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## **INTRODUCTION**

Like many other professions caught up in the heady first months of the war, painters and sculptors –professional and amateur, famous and obscure – were called upon to enlist in the armed services. Some thirty artists joined the RAMC *en bloc* following a single recruitment visit to the bar of the Chelsea Arts Club by the commandant of the 3<sup>rd</sup> London General Hospital. (1) *The Studio* – a popular arts and crafts magazine – ran page-long lists of those who had signed up; many joined the Artists' Rifles, an officer-training unit, which attracted painters, poets, architects, writers, and many others with artistic aspirations – if not the talent. (2) Some chose to ignore the call to arms. Many had little choice: war was bad for business. The art market shrivelled, prices tumbled, artist's materials became scarce. While emerging artists wrestled with their patriotic consciences, established artists were expected to donate items of work to patriotic causes or to offer up blank canvases for auctions organised by the Red Cross and other charities. (3)

However, not everyone in Britain thought the onset of war an unmitigated catastrophe. Many on the right of the political spectrum saw it not as the end of the golden period of Victorian and Edwardian eminence, but an opportunity to purge the nation of social maladies – amongst them feminism, industrialization, modernism, and futurism – which they felt had blighted the country in the previous decade. (4) Only war, they argued, had the power to regenerate society and purge it of 'the spectre of national decay.' Fulminating in *The Architect* magazine, W.R.Colton later gave shape to these spectres, insisting that it was 'high time' war set to work with its purifying fire:

A wave of diseased degeneracy had submerged Philosophy, Music, Literature, and Art to such a depth that, looking forward, I venture to prophesy that future centuries will gaze back with pity upon this period

of mistaken morbidity. The futurists, the cubists, the whole school of decadent novelists. (5)

In the years before the war, Futurism and the Modern Movement had burst into England in a succession of noisy and bizarre interventions. Its most potent messenger had been the Italian Futurist Filippo Marinetti, a nihilistic and bombastic artist-cum-demagogue, whose manifestos and loud proclamations galvanized and traumatized in equal measure the emerging *avant-garde* in London. Marinetti and his Futurists glorified machinery, noise, and destruction, and welcomed the prospect of war as an 'essential hygiene' that would wipe out stale value systems and structures. (6)

Not unreasonably, the bastions of those value systems reviled the posturing Italian and his radical ideas, arguing instead that a 'just' war would release sufficient positive energy to sweep away 'that vague and chaotic groping' of the last few years, heralding a positive rejuvenation of decency and culture, and bringing with it – for good measure – the extinction of cultural 'undesirables'. (10)

Collins Baker, Keeper at the National Gallery, epitomized the moral stance of the British Establishment by claiming in August 1914, that art would benefit in the long-term from a cleansing conflict 'great enough to engrave the world's mind deeply' (8) and he was sure it would strengthen society, make it less frivolous, and 'more serious and thoughtful in its pursuits'. (9)

Having shot down those social and cultural deviants who peddled their trade on the Continent, the principle target in England was the small, but noisy, group of radicals that had raised their flag around Percy Wyndham Lewis and the Rebel Art Centre in central London. Demonised by the conservative press, lambasted by the Academy, Lewis and his gang were condemned as the 'bohemian and debauched icons' of the pre-war era. In the *English Review*, one critic warned that unless these home-borne *dilettanti* were purged too, 'Future historians will say that the age went dancing to its doom.' (11) Even the normally sympathetic editor of *New Age*, hoped that Lewis and his fellow-Vorticists might 'all perish in the war.' (12)

For their part, few of the modernist artists targeted by such vitriol were enthusiastic about the outbreak of the conflict. Jacob Epstein typified their

reluctance when he declared 'Really I am too important to waste my days thinking of matters military', an imperious view that rebounded badly upon him in the years to come. (13) Paul Nash was equally resistant, volunteering at first for home service only; William Roberts was similarly reticent, and, despite his outward show of martial zeal, Richard Nevinson spent much of his time trying to avoid compulsory active service. Others joined under duress, or because they could not afford otherwise.

More broadly, the moderate intelligentsia regarded the war as offering a very different set of opportunities to those on the right; some believed it could unite the disparate factions, unifying the many conflicting artistic causes that had surfaced in the frenetic days before the war. Others asked, whether it was now possible to rediscover a unifying visual and artistic language, to repair – even close – the chasm between art and the public? Could the vicissitudes of war, asked others, reverse the degeneration into abstraction that had mannered the arts in the years leading to 1914? Was artistic unification possible, even desirable? Certainly, there were those, like Laurence Binyon, who argued for a doctrine of cultural and social cohesion. 'What is needed now', he implored, 'is the fusion of one imaginative effort that shall make art again a single language expressing the whole modern man.' (14) Given the deafening cacophonies of the period, this was very unlikely; art had become 'a barometer of cultural health', it was being discussed in terms of maladies and purges, of hygiene and heroics. Art and war had become, for many of those involved, a tussle between the world of the imagination and the world of action. (15)

Of course, only a relatively small number of artists were involved in the debates generated by the threat to the avant-garde. For many others, their interests were best represented by one of the long-established academies of art that existed in London and in the regions. The students, graduates and staff of these august institutions would soon become the advocates, advisors, and artists of the official war art schemes that would be created as the war entered its second and third years. As we shall see, the government-funded schemes for commissioning official images of wartime were both a lifeline and a liability to artists. Many artists were commissioned; many who thought themselves eminently employable were to be disappointed, others had their

skills redeployed into field camouflage, survey-work or cartography; many were simply overlooked or forgotten and found themselves in uniform without the advantage of rank or official status.

### **Eric Kennington: soldier-artist**

One of the best examples of an artist who made the difficult transformation from front-line soldier to government-sponsored artist was Eric Kennington. (16) When he was posted overseas with the 1/13<sup>th</sup> (County of London) Battalion The London Regiment – the 'Kensingtons' – in November 1914 he was no ordinary foot-soldier. At twenty-six he was a highly skilled painter, widely recognised for his technical virtuosity and exceptional draughtsmanship. A frequent exhibitor at the Royal Academy annual shows, he had studied at Lambeth School of Art and at the City and Guilds School but he found little time for artistic pursuits in his time with the Kensingtons on the Western Front. Lodged in poorly-maintained trenches near the village of Laventie on the Lys Valley, Kennington experienced at first-hand the privations of front-line infantry work, a period brought ignominiously to a close after a shooting accident in which he lost a toe. Laventie was a grim and uncharitable place, evocatively remembered in a regimental memoir drawn up twenty years later:

