display in March and April 1916 by local recruiting committees (Massey to Robinson, 6 March 1916; Gray to Secretaries of Recruiting Committees, April 1916) (see Fig. 1 for an example of such a poster on display).

New Zealand's reliance on war posters from Britain and Australia is not surprising considering the political, cultural, social and economic ties of empire at that time (McKinnon 1993: 237). New Zealanders saw themselves as imperial subjects, sharing an empire-wide culture. A separate sense of identity had been growing in New Zealand, but it coexisted with support for the empire (McIntyre 1992: 343). This support was unwavering during the war, both materially and intellectually.

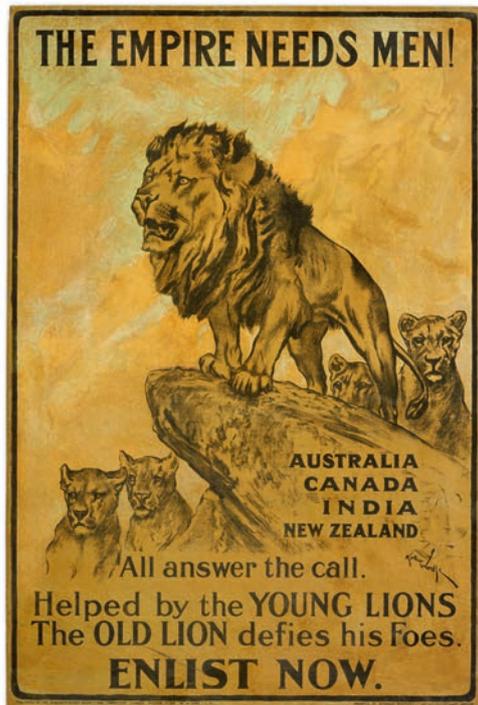


Fig. 12



Fig. 13

Fig. 12 Poster, 'The Empire Needs Men!' [also known as the 'Lion' poster], 1915 (by Arthur Wardle (1864–1949, England); printed by Straker Brothers Ltd; published by Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, United Kingdom. Chromolithograph on paper, mounted on board and varnished, 762 × 503 mm. Gift of Department of Defence, 1919. GH016383, Te Papa). The 'Lion' poster was originally printed without the list of countries (with 'The Overseas States all answer the call' instead). It was modified for far-flung parts of the British Empire, and a large supply was printed by the New Zealand government and distributed throughout the country to encourage recruiting (Allen to Mackenzie, 25 May 1916, 12 May 1919; Andrews to Australian War Museum, 15 January 1920; Anonymous 1915b). It was also slightly reworked locally by the *New Zealand Herald*, demonstrating the flexibility of such propaganda (Fig. 13).

Fig. 13 Poster, 'The Empire Needs Men!' 1915 (original design by Arthur Wardle, United Kingdom; redesigned and printed by the *New Zealand Herald*, Auckland. Letterpress and offset print on paper, 764 × 505 mm. AD 1 9/169/2/1 SEP 598, Archives New Zealand, Wellington).

From the 1890s, through the First World War and the years afterwards, values of imperialism, militarism, monarchism and patriotism were instinctive and widespread in New Zealand society. They were transmitted through, and reinforced by, the press, literature, popular culture (including the theatre and cinema), education, imperial exhibitions, patriotic associations, and through such activities as compulsory military training for boys and young men (MacKenzie 1984: 11; Baker 1988: 11; McIntyre 1992: 343; Belich 2001: 104; Aulich & Hewitt 2007: 36). British war posters drew upon and reinforced these values, employing shared languages of imperial rhetoric and imagery. Therefore, British posters were New Zealand's posters – officially everyone was part of the same empire, sharing its values and symbols, and participating in the same causes.

This mutual relationship was expressed in several British war posters, which included New Zealand as a key part of the empire's war efforts. The 1916 poster 'The British Empire at War' (Fig. 11) indicated the importance of New Zealand's contribution to the war, and would have reminded British viewers of the depth of loyalty and support being made by countries of the empire, and thereby, the usefulness of empire (Fogarty 2009: 174). The poster includes an emotional quote from New Zealand's Prime Minister William Massey, illustrating his deep loyalty to the British Empire: 'Not only in this fight for our national honour but for all time, New Zealand is inseparably linked with the loved Homeland.'