*When the open warfare of the early autumn stagnated into the holding of trenches, little damage had been done to the villages near the line. As the enemy artillery was brought up, however, systematic shelling started, and the quiet village of Laventie was the first to suffer, situated, as it was, very close to the line. Piteous processions of refugees were to be seen carrying bundles and wheeling trucks containing some cherished possessions to less dangerous areas. The village itself was a sorry spectacle ... In the village a street appeared as though a giant hand had swept all the houses on one side into ruins, while the other side was untouched. (17)*

Out of this wretchedness, Kennington wrought something quite extraordinary. While convalescing in England he composed and completed perhaps the first great painting of the war – *The Kensingtons at Laventie* – a brutally beautiful composition of a platoon of British soldiers caught in the moment of forming up in a ruined street before setting off to their billets. Emotionally isolated from each other, exhausted, wan and weather-beaten, the platoon is a unit in name

only. Few artists had created so uncompromising, yet so stunningly seductive, image of contemporary war. (18)

In a detailed commentary on the painting, (19) Kennington has left a riveting account of the individual stories of Platoon no.7. He tells the tale behind the plundered German *pickle-haube* helmet strapped to the webbing of Private McCafferty, the figure with his back to us who is also shouldering two rifles, one his own and the other previously belonging to a 'Private Perry' who had been shot by a sniper alongside McCafferty in the trenches along la Rue Tilleloy. On the right, scanning the rather dishevelled group, stands Corporal Kealey, about to give the command 'Fall in No 7 Platoon'. In the centre, Private 'Tug' Wilson remains alert, his fork and spoon tucked into the top of his puttee, his rifle-sight clad in a blue scarf to keep out the mud and freezing water. To his left, the diminutive figure of Private Guy, widely respected by his fellows as one who 'never groused or slacked', looks down, without judgment, at the prone figure of the underage Private Todd, 'exhausted' so Kennington tells us, 'by continual service, hard work, lack of sleep, long hours of 'standing to' and observing.' Todd was later discharged and returned to civilian employment where, along with others in the platoon he was tracked down and drawn by Kennington, who underscores the authenticity of the scene by including himself at the back of the group, clad in a waterproof sheet and knitted balaclava hat, nearly lost in the dense tones of the painting's left-hand strip. (20)

Exhibited at the Goupil Gallery in Regent Street, London in April and May 1916, the painting caused a sensation, not least because Kennington chose to paint in reverse on glass, an ancient and demanding technique which gives an extraordinary luminosity to the scene and accentuates the staged theatricality of the grim *tableau*. (21) Reviewers were unanimous in their praise of its technical virtuosity, its iconic colour scheme, and its 'stately presentation of human endurance, of the quiet heroism of the rank and file':

The picture convinces us that it is real life, but it is not at all like a photograph of an actual scene. Without any sentimentality or forcing of expression Mr Kennington makes visible to us what all these men are feeling. They are ordinary men, very tired and dirty; there is none of the romance of war as it is commonly painted. No-one is enjoying the thought that he is a hero or is making history; and yet all these soldiers are at one in their common sense of duty and determined to endure;

and it is this sense, made visible, that imparts beauty to the picture.  
(22)

Although several influential public figures objected to its harsh realism, Kennington's supporters and patrons (including several army generals) lobbied his case and he was employed, (but not until August 1917) as an official war artist. (23) Unfortunately, despite his cast-iron credentials, he did not thrive in this role: his terms of commission were strict, he had no official car, no expenses, no salary; his materials failed to arrive in France and he was constantly harassed by officials who doubted his authority and, once challenged, grew weary of his notorious irascibility. To add to his discomforts, Kennington's preferred subject-matter – the 'fighting man' - upon which his reputation had been built, proved elusive and he was reduced to drawing 'tents and shacks and camp rubbish'. Undeterred, he eventually produced a suite of imposing pastel drawings extolling the magnificence of his revered front-line troops – raiders, bombers, 'A giant Cheshire', 'an 8<sup>th</sup> Queen's hero'. (24) Unfortunately, his subsequent one-man show in London was spoilt by a long-winded wrangle over the censoring of many titles and a graceless dispute with the war museum over the pricing of his work. (25) So, despite the critical acclaim that heralded the show – the poet Robert Graves commended his unique ability to capture 'the trench point of view' – Kennington felt artistically and financially impoverished by his experience as a war artist. The success of the 'Kensingtons' however, alerted the British authorities to the potential power of visual propaganda, and proved to be one of the tipping points in the official patronage of artists.

### **Commissioning the artists: propaganda, record, and commemoration**

While Kennington was being hurriedly mobilized in August 1914, the onset of war soon dispersed the Modernist group of artists and writers who had collected around Wyndham Lewis. Under vitriolic tirades from the right-wing press, war had itself been declared on the *avant-garde*, indeed on the young themselves. Everything that might be regarded as new, innovative and lively was ridiculed as alien and inimical to the patriotic cause. The slightest hint of

Futurism, Vorticism, or Imagism, as Hynes recounts, was derided as 'a sickness, a fraud, or a foolish triviality'. (26) Although the momentum of pre-war Modernism sustained the arts for a short while into 1915, caution prevailed. (27) Ironically, into this hesitant, at times septic, environment was introduced one of the largest and most comprehensive arts patronage schemes ever to be devised in the country. It was a scheme that is now regarded as one of the British government's 'few inspired moments' of the entire war, largely because it eventually recognised the cultural value of artistic records in addition to their initial function as propaganda. (28) It had several phases – a propaganda phase, a 'record' (or documentary) period, and a final commemorative chapter, which tried to fashion the vast body of commissioned art into meaningful shape. Few of these phases were pure; they overlapped; they repeated, they are now almost impossible to untangle. Happenstance also played a major part in the choice of artists: rivalry saw some promoted over others; prejudice denied some the opportunity to escape the tedium of active service. Those who were commissioned – and there were a great many – produced some of the most extraordinary pieces of art of the last century. Exactly how it came about is a fascinating, if slightly, convoluted tale.