The most evocative poster illustrating the relationship between New Zealand, Britain and the empire is known as

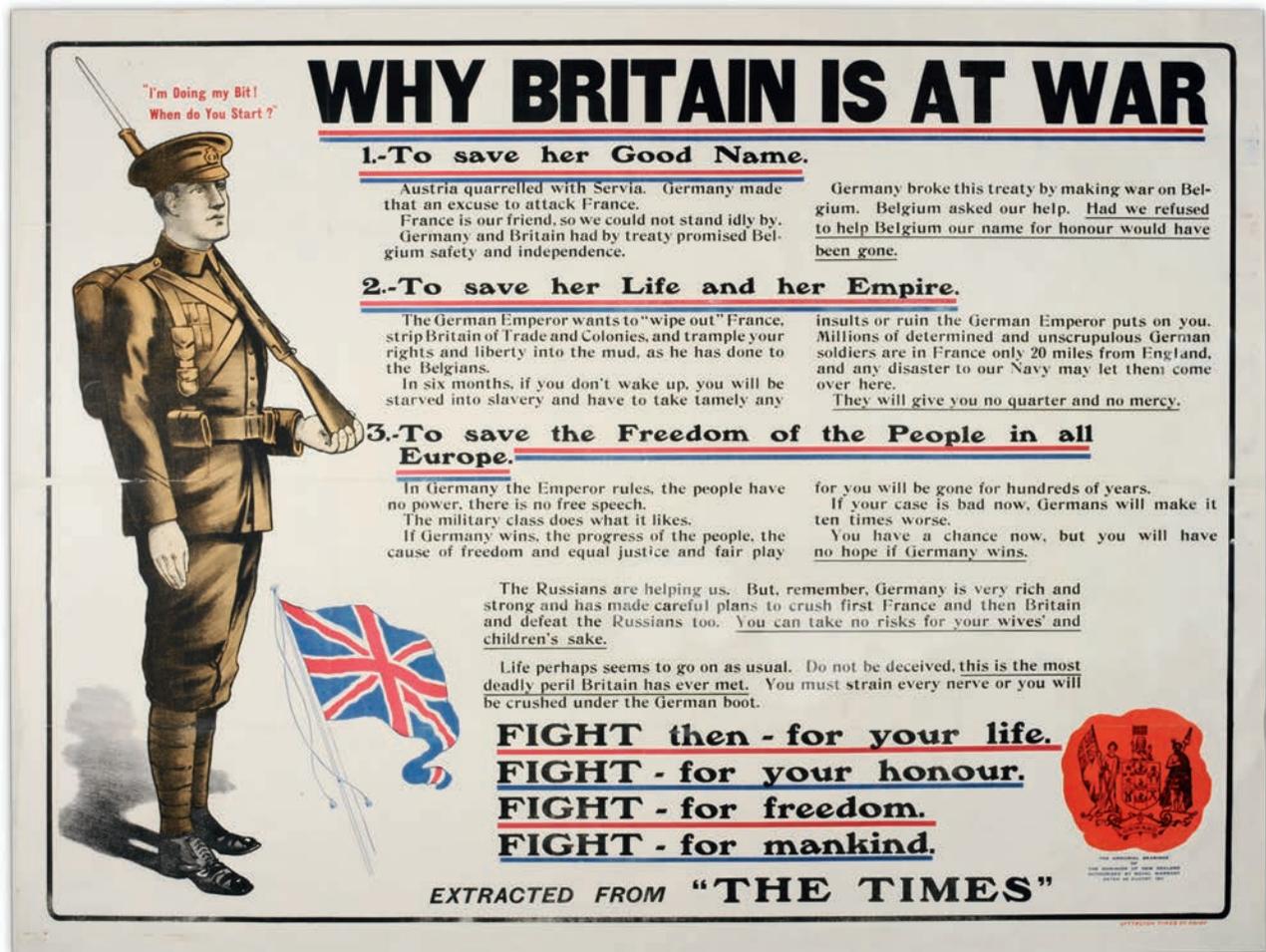


Fig. 14 Poster, 'Why Britain is at War', 1915 (printed by Lyttelton Times Company, Christchurch. Letterpress and lithograph on paper, 765 × 1010 mm. AD 1 917 44/235 SEP 412, Archives New Zealand). This poster is based on a British poster published in December 1914 (IWM PST 0948, Imperial War Museum, United Kingdom). It is notable for its large size and colour image, contrasting with New Zealand's smaller, text-only official posters of the same period.

the 'Lion' poster, and was widely seen in New Zealand from mid-1915 (Figs 12, 13). In this image, the young lion cubs (Australia, Canada, India and New Zealand) do not rebel against the 'Old Lion' (Britain) but take their place by their father's side (McKinnon 1993: 239).

The relationship was also expressed publicly by individuals. Businessman Frederick Ferriman was an enthusiastic supporter of various war efforts and fundraising. He instigated the production of a New Zealand version of a British poster (Fig. 14). The text for the poster was extracted from *The Times* newspaper in Britain, but was printed locally by the Lyttelton Times Company and distributed in Christchurch and 'other parts of the South Island with a view of stimulating recruiting' (Ferriman to Allen, 15 December 1915). Ferriman sent a copy of the poster to the

Minister of Defence, who declared it to be 'excellent' (Allen to Ferriman, 22 December 1915).

## Collecting war posters

A poster ... is by its nature a creation of the moment ... In its brief existence the poster is battered by the rain or faded by the sun, then pasted over with another message more urgent still. (Hardie & Sabin 1920: 4)

War posters achieved their initial meaning in public spaces at particularly intense moments of time. Few have survived because posters are essentially ephemeral – they are intended for short-term display to meet particular time-based needs. They are either pasted over or scraped off. Posters that last longer risk fading and degradation from exposure to the

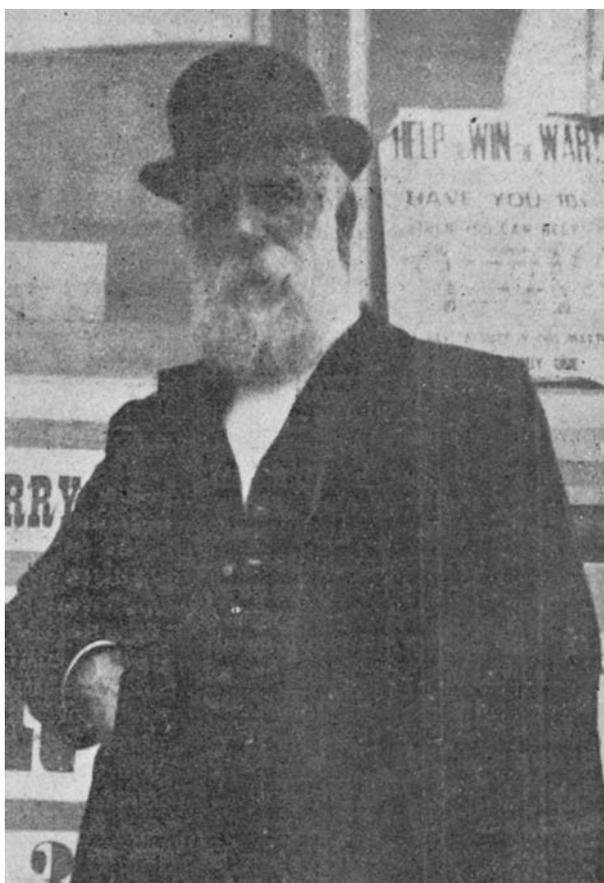


Fig. 15 A man stands in front of a slightly dilapidated 'Help to Win the War!' poster in late November 1916. The poster would have been pasted onto the window at least three months earlier, when it was issued. This photograph is rare visual evidence of an official New Zealand poster on display, and shows how tenacious a seemingly vulnerable piece of paper can be (photo: *New Zealand Observer* (25 November 1916, p. 19); reproduced courtesy of Auckland City Libraries).

elements (Fig. 15). The very materiality of posters puts them at risk, as they can be recycled for other purposes. This ephemerality prompted proactive collecting strategies. When the Imperial War Museum was established in London in 1917, it soon sought out war material from India and the dominions (including New Zealand), particularly posters and proclamations dealing with recruitment and war loans. 'It is important to collect such material as soon as possible as Posters and leaflets disappear very soon after the reason for their existence ceases to be of importance. This is specially the case with Recruiting Posters' (Lascelles to Mackenzie, 23 January 1918).