The true origins of the official British war art scheme can be traced to a decision made by the Foreign Office in late August 1914 to establish a secret agency to manage and disseminate British propaganda. Headed by Liberal politician Charles F.G. Masterman, it was known simply as Wellington House, after its office address in Buckingham Gate, central London. Working in secret, it published and distributed clandestine literature aimed at neutral countries across the globe. In April 1916 a pictorial section was established and an extraordinary variety of visual propaganda was commissioned; these included war films, picture cards, calendars, bookmarks, lantern-slides as well as photographs and line drawings. An all-picture publication, the *War Pictorial*, was produced in five language editions and achieved a world-wide circulation of some 300,000 copies. (29)

It soon became apparent, however, that the limited flow of photographs from the battlefronts could not meet the voracious needs of the department,

nor could the administrative structures of a somewhat shambolic and informal secret service cope with the demands of a global propaganda campaign. By early 1916 the illustrated newspapers were also seeking authentic front-line images and were offering cash incentives to soldiers with suitable sketchbook material. (30) A chance remark made to Masterman that summer alerted him to the unremarkable news that Muirhead Bone, the well-known Scottish etcher, had been called up by the army. Might not his prodigious gift of drawing, it was suggested, be better used in the services of the government than in leading an infantry platoon? Largely ignorant of the visual arts scene Masterman had to ask his wife who Bone was. Within weeks he was contracted as the first Official War Artist. (31) Others contend that it was dinner-party chatter, largely promulgated by society hostess Lady Cunard, which gave birth to the war art scheme. Her motive was not merely in contriving elaborate social schemes for their own sake, but in rescuing young artists from miserable and potentially lethal duty overseas. She and her coterie were also aware that the German and French government had initiated an official scheme to recruit artists to record the war in Europe, and were already deploying dozens of official photographers at a time when the British government were vacillating over whether to send one or two. Other influential figures, such as Edward Marsh, private secretary to Winston Churchill, also wielded subtle influence, openly championing younger artists such as the Nash brothers, Mark Gertler, and Stanley Spencer. (32)

At Wellington House, Masterman's intention for Bone's work was simple: he regarded it as a novel adjunct to the programme of pictorial propaganda. Accordingly, two hundred of his drawings were published for sale in ten monthly parts, starting in late 1916. The first endorsed by an effusive foreword by Douglas Haig, Commanding General of the British Expeditionary Force in France. At a shilling each, they were affordable and each part carried an explanatory essay and helpful captions. (33) Fortuitously, the new photogravure process of large volume printing allowed images of subtle tonal complexity to be accurately reproduced even on the cheap newsprint that resulted from restricted supplies caused by the naval blockade. Bone's graphic realism was ideally suited to this form of mass reproduction.

Had not two other factors occurred, the programme of employing artists may have ended then. First, came the rapturous reception for Kennington's painting on glass; then just months later, in September 1916, an exhibition in London of 'Paintings and Drawings of War by C.W.R.Nevinson (late Private R.A.M.C.)' aroused an extraordinary burst of critical and popular approval. It is not too great a claim to make that Nevinson's work marked the beginning of a new form of war art. (34) A brilliant reader of the public mood, Nevinson created a pictorial form that borrowed just enough of the Futurist style to flavour his rather academic compositions. His painterly style was equally unthreatening to moderate tastes, being a blend of post-impressionism textures and the grey tonality of the Camden Town Group. By an adept, indeed inspired, juggling act, Nevinson established a balance between literal representation and the near-abstract visual language of modernist art that had been prevalent, but widely condemned in the pre-war era. (35) The second factor was the creation in February 1917 of a new Department of Information, under the directorship of John Buchan. (36) Intended to pull together the many disconnected strands of allied publicity and propaganda, the Department was staffed mainly by civil servants, but drew on an extensive network of the most important and influential figures in the London arts scene, amongst them the novelist Arnold Bennett; gallery owner Robert Ross; Eric MacLagan, later Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum; Campbell Dodgson, Keeper of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum; Alfred Yockney, one-time editor of *Art Journal*, and Muirhead Bone himself, who proved to be an untiring champion of young artists. Individually and collectively they urged Buchan and Masterman to employ many of those who had enlisted or been conscripted and were by then scattered across many theatres of war. As high-minded as these individuals may have been their aim initially was simply to create a record. Painter Thomas Derrick, another adviser, was very clear about the need for a pragmatic approach:

I am strongly of the opinion that the conscious intention of this project should be extremely prosaic. Simply RECORD. This has been the main intention of art patronage that has produced some of the best pictures in history. The qualities that made them masterpieces were 'thrown in'

by the artists. I believe that these qualities when real are always of the nature of a by-product. (37)

Masterman, however, took a more liberal attitude. Certainly, there may have been ulterior motives: after all, sponsoring the widest range of war art did allow the British government to look as if it were nurturing cultural freedom, a very different proposition to the vulgar propaganda of German *Kultur*. But by choosing to employ younger artists who had direct experience of war, Masterman recognized that he would be employing many of those who had actively been part of much-derided Modernist causes. And contrary to widespread readings of his commissioning strategy, he set no limits on what should or should not be painted. When asked directly by Nevinson if there were subjects he should avoid, he replied 'No, no ... Paint anything you please.' (38) Such an attitude could not hold for long. It ran foul of those in France and Belgium who had to host the artists; and as we shall see when we look at the experiences of a number of these artists, it created terrible ructions with those who had to censor work before it could be circulated for public consumption.

Masterman was aided and abetted in this role by the appointment of Max Aitken (recently elevated to the peerage by Lloyd George to become Lord Beaverbrook) as Director of a new Ministry of Information, which supplanted the Department of Information in March 1918. (39) Beaverbrook created a British War Memorial Committee, and brought an administrative flair and entrepreneurial zeal that had been recently honed on the ambitious Canadian War Memorials scheme, which he personally directed. (40) His methods were direct and unencumbered by layers of bureaucracy. One painter recalled his first meeting:

About ten minutes past four up breezed a car, and in it was a slim little man with an enormous head and two remarkable eyes. I saluted

and tried to make military noises with my boots. Said he: "Are you Orpen?" "Yes, sir," said I. "Are you willing to work for the Canadians?" said he. "Certainly, sir," said I. "Well," said he, "that's all right. Jump in, and we'll go and have a drink." (41)

Beaverbrook set out to replicate in England the successful Canadian scheme. He altered the direction and tone of official war art, moving it from the representation of the present (with a short-term emphasis on propaganda and documentary record) to the creation of a permanent legacy for future generations, an emblem of remembrance, a lasting memorial expressed in art. However, he reckoned without the challenge of rival factions in Whitehall, especially those in the Treasury who were suspicious of an organization that had originally been established to create propaganda but was now acting as a patron of new artworks; nor had he anticipated the direct challenge from rival administrators at the newly formed National War Museum, who wished themselves to take the initiative in gathering the existing war art and setting its own agenda for commissioning new records. (42)

Under the energetic guidance of Arnold Bennett, and with the tacit support of Beaverbrook, the British War Memorials Committee (BWMC) set itself on a very different trajectory from the War Museum. Independent and original in its thinking, even to the point of declaring open defiance, the committee did its utmost to frustrate establishment efforts to promote the old guard of British art, namely those in the Royal Academy who wanted to cream off the better commissions. Instead, Bennett and his fellow members offered work to the cadre of younger soldier-artists with the ulterior motive of assembling a significant contemporary collection that would be representative of 'the greatest artistic expression of the day'. (43)