Many of the other nations involved in the First World War established specific war museums and/or collections

either during or after the conflict. Individuals and public institutions – including museums, archives and the armed forces – actively collected the material culture of war, from posters to 'war trophies' such as guns. Collecting for war museums in this way was both a commemorative act to show the 'stupendous character' of the conflict and each nation's efforts, and a patriotic act as the material often became the basis for important national collections (Winter 1995: 80).

Like war trophies and other objects of warfare, posters were considered significant as markers of imperial war effort, achievement and victory. They were seen as records of the part played by each nation. At the very least, they could illustrate some of the most important aspects of war, such as recruitment and fundraising (Anonymous 1919c). However, unlike the hardware of war, the visual and textual nature of posters could be a reminder of the 'sentiments and emotions of the war years' (Anonymous 1921b). They acted as a window on the past – how people remembered or imagined the war – even though their meanings were far from the realities of actual warfare (James 2009: 32).

## Collecting war posters at the Dominion Museum

From 1917, the Dominion Museum began collecting war material with assistance from the New Zealand High Commissioner in London, and from the Department of Defence, mainly through its New Zealand War Records Section in London. The War Records Section was established in 1917 to gather posters, pamphlets, war literature, diaries, war trophies, maps, photographs, pictures, uniforms and medals in anticipation of the establishment of a war museum in New Zealand (Anonymous, 16 December 1918).

The Dominion Museum's aim was to develop a collection 'illustrating the history of New Zealand's part in the present war', which it elevated to the 'Great War' in 1918 (Dominion Museum 1917: 3; 1918: 2). The director of the museum, James Thomson, hoped for a new building to house and display the large amount of material being collected.<sup>8</sup> Such a facility was to be similar to the newly established British Imperial War Museum, which aimed 'to record for all time the valour of the Empire's fighting services, the sacrifices of the Empire's peoples' (Dominion Museum 1919: 1). The press concurred with the desire for an appropriate war memorial, which could take the form of a museum to 'record to us and to our children what New

Zealand citizens, called to arms in the cause of liberty and justice, could suffer and achieve'. Such a museum would 'illustrate every phase of the great struggle'. War posters would play a role by illustrating recruitment and fundraising campaigns (Anonymous 1919c).

Concerns about how the war should be commemorated for New Zealanders and a sense of the exceptional historical significance of the 'Great War' were major driving forces in the Dominion Museum's collecting:

The Great European War of 1914–1918 is one of the most important events of all history, and as such calls for some material representation by which the children of this, and future generations may adequately picture what the war was and meant. Not only so, but it was one of the most important events in New Zealand history, and we would fail in our duty to posterity if we did not attempt to preserve the fullest knowledge of what part New Zealand and New Zealanders took in it ... For the non-reading public a war museum will furnish the best way of envisaging the war and what it has meant. (Thomson (attrib.) to Allen and Russell, July 1919)

During this period of discussion, First World War posters were given to the Dominion Museum by private collectors and government departments, including the Department of Defence and the Department of Internal Affairs. In April 1918, the Department of Defence gave a parcel of 'British War literature', including posters, to the Dominion Museum (Dominion Museum 1909–1966: 38). At the same time, a parcel of French war material, including posters, was received, purchased through the New Zealand High Commissioner in London, Sir Thomas Mackenzie (Dominion Museum 1909–1966: 38).<sup>9</sup> In February 1919, the Dominion Museum received a parcel of over a hundred British and American war posters from the High Commissioner (Thomson to Hislop, 19 February 1919). This parcel contained British and American food economy posters, American recruiting posters and coal economy literature collected by the War Records Section in London (e.g. Figs 6, 7).

In July 1919, the museum received gifts of Canadian and American war posters from two Wellington donors (Dominion Museum 1909–1966: 79). In his acknowledgement letters, Thomson noted that about 200 British, American and Canadian posters had been received, and that he hoped to exhibit them 'at an early date' (Thomson to Holmes and Von Haast, 14 July 1919). Thomson made no distinction between the different nations' posters, reinforcing the notion of shared visual and textual languages across the empire and its allies.

Later in July 1919, the Dominion Museum provided a 'rough' list of its war-related material to the New Zealand Military Forces, which included American and French war posters (Thomson to Richardson, 30 July 1919).<sup>10</sup> The day after the museum provided the list, and possibly prompted by the omission of New Zealand-made posters in its collection, Thomson asked the Department of Internal Affairs for 'as complete a collection as possible of posters used in New Zealand in connection with Recruiting, Military Service, and War Loans, as well as those used for patriotic purposes' for the proposed war museum. He recommended that posters and notices be sought from the Government Statistician, Treasury Department and the Post and Telegraph Department (Thomson to Hislop, 31 July 1919). This request was duly carried out, and posters and other ephemera from all three departments arrived at the Dominion Museum during September 1919 (Dominion Museum 1909–1966: 88, 92). None of these official New Zealand posters now remains in Te Papa's collections. They were possibly part of the transfer of war literature and propaganda to the newly established Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington in August 1920.<sup>11</sup>

Ultimately, a national war museum was not established in New Zealand, and many of the military objects stored either at Trentham Military Camp in the Hutt Valley or at the Dominion Museum were eventually distributed to museums and city councils around the country. The Dominion Museum kept only international posters, mainly from the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada, and these remain in Te Papa's collection today.<sup>12</sup> Ironically, Te Papa holds only four privately produced New Zealand-made war posters and their provenance is unknown.

## War posters as aesthetic objects

Exhibitions of war posters were held both during the First World War and afterwards, for example in London, Berlin and New York (Darracott & Loftus 1972: 7).<sup>13</sup> Most of the warring nations were interested in the degree of success achieved by propaganda posters in terms of design and message, and there was great interest in the artistic merits of each nation's posters. This interest was part of a continuum of study into poster art and design from before the war. Exhibitions of war posters continued to be held after the war and continued to engage audiences even though their original functions and meanings had passed.<sup>14</sup>

The aesthetic and comparative approach appears to be in tune with how New Zealand audiences understood war

posters. For example, on their arrival in 1919, the majority of Te Papa's posters caused a stir in the press when acting director James McDonald showed the collection to journalists from the *Evening Post* and *New Zealand Times* newspapers (Anonymous 1919a,b). The *Evening Post* reported at length on the differences between the British and American posters, favouring the American ones as having a 'snap and freshness that are generally lacking in the English poster' (Anonymous 1919a). The *Post* also considered American posters 'of distinct educational value as to what may be achieved in the direction of poster appeals' (Anonymous 1919a). The favouring of American posters was not surprising given that poster production and advertising were far more technologically advanced and sophisticated in the United States than in Europe during this period (Kazecki & Lieblang 2009: 111).

In terms of subject matter, war posters were seen as educational and colourful exhibits for conveying the main themes and issues of the war, which in the case of the Dominion Museum were considered to be recruitment, military service, war loans and patriotism (Thomson to Hislop, 31 July 1919). Whether or not the content of the posters was ever true to the experience of the home front or actual warfare appears not to have been a subject for debate.

## Exhibiting war posters

War had become crucial to New Zealand identity in the 1920s, and was publicly expressed through the legislating of Anzac Day as a formal day of remembrance in 1921, huge attendances at Anzac Day parades, and the building of hundreds of war memorials throughout the country (Phillips 2000: 349; Worthly 2002; Anonymous 2007).

These types of commemoration may account for Thomson observing in 1920 that there was 'little public interest' in the large military war trophies such as trench mortars. He proposed storing the larger objects at Trentham Military Camp to free up space at the Dominion Museum, which he was able to achieve later that year. In the meantime, he proposed exhibiting the war posters instead (Thomson to Richardson, 18 June 1920; Anonymous 1920).

In March 1921, the Defence League held a 'citizen soldiers' carnival' in Wellington (Anonymous 1921a). The carnival was a success and prompted the Department of Defence to tour an exhibition of 'war trophies and wounded soldiers' work' around the country (Richardson to Minister of Defence, 23 March 1921). The Dominion Museum

offered 100 framed British, American, Canadian and French war posters to the Defence Department for inclusion in the exhibition (Hislop to Richardson, 5 July 1921; Hislop to McDonald, 20 July 1921).