One of the most fascinating aspects of the complex commissioning and curatorial project masterminded by the BWMC is the degree of tolerance, even at times clandestine support, afforded to modernist work. As we have seen, the right wing and conservative factions in the press and society at large did not happily tolerate artworks that reminded them of foreign imperatives – Futurism, Cubism, Expressionism – which were regarded as alien and undesirable, and inimical to British values. Such images were relentlessly pilloried in the illustrated press, although Nevinson's work was generally endorsed as setting acceptable parameters of subject and technique. (44) Nevertheless, under the auspices of the BWMC, artists were encouraged to find their own voice and not be too swayed by cautious public opinion. Certainly, Masterman felt this way, expressing disappointment that

Nevinson, having been offered an official commission, had 'abandoned his own *metier* in order to produce *official* (perhaps dull) pictures'. He, and others, urged the painter to recover the probing anger of his earlier work and 'to develop his own genius – however bitter and uncompromising.' (45)

Beaverbrook intended to house these works in an imposing Hall of Remembrance; it would mirror an equally grand hall in Ottawa, Canada that one day would house the art commissioned by the Canadian War Memorial Fund. A list of artists was considered, individual negotiations took place, terms were agreed. Some artists were paid to produce a single picture for the planned Hall (£300 plus materials and studio expenses for one of the larger pictures). Younger, less established artists were offered a rather more modest deal - a salary of £300 per annum in return for their total artistic output during that period. This proposal was accepted by now familiar figures such as Paul Nash, Colin Gill, Bernard Meninsky and John Nash (all aged under thirty) but, rejected by the less amenable, and somewhat contrary, Nevinson who surmised that it would "prove a bad business proposition". (46)

The end result was truly impressive. Not only was this the 'first twentieth-century incidence of British state patronage to commission modern history paintings', it was possibly the most ambitious, and it secured for the nation some of the best art to emerge from the conflict. Seventeen large history paintings by artists such as Henry Lamb, Wyndham Lewis, Paul Nash, John Singer Sargent, and Stanley Spencer; two large sculpture reliefs by Charles S. Jagger and Gilbert Ledward, and twelve smaller canvases were produced by thirty-one artists. These formed the backbone of major exhibitions of the Nation's War Pictures that were created and toured immediately after the war. (47)

However, in some government circles the BWMC attracted little but criticism. Beaverbrook was regarded with envy and mistrust, his dual roles as both a Press Baron and peer of the realm were regarded as irreconcilable. Others on the committee were tainted by association with unpopular causes, even national scandals that made them easy pickings for hostile mandarins in Whitehall. (48) Bennett and his fellows often set themselves on a collision course with the establishment; Bennett gleefully declaring in one letter that the

committee had 'succeeded in 'turning down *all* of the R.A. painters, except Clausen. Some feat, believe me!' (49)

By contrast the National War Museum (which had been re-named the Imperial War Museum in December 1917 (50)) plotted a very different course. Setting out to achieve a comprehensive visual record of the war it too began a programme of purchasing and commissioning artists. Its method was systematic and prescriptive: wartime activity was divided into eight subject groupings (Army, Navy, Air Force, Merchant Marine, Land, Munitions, Clerical and other work by Women, Public Manifestations) and artists were then found to fit these subjects. The commissioning process in this parallel 'documentary' phase could be quite draconian. Having served at the front as a signaller and scout in the 1st Honourable Artillery Company, the young painter Adrian Hill was the first artist to be commissioned by the new museum. He was told precisely what to draw:

Towns and localities behind the lines which are specially identified with the British Army ... points of juncture between our line and the line occupied by the French, American, Belgian and Portuguese, so as to show the different nationalities side by side ... labour and engineering work by Coloured Battalions which show the distinct dress of the Chinese etc., and especially some sketches of Tanks HQ showing repairing and the like. (51)

Working to these specifications Hill diligently produced an extensive portfolio of over 180 pen and ink drawings that documented the mundane aspects of the war in France and Belgium. Straying outside one's brief, however, was not tolerated. While his drawings were encouraged – and it is said, were highly regarded by Field Marshal Haig – his oil paintings were flatly rejected. 'The committee was not favourably impressed by your oil paintings', he was bluntly informed, 'and it was thought desirable that you should keep to drawings in future.' (52)

Tensions between the BWMC and the Museum reached a head in May 1918 when Beaverbrook unilaterally accepted (in fact, virtually commandeered) William Orpen's gift of scores of war paintings for the Ministry of Information. Orpen, as we shall see, was largely indifferent as to which organization administered his impressive *opus*, but those in the War

Museum – Alfred Mond, the First Commissioner of Works and Chairman, and Sir Martin Conway, Director-General – who felt that the work was theirs by right, began to openly plot against Beaverbrook, seeking to discredit him, his Ministry and the war memorial committee. The failure to realise the Hall of Remembrance may have been due to these machinations, but equally corrosive were the sheer costs of running the Ministry, and in particular Wellington House, which amounted to £1.8 million in 1918. In July of that year Beaverbrook ceded the entire operation to the Imperial War Museum, resigning as Minister of Information in October.

Inevitably, the Hall of Remembrance was not built, nor the great Canadian Memorial building intended to house Aitken's other collection of war art. However, the paintings, prints, drawings and sculpture survived and are still housed (admittedly many of them underground in storage) in the Imperial War Museum in London. It is probably the finest collection of British art in the country outside Tate Britain. Arguably the greatest legacy of the war's art was the scheme itself: under Beaverbrook's tutelage the Ministry of Information protected and promoted emerging artists, brought intellectual coherence to a previously haphazard programme of commissioning, and instigated what Bennett described as 'a revolution in official patronage'. (53) Twenty years later it provided the template for the War Artists' Advisory Committee headed by the respected art historian Sir Kenneth Clark, then the Surveyor of the King's Pictures at Windsor and Director of the National Gallery, London who based his structures, protocols and pricing on the programmes initiated by Masterman, Buchan, and Beaverbrook many years earlier. (54)

### **Managing artists**

Managing the various war artists required logistical prowess, administrative dexterity and, perhaps most crucially, patience. Legendary (and perhaps a little exaggerated) are the tales of minor spats between artists bent on one course of (often reckless) action and those middle-ranking officials who had to corral and direct their enthusiasms. In 1917 the Department of Information had asked that a permanent 'artist's base' be set up in France to cater for greater numbers than the one-at-a-time system so far in place. This did not

happen. The British Expeditionary Force (BEF) Intelligence Chief General Sir John Charteris, argued that two artists was ample and complained of their unfortunate tendency to 'want to sit down and look at a place for a long time'. (55) And there was no shortage of artists in Britain who wanted the work. Those who administered the war artist's schemes were inundated with requests from artists who wished to sell war-related pictures, or who craved official accreditation and an opportunity to see the war at first-hand. Algernon Mayow Talmage, Royal Academician, silver medallist at the Paris Salon, bronze medallist at the Pittsburgh International exhibition was one such artist. In May 1917 he presented his credentials to the war museum:

No picture that I am aware of, has been really studied on the spot so as to get the real environment and atmospheric conditions and phenomenon.