The posters were mounted on wood-pulp board or strawboard, varnished for protection, and then framed in wood. The posters were varnished for at least two reasons. First, glazing was expensive and ephemera such as posters would not have justified such expense. Second, the risk of breakage while transporting glazed works by rail and steamer was considered too great, as had been proven by earlier experiences (Hislop to Richardson, 5 July 1921).

The posters began their tour with a 10-day display at the Dominion Museum in August 1921, which was advertised as a 'Special Exhibition of British, American, and Canadian War Posters' (Anonymous 1921c). It is difficult to measure the effectiveness of war posters at their time of posting, but the enthusiastic reception of this exhibition by the press indicates that First World War posters still had currency and meaning in the years immediately following the war:

A very interesting exhibit of war posters is on view at the Dominion Museum at the present time. It forms a part of the National War Collection, and presently it is to be added to the exhibition of war trophies now visiting various centres in New Zealand ... They include many striking designs and some attractive examples of the printer's art ... Some of them are the work of well-known artists, who gave of their best in national causes. They range from the grim to the gay, and are of historic value as recording the sentiments and emotions of war years ... The collection is bound to interest very many people. (Anonymous 1921c)

After the exhibition at the Dominion Museum, the framed posters were added to the touring exhibition about halfway through its itinerary. From April to December 1921, the exhibition spent about a week in each venue throughout the lower half of the North Island (Wanganui, Napier, Hastings, Masterton, Palmerston North, New Plymouth, Stratford, Hawera, Taihape, Feilding, Levin) (Various 1921–1922). Auckland declined to be involved, as its War Memorial Committee aimed to display its own material (Potter to Defence Headquarters, 7 May 1921).

The touring exhibition was met with varying degrees of public enthusiasm and local authority support (Various 1921–1922). Overall, it was considered 'every way successful', particularly in Hawera and Hastings, and particularly in terms of educational value to both adults and children (Central Military Command to Defence Headquarters,

15 March 1922). The war posters are not mentioned in reports on the exhibition, but were possibly among the ‘attractions which absorbed’ visitors for ‘considerable periods’. ‘It is plainly evident these war mementos, each of which carries a history which anyone with an imagination can weave around, have become a consuming attraction’ (Central Military Command to Defence Headquarters, 5 September 1921).

The exhibition then began to tour the South Island. However, declining public interest was identified at the Christchurch and Kaiapoi displays in December 1921, and the rest of the tour was cancelled, with the objects being returned to Wellington (Southern Command to Defence Headquarters, 14 December 1921).

From 1922 to 1924, the mounted war posters received a new lease of life in the context of two trade exhibitions. The Dominion Museum sent 101 mounted war posters to Christchurch for an ‘Art and the War Section’ of the Dominion Industrial Exhibition held from November 1922 to January 1923, along with war art, war photographs, portraits of notable servicemen and war memorial designs (Anonymous 1922b). In this context, the posters were far removed from war and commemoration, and were diffused by being scattered throughout the exhibition. Nevertheless, they made an impact on the press:

Perhaps the most interesting of exhibits not manufactured in New Zealand, are the posters used in various countries during the war. These adorn the walls in various parts of the building, and some of them are fine examples of art. The best painters of the various countries lent their skill in the cause of recruiting, and the posters ... are very striking. (Anonymous 1922a)

In late 1923, the Dominion Museum sent eight cases of the mounted war posters (along with war memorial designs and photographs) to Hokitika Museum for the British and Intercolonial Exhibition held from 15 December 1923 to 2 February 1924 to commemorate the completion of Arthur’s Pass Tunnel and to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of the Province of Westland (Evans to Thomson, 15 February 1924). The posters were presented as ‘Government War Posters and Pictures’ (British and Intercolonial Exhibition 1923: 207). This exhibition appears to be the last time that the mounted war posters were sent out for display. Possibly the success of Anzac Day in commemorating the war, and the building of permanent and personalised war memorials throughout the country, lessened the need for temporary displays of wartime artefacts such as posters.