I have been painting in the open all my life and I feel that were it possible to give me opportunities to study this subject I could paint a picture which would be a value as a record and venture to hope as a work of art which would be something entirely different to the usual hackneyed and unconvincing picture. (56)

But, like so many others, he was turned down, rejected in a single short sentence and filed in one of the bulging cabinets in the museum's growing archive.

### **Motivations**

So why did so many artists crave official recognition? Financial security may have held some attraction: though as we have seen the remuneration was rarely generous. Why were so many artists driven by a need to witness the scale of the conflict; to expose themselves to the privations of war, to test out and hone their skills in such demanding circumstances? To witness, interpret and leave some form of personal testimony was a powerful motivation for those who needed to come to terms with their violent muse. (57) 'You must not miss a war, if one is going!' wrote Wyndham Lewis, with only the slightest

degree of irony, 'You cannot afford to miss that experience'. (58) Others were simply astonished at what they saw on active service: "I tell you" wrote the soldier-artist Keith Henderson in October 1916, "the 'subjects' are endless, and in particular I long to do great big stretches of this bleak brown land". (59) Similarly, the society portrait painter Ambrose McEvoy thought the battlefield to be 'the most thrilling sight I have ever seen.' (60)

Few of those who aspired to paint the war did so to avoid danger: in both world wars artists were exposed to discomfort and death, although only one officially-validated artist died in service in the Great War, while three lost their lives in the Second World War. (61) However, it is clear that many artists – especially those who had first hand experience of the fighting – sought refuge and safety in the role of official war artist. Wyndham Lewis certainly did: after months in the Royal Artillery he had already lost too many close friends when he jumped at an opportunity to work for the Canadian Memorial scheme. Similarly, Richard Nevinson clutched at every chance to avoid being called-up once he realised that his medical discharge for rheumatic fever no longer gave him exemption. He even considered fleeing overseas to Spain to avoid military duty. (62) Despite his disability and an honourable discharge as medically unfit, Eric Kennington became increasingly concerned that unless he was offered the post of war artist by one of the memorial committees he too might face conscription as the war dragged into a fourth year and the British male population was scoured for men.

For those artists already in the services, many found their skills in demand, though perhaps not in ways they might have expected: the Vorticist painter William Roberts – serving as a lowly gunner in the Royal Artillery – was tasked with painting his battery's name on two German field guns captured by the 51st Brigade in early 1918. The eminent Salon painter William Orpen turned his hand to sculpture, helping to model and cast a number of plaster heads for target practice. The sculptor Derwent Wood worked in the 'tin noses' room at the 3rd London General Hospital, fashioning facemasks out of flesh-coloured electroplate. Stanley Spencer's painterly duties were a little less edifying: in Macedonia he had to paint the letters designating the men's and the sergeant's toilets. As ever, Spencer brought a delicate touch to this mundane task by decorating the 'S' for Sergeants with a halo of painted

dog roses. (63) In addition, professional artists – along with pre-war surveyors, architects, draughtsmen, and engineers – found themselves promptly transferred to units of the Royal Engineers. These postings were not always free from danger. While his fellow camouflage designers worked safely in workshops and painting sheds many miles behind the lines, the young painter Leon Underwood was sent on hazardous forays into No Man's Land. With his back to the enemy he was required to make detailed drawings of trees on the British trench line. These drawings were then used to construct an exact replica of a chosen tree which, hollowed out and lined with bullet-deflecting metal, was installed after dark as a cunningly disguised observation post. (64) John Nash was typical of many soldier-artists who yearned for the safety of an official war art commission, but soon wearied of its demands and the constant inspections by men from the Ministry, even where these were sympathetic fellow-artists. Referring to the burden of his official work, Nash wrote that he 'had not been out much owing to the Painting, a hole in my shoes, and also I don't feel free for landscape – how I long for "my ticket" ...The day I get free from the army I shall take a clean sheet of paper and go out and try and surprise myself.' (65)

It is difficult, then, to satisfactorily summarise the motivations that drove artists: many wanted merely to escape the petty tedium of service life, to be relatively free from danger and to be modestly rewarded for their talents. As we shall see when we examine the wartime experiences of a number of them, those who were naturally bellicose soon found their enthusiasms dampened; those who wanted to be officially recognized and supported were often frustrated in their aims, and nearly all of those who produced memorable art often had to do so in the face of hardship, privations, and an implacable administration which censored their work and taxed their often meagre incomes.

## **Challenges**

While we can now only guess at what motivated some artists to sustain their creativity during the Great War, it is simpler to list the obstacles and constraints that might have held them back. Indeed, there give the conditions many had to work in one wonders how any art was produced at all. Possibly

the greatest challenge was the widespread fear of spying: the suspicion that anyone wandering abroad with pencil and paper was up to no good. Even when working for the Department of Information in England, the eminent artist Sir John Lavery was not allowed anywhere near his designated subject-matter – the Fleet moored off Rosyth. His Special Joint Permit in fact disqualified him from drawing docks, harbours, munitions factories, captured ships or planes and – for good measure – ‘any other place or thing guarded by His Majesty’s Forces’. The permit did little to protect him from the police, Boy Scouts or over-vigilant members of the public: ‘No sooner had I got to work than I was stopped by the local police’, he recalled with irritation, ‘and marched off to Headquarters. They thought the permit too good to be true.’ (66) Fellow painter Alfred Munnings concluded after several abortive sketching trips in England that ‘there came a time when an artist dare not be seen sketching out of doors in the country.’ (67)

In the war zones these irritations could escalate into major incidents. William Rothenstein was arrested on two separate occasions; once by the French when he was found sketching entrenchments in 1914; a second time by the British on the eve of the German offensive in 1918, at a time when he assumed he was protected by his status as an official artist. When an indignant Brigade Major could not decipher Rothenstein’s name on his White Paper, the painter responded by pronouncing the first ‘R’ with an exaggerated Teutonic accent, adding for good measure: ‘Now, I suppose were my name Smith, you would have me shot.’ (68) One Fleet Street ‘special’ artist had to disguise himself as a Belgian peasant to avoid the notice of the military police. His most memorable scoop – drawings of the siege battles on the Aisne – were smuggled out of the war zone stuffed into his long boots. (69) On active service these problems were inevitably compounded by strict military discipline. The painter John Nash, a bomber in the Artist’s Rifles, remembered that ‘drawing wouldn’t have been encouraged by a commanding officer in the Line: I might have been taken for a spy.’ (70) However, another rifleman in the same unit, exulted in the game of hide-and-seek:

I had become a keen and fairly competent sketcher in the army. It had started with military sketching as a scout, but it soon went on to filling

sketchbooks with records of the towns and villages of Flanders, and of the trenches. As it was strictly illegal, the necessary care not to be detected added to the pleasure. (71)

Even with official clearance artists were something of a hindrance at the front, viewed – along with many journalists and nearly all visiting politicians – as intrusive, awkward, and inappropriately dressed. In France all visitors – press, politicians, dignitaries, and artists – came under the jurisdiction of Military Press Control, a branch of Military Intelligence, known by its acronym MI7. From mid-1917 to the spring of 1919 the officer entrusted with managing the flow of official war artists to the front was Major (late Colonel) Arthur N. Lee who acted as logistician, organiser, and censor – a powerful post indeed that effectively dictated the movement of any British artist on the Western Front. He tended to agree with his superior, Colonel Hutton-Wilson, that artists had the potential to be troublesome, though he befriended a number of them and by the end of the war had acquired a collection of pictures they had given him. (72) Lee's differences of opinion with individual artists – especially Richard Nevinson – have become legendary in the annals of art patronage, but Lee regarded his role as a guardian of British military values and worked unstintingly to protect the army's interests while trying to facilitate each individual artist's needs. By his own admission 'not an arty man', Lee was determined that the commissioned artists should not be unduly cushioned from the actualities of the war. 'I do not believe', he wrote, 'that those selected for other less arduous work should have any more comforts than the Line people ...just because they were lionised by Society at home.' (73) However, when Nevinson absconded without permission to see for himself the build-up for the Battle of Third Ypres he overstepped the mark and without hesitation Lee sent him back to England. Months later, Lee refused to pass one of Nevinson's canvases which showed a group of soldiers he had seen on the London Underground returning from leave. His case was simple: 'the type of man represented is not worthy of the British Army'. Nevinson's *riposte* was swift:

I will not paint 'castrated lancelots' though I know this is how Tommies are usually represented in illustrated papers etc. – high souled eunuchs looking mild-eyed, unable to melt butter on their tongues and mentally and physically incapable of killing a German. I refuse to insult the British army with such sentimental bilge. (74)

In fact Nevinson never sent the letter. Regardless, Lee was not to be moved. As official censor he was adamant, firmly believing that 'if [the painting] ever gets into German hands I will lay a shade of odds that the Germans use it against us.' (75) However, after some wrangling between the War Office and the Department of Information, Nevinson had his way. Not so with another painting, the ironically titled *Paths of Glory*, which depicted a tract of battlefield strewn with the corpses of two khaki-clad corpses. Banned from showing it or having its reproduced for publication, Nevinson upstaged the censor by pasting a strip of brown paper over the canvas inscribed with the word 'censored' in bold capitals. As we shall see when we look at Nevinson's work in more detail, this was yet another show of bravado, as was the painter's reaction when he was reprimanded by the War Office: he stormed off to work for the Canadians.(76)

Lee's initials appear at the foot of many drawings that were made in France and Belgium. His office was also inclined to correct what they termed factual inaccuracies. Nevinson, for instance, had to correct the direction of the traffic – from the left to the right side - in his painting *The Road from Arras to Bapaume*. All artists were warned off drawing or painting subjects that might have some obvious strategic value, or from depicting new technologies or operational procedures that might lend the enemy tactical advantage. But painters could stray unwittingly into controversy. The etcher Martin Hardie – an assiduous recorder of the French, and later the Italian, theatre of war – had several pictures removed from display because they appeared to show Britain's allies in a dim light. His rendition of *The Bathing Corner at Boulogne* was considered inappropriate because it showed French troops frolicking in an unbecoming manner; similarly, his picture of black troops landing at the same post was criticized because it 'accentuated the Kaffir features unduly'. The picture was withheld from public view. (77)

What of the dead? Nevinson had run foul of the War Office by showing dead British soldiers and he later criticized the Imperial War Museum for hiding such images from the public eye, arguing that it was an odd state of affairs 'which sheds a curious light on the official mind when one remembers the grim films that have been exhibited and the books of horrible photographs that have been published.' (78) It is true that dead British soldiers were to be viewed in such films as 'The Battle of the Somme', which went on widespread British release in late summer 1916. But by late 1917 there was a ban on the depiction of corpses in official films, photographs and art. Token injuries such as bandaged headwounds or arms in a (preferably clean) sling were acceptable and this convention is evident in much of the work produced towards the end of the war, from the conservative figuration of Beadle's *The Breaking of the Hindenberg Line*, to Henry Tonks' *An Advanced Dressing Station*, which despite its dank grimness and the whiff of fetid air is reassuring in its care for the injured. Maimed limbs are well-concealed under the cover of thick blankets: melodramatic postures are preferred over damaged flesh. (79) The formula for representing British and Allied wounded and dead did not extend to the enemy: both Nevinson and Orpen depicted German corpses, Orpen's rendition of an emaciated body in his fiercely frank canvas *Dead Germans in a Trench*, first shown in public in May 1918, is unflinching in its portrayal of disfigurement, the bodies contorted and bent, their flesh grey-green and ghastly. Compare the rigor mortis in this canvas and in Nevinson's vast Dante-esque panorama *The Harvest of Battle*, with the decorous wounds described by Gilbert Rogers in his large canvas *Stretcher Bearers after the Battle of Messines*, where the British wounded appear to suffer only minor injuries and are whole in body and limb, while the German corpses are scattered fragments strewn around the edges of the painting. However, the protocols on depicting the dead were relaxed after the Armistice. John Nash's painting 'Over the top: 1<sup>st</sup> Artist's Rifles at Marcoing, December 30<sup>th</sup> 1917', painted in 1919, includes the bodies of two British soldiers lying prone in their jumping-off trench. Only acceptable after the war had been won, these British bodies serve as symbols of death, a means of indicating greater loss of life during battle, of 'individual sacrifice within the collective action'. (80) As in Nevinson's more controversial but no less brutal painting, their dignity has

been reserved through the prone postures and their averted faces, which delicately preserves their anonymity.