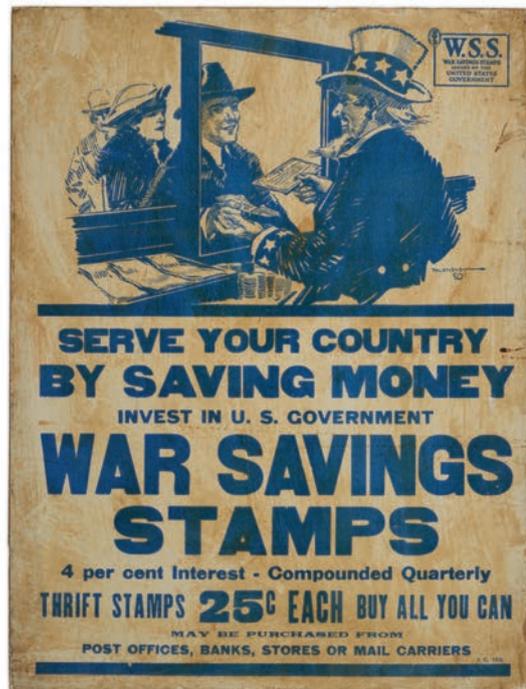


Fig. 16



Fig. 17

Fig. 16 Poster, ‘Serve Your Country By Saving Money’, 1918 (by Reinhold Palenske (1884–1954, United States); published by United States government. Lithograph and block print on paper, mounted on strawboard and varnished, 738 × 534 mm. Gift of Department of Defence, 1919. GH016656, Te Papa).

Fig. 17 The remains of framing nails are still embedded into the backing board of this particular poster (GH016656, Te Papa).

## Conclusion

Posters are ephemeral objects, intended for temporary public lives. But no matter how ephemeral, some First World War posters survived through the efforts of individuals and institutions such as the Dominion Museum, now Te Papa.

A recent assessment project has identified that 40 of the original 100 mounted war posters remain in Te Papa’s

collections but no longer have their frames. The remaining 60 may have been damaged in transit, destroyed, taken as souvenirs or given to other institutions. The mounted posters show much wear and tear. The varnished glazing has yellowed over time, with drips and brush hairs visible. Rusty remains of nails are embedded into the backing boards. Dirty edges show evidence of where the frames once touched the posters (Figs 16, 17).

Te Papa's collection of First World War posters provides an interesting case study on imperial networks and transnational consumption of print and visual culture during and immediately after the war. The New Zealand government printed its own posters only when absolutely required, and generally relied on the importation of colourful and dramatic British and Australian posters to encourage recruitment. Long-standing transnational networks and shared imperial ideology made the acceptance of overseas posters possible within a New Zealand context.

Until at least the early 1920s, war posters were significant as markers of imperial war effort, achievement and victory, and appeared to hold sentimental and emotional value for audiences. The details of the collection of the posters at the Dominion Museum, their display around the country and their reception in press reports at the time demonstrate that New Zealand society continued to engage positively with such objects in the years immediately following the war, even though their original functions had long passed.

Back in 1917, the original driving force had been to build a collection worthy of a national war museum. Such a museum was not achieved, but the collection of international First World War posters remains at Te Papa, providing a window onto the war and how people remembered and imagined it – a process still continuing today.

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## Notes

- 1 This paper is part of a larger research project into the creation, display, circulation and reception of First World War posters in New Zealand. The dating of the First World War from 1914 to 1919 is based on the official end of the war in June 1919, when the Treaty of Versailles was signed.
- 2 The United States of America printed more than 20 million copies of around 2500 poster designs – this was more than all the warring nations combined (Rawls 1988: 12). The British Parliamentary Recruitment Committee produced 12.5 million copies of 164 poster designs (Aulich & Hewitt 2007: 36).
- 3 For example, *The Colonist* reported that 'an American recruiting poster now on view in Dunedin, is attracting much attention' (Anonymous 1917). 'Two very interesting American recruiting posters' were displayed in a Wellington pharmacy (Anonymous 1918). These examples suggest that private individuals may have sourced war posters from overseas as part of their personal war efforts.
- 4 One interesting comment can be found in an Imperial War Museum exhibition catalogue, which observed that Auckland's recruiting station represented 'the slickness of New Zealand poster display' as opposed to messy, crowded British displays (Darracott & Loftus 1972: 72) (Fig. 1).
- 5 Ellen Ellis features one First World War poster in *The New Zealand poster book* (1977: iv and 30). She notes the paucity of New Zealand-produced posters and the reliance on British posters. Hamish Thompson's *Paste up: a century of New Zealand poster art* (2003: 48) features three posters, very briefly focusing on their design. The author's work on Second World War posters briefly compares the posters of the two world wars (Gibson 2008: 14).
- 6 If New Zealand's posters had been seen, they may have been considered 'mediocre' as they were predominantly letterpress printed and generally lacked pictorial content (Hardie & Sabin 1920: 36).

- 7 This is in contrast to other British dominions such as Australia, Canada and South Africa, which printed many of their own striking posters featuring non-British imagery and vernacular language, regardless of imported posters. The author has not yet uncovered documentation on the government's decision to rely mainly on British and Australian recruitment posters.
- 8 Thomson had hoped for a new museum building since before the war. The Dominion Museum building was inadequate, decaying, overcrowded, unattractive to visitors and unable to meet the functions of a museum. The large incoming collections of war material at the end of the war, and their national significance, provided Thomson with compelling calls for change (Dominion Museum 1919: 1).
- 9 It appears that most of the contents of these two parcels were transferred to the newly established Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington in August 1920 to await the establishment of a 'War Museum Library' as part of the proposed war museum (Dominion Museum 1909–1966; McDonald to Hanna, 30 January 1922). However, a few British posters remain in Te Papa's collection from this period. A spare copy of one of these posters was transferred to Auckland Museum and is stamped 'Dominion Museum, 10 Jul 1918' (GH016636, Te Papa; PW1 (55), Auckland War Memorial Museum).
- 10 None of these French and Australian posters now exists in Te Papa's collection, and their subsequent history is currently unknown. The 'rough' list does not mention the British and Canadian war posters held by the museum. This lack of item-level accuracy is typical of how museums treated ephemera such as posters during this period. In the Dominion Museum's first history register (known as the F-GH Register), posters were grouped loosely by parcels and packets, and described by country of origin and broadly by type. It is almost impossible to know which organisation or individual gave which posters. The following posters and their dates of receipt were noted by the Dominion Museum in the History Department's F-GH Register:
- April 1918 (F.716). 'Parcel of French Pamphlets ... relating to the German occupation of Belgium together with several cartoons and other Posters, purchased through High Commissioner' (transferred to Alexander Turnbull Library, 28 August 1920) (Dominion Museum 1909–1966: 38).
  - April 1918 (F.717). 'Parcel of British War literature comprising ... Posters ... Presented by Col. Gibbons' (transferred to Alexander Turnbull Library, 28 August 1920) (Dominion Museum 1909–1966: 38).
  - June 1919 (F.1263). '15 U.S.A. War Posters presented by Miss K. Holmes' (Dominion Museum 1909–1966: 79).
  - September 1919 (F.1378). 'New Zealand War Loan Posters and Sundry [War Loan] Notices. Presented by Internal Affairs' (Dominion Museum 1909–1966: 88).
  - September 1919 (F.1379). 'Sundry Notices, Forms, Etc used in connection with Enrolment of the N.Z. Expeditionary Forces and Reinforcements. Presented by the Govt. Statistician' (Dominion Museum 1909–1966: 88; Fraser to Hislop, 29 August 1919).
  - September 1919 (F.1386). '24 American War Posters, from Prime Minister's Office' (Dominion Museum 1909–1966: 89).
  - 24 September 1919 (F.1428). '1 Pcl. War Loan Posters & Postal Notices re Correspondence N.Z.E.F.' from the General Post Office via Department of Internal Affairs (Dominion Museum 1909–1966: 92; Morris to Hislop, 18 September 1919).
- Missing from the F-GH Register are the large consignment of posters from the High Commissioner in London in early 1919 (Mackenzie to Massey, November 1918), and the gift of Canadian war posters from Mr K.F. Von Haast, solicitor of Wellington, in July 1919.
- 11 They could be what was referred to in the *Turnbull Library Record* as 'some propaganda dross of the war' (Bagnell 1970: 100).
- 12 The posters can now be accessed on Te Papa's Collections Online database (<http://collections.tepapa.govt.nz>).
- 13 New Zealand's war posters were seen at least once in London, when the High Commissioner displayed the government's posters alongside examples from other Dominions as 'part of a vigorous recruiting campaign' (Gray to Defence Headquarters, 25 August 1916; Anonymous 1916).
- 14 For example, a large exhibition titled *War Posters of Many Nations* was held in London in June 1919 (Aulich & Hewitt 2007: 12).

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