More prosaically, artists were often confronted with rather more practical difficulties and inconveniences. In the trenches, the most pressing need was often to keep drawing paper dry. Arthur Bradbury, a subaltern in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Iniskillings, recalled Somme trenches that were waist deep in mud and although he kept his sketchbook deep inside his pack the 'conditions often made sketching impossible'. [81] Lieutenant-Colonel Frank Palmer, a trainee architect before the war, carried his sketchbook 'tucked inside his tunic like a breastplate'. (82) While Orpen complained of the putrid smell of abandoned trenches in hot weather, cold snaps brought their own hazards: Paul Maze describes in his memoir, *A Frenchman in Khaki*, of a time in the appalling winter of 1916-1917 when it was impossible to paint at all because his watercolour brush froze before he could apply it to the paper. [83] Painting in 1918, William Rothenstein wrote of being so cold when working outdoors that he kept a pair of fur gloves hanging from his shoulders into which he gingerly put his numbed fingers from time to time. (84)

Others took real risks. Adrian Hill – a member of a Scouting and Sniping Section of the Honorable Artillery before his official appointment as an artist - recalled hair-raising patrols into No Man's Land

I advanced in short rushes, mostly on my hands and knees with my sketching kit dangling round my neck. As I slowly approached, the wood gradually took a more definite shape, and as I crept nearer I saw that what was hidden from our own line, now revealed itself as a cunningly contrived observation post in one of the battered trees. (85)

Hill recollected making drawings as the rain poured off his paper and having to use shell-hole water to dilute his Indian ink washes. (86) Others found the demands simply too trying. Back in Britain, the distinguished painter Philip Wilson Steer laid down exacting conditions before he even picked up his paintbrush and palette. Amongst these were: 1) Shelter from the wind; 2) proximity to a lavatory; 3) shade from the sun; 4) protection from children; and 5) a suitable subject. (87)

And what exactly comprised a suitable subject? It would be tempting to suggest that ruins and ruination dominate the *oeuvre*, but this is patently not the case. In December 1919, one thousand of the war museum's collection of three thousand artworks went on show in the plush and hallowed halls of Burlington House, the home of the Royal Academy, in London. Although ridiculed by the illustrated and popular press, and vilified in Parliament, the sheer variety of subject matter hanging on the walls was impressive. (88) The work ranged from paintings of the Home Front produced by the Women's Work Section, to the vast history paintings by Singer Sargent and Wyndham Lewis. Formal portraits hung alongside canvases depicting battleships, aerial views of the Turkish Front were set next to representations of convoys on the North Sea. Admittedly, not all of the great incidents were represented – *The Graphic* in particular deplored the absence of familiar battle scenes, demanding to know, where was the 'Battle of Mons'? – but the breadth of coverage could not be ignored. Nor has it been since. In its comprehensive coverage of the war, and with its many outstanding large works by major twentieth-century artists, the Imperial War Museum collection of art complements, indeed rivals, the major collections of British art held across the river in what is now Tate Britain. This book tries to tell the individual stories of some of the artists that produced these extraordinary paintings and drawings. By locating them in their social, artistic and military context, I have tried to shed a little light on their motivations, to understand something of what drove them and what frustrated them. Every one of the artists discussed in this book was changed forever by the war, not all for the good. As we shall discover, several received wounds or illnesses that blighted their later years; others never recovered from the slights they felt at the hands of those who bossed them around or who failed to give them the support they felt was their due. Yet, however sad and difficult these war years were, they were also colourful, energizing and, at times, iconoclastic. Official patronage released many outstanding young artists from grindingly dull and dangerous military duty; it also gave them a level of artistic freedom that they would later regard as seminal to their careers. Few of these artists would have wholly agreed with Ruskin that 'There is no great art possible to a nation but that which is based on battle', but most of them – Nash, Nevinson, Orpen, Lewis, Lamb and

Spencer – forged extraordinary and unforgettable work out of the cauldron of the Great War.

## Notes to Opening

1

Cited in Meirion Harries and Susie Harries, *The War Artists*, p.2

2

See, for example, the lists in *The Studio*, December 1914, and August 1915.

3

Artists of repute volunteered blank canvases for worthy patriotic causes such as the *Red Cross*, which hosted a number of auctions at Christies. Those who bid the highest sum had the canvases completed to their wishes.

4

The conditions that prevailed in pre-war period England are expertly analysed in Michael J.K. Walsh, *C.R.W. Nevinson: This cult of violence* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2002) pp.101-103. Equally thorough is the treatment by Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: the First World War and English Culture* (London: Bodley Head, 1990) and Charles Harrison, *English Art and Modernism, 1900-1939* (London: and Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1981).

5

W.R.Colton, *The Architect Magazine* 17<sup>th</sup> March 1916, p.200.

6

A good summary of the 'fanatical Marinetti' is in Denis Farr, *English Art: 1870-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) p.208. Marinetti's manifesto for English art contained a rounding indictment of 'The pessimistic, skeptical and narrow views of the English public, who stupidly adore the pretty-pretty, the commonplace, the soft, sweet, and mediocre', and scorned, for good measure, Garden Cities and Morris dancers.

Of the vast literature available on the Modernist movement and its reception in Britain during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the following might be considered especially useful: Susan Compton (ed/) *British Art in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: the Modern Movement* (London and Munich; Royal Academy of Arts, Prestel-Verlag, 1987); David Peters Corbett, *The Modernity of English Art, 1914-1930* (Manchester: Manchester University press, 1997); Denis Farr, *English Art: 1870-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); Charles Harrison, *English Art and Modernism, 1900-1939* (London and Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1981); Lisa Tickner, *Modern Life and Modern Subjects: British Art in the Early Twentieth Century* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2000).

7

John Ruskin, 'War', in *The Crown of Wild Olive. Three Lectures on Work, Traffic, War*, (London: Smith Elder, 1866) pp.143-5.

8

C.H.Collins-Baker, 'Art and War', *Saturday Review*, 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1914.

9

C.H.Collins, paraphrased by Michael J.K.Walsh, *C.R.W. Nevinson*, p.102.

10

A.Clutton-Brock, 'War and Poetry', *Times Literary Supplement*, 8<sup>th</sup> October 1914.

11

J.D. Symon, 'War and Creative Art', *English Review*, of December 1915, p.520.

12

R.H.C. (A.R. Orage) 'Readers and Writers', *New Age*, 10<sup>th</sup> September 1914, p.449. Orage was focusing his contempt on Ezra Pound, asserting 'Whether he knows it or not, Vorticism is dead. It was, at best, only a big name for a little thing, that in the simmering of the pre-war period suddenly became a bubble, and is now burst. Compared with the war it is incomparably feeble.'

13

Epstein was eventually conscripted a Private in the Fusiliers after what he saw as a 'deliberate conspiracy in the press', orchestrated by Augustus John. See Epstein to Quinn, quoted in Michael Holroyd, *Augustus John*, Volume Two, cited in Harries and Harries, *The War Artists*, p.89.

14

Laurence Binyon, *The Art of Botticelli : An Essay in Pictorial Criticism* (London: 1913) p.17.

15

'Purging' was not restricted to Britain. The concept is explored by D.Peters Corbett, *The Modernity of English Art, 1914-1930* (Manchester: Manchester University press, 1997).

16

Eric Kennington, was born 12<sup>th</sup> March 1888 in Chelsea, London, son of the painter T. B. Kennington. He studied at the Lambeth School of Art and the City and Guilds School, in Kennington, South London. He exhibited from 1908 at the Royal Academy and the Leicester Galleries. Having served in France with the 1/13<sup>th</sup> (County of London) Battalion The London Regiment – the 'Kensingtons' – for some 300 days he was invalided out of the Army June 1915. After the war he visited Arabia to illustrate T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. His work as a sculptor includes the war memorial to the 24th Division in Battersea Park 1924, and carvings on the Shakespeare

Memorial Theatre, Stratford on Avon, 1930. He served as an Official War Artist in the Second World War, and was elected Associate Royal Academician in 1951, a full member in 1959. Kennington died in Reading on 13th April 1960.

Extracted from Mary Chamot, Dennis Farr and Martin Butlin, *Modern British Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture* (London 1964).

17

Sergeant O F Bailey and Sergeant H.M. Hollier, "*The Kensingtons*" *13th London Regiment* (London & Aylesbury: Regimental Old Comrades' Association, nd, circa 1935).

18

*The Kensingtons at Laventie, Winter 1914*, reverse painting on glass, 139.8 x 160.2 cms, painted 1915, transferred to the Imperial War Museum, 1983, Catalogue: IWM: ART: 15661.

19

Eric Kennington MS "The Picture". This document appears to be in the artist's own hand and is presumed to be a description of the painting as it was shown at the Goupil Gallery, London, April-May 1916.

20

For a full account of this painting see Angela Weight, 'The Kensingtons at Laventie: A Twentieth Century Icon', in *Imperial War Museum Review*, 1 (1986), pp 14-18

21

The proper term for reverse oil painting in glass is *hinterglasmalerei*. For an elaboration of this exacting technique see Wallace, K. *Examination and treatment of hinterglasmalerei or reverse painting on glass* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Art, Canada, 1977). So fragile is Kennington's painting that it is installed permanently into the picture gallery of the Imperial War Museum; to allow touring and temporary exhibitions to take place it is not moved, but covered and boxed in for the duration.

22

*The Times*, 20<sup>th</sup> May 1916.

23

Not all were convinced about Kennington's suitability: both John Buchan and Charles Masterman disliked the grubby realism of his work, and it required sustained pressure from certain committee members – Campbell Dodgson, Thomas Derrick – and the painter Sir John Lavery and etcher Muirhead Bone to have him employed. According to Weight ('The Kensingtons at Laventie', p.16) General Sir John Charteris. Head of Haig's Intelligence Staff, personally arranged for Kennington to return as an 'artist visitor' to the Western Front in December 1916, many months before his officially sponsored visit.

13

*A Giant Cheshire*, charcoal on grey paper, 56 x 51 cms, IWM:ART 2909;  
*An 8<sup>th</sup> 'Queen's' hero*, pastel on tinted paper, 56 x 40.6 cms, IWM:ART 1017.

25

As Meirion and Susie Harries note, Kennington's 'bark was often worse than his bite'. He later presented seven of his works free in 1919 and 1920, and a further twenty-one between 1934 and 1938, including his oil painting *Gassed and Wounded*. (Harries and Harries, *The War Artists*, p,289, fn 23)

26

Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined*, pp.64-65.

27

Issue No.2 of BLAST, for example, came out in June 1915, but carried a black-bordered notice announcing the death of Gaudier-Brzeska.

28

The phrase is from Denis Farr, *English Art: 1870 – 1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) pp.226 – 227.

29

Born in Sussex and educated at Christ College, Cambridge, Charles Masterman (1873-1927) was a politician, writer and, from 1914, head of the British government's war propaganda bureau. He was a prolific writer, edited *Granta* at Cambridge, and published widely in the *Daily News*, *Athenaeum* and the *Nation*. His most important book *The Condition of England* (1909) explored the social condition of Britain, especially the lived experiences of the working class.

An active member of the Christian Social Union, Masterman was held by many as a future Prime Minister. His ministerial career began in 1906 with his election to Parliament as a Liberal member for West Ham North; Asquith appointed him Parliamentary Secretary of the Local Government Board in 1908, followed by posts at the Home Office (Under-Secretary of State) from 1909-12, and at the Treasury (Financial Secretary) from 1912-14. In 1914 he joined the Cabinet as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. A strong advocate of social reform, he was close to David Lloyd George, but fell out of favour having lost two Parliamentary by-elections and incurring the wrath of Lord Northcliffe, the Press Baron, over his support for the unpopular National Health Insurance bill of 1911. His descent from public position was as sudden as his ascent had been spectacular.

His tenure at the war propaganda bureau, known also as Wellington House, was his last major public appointment. Resourceful and imaginative, and supported by a coterie of well-connected advisers, he devised a comprehensive programme of clandestine publishing, issuing some 1,160 pamphlets and books during the course of the war, commissioning the first photographers and the first official war artists to work at the front. However, having been replaced by John Buchan in 1917, Masterman found himself further relegated in 1918 by the appointment of Lord Beaverbrook as Minister

of Information. Masterman served both men well, and although he lost his parliamentary seat in 1918 he was re-elected to represent Rusholme, in Manchester in 1923. He died four years later.

30

See for example *The Illustrated London News*, 24<sup>th</sup> April 1915; 4<sup>th</sup> September 1915; and *The Graphic* 8<sup>th</sup> January 1916. The major illustrated news papers and periodicals of the war period were: *Illustrated London news*, *Nelson's Picture Weekly*, *The War pictorial*, *Shurey's Illustrated Great War Paper*, and *The War Illustrated*, all of which came into production only weeks after the outbreak of war.

31

Lucy Masterman, *C.F.G. Masterman* (London, 1939), p.287.

32

By comparison, the French government had established a *Section Photographique de L'Armee* by April 1915, employing fifteen photographers with eighty-six assistants and thirty laboratory technicians and mobile laboratories, that producing more than 150,000 plates during the course of the war. The Germans mobilized on a similar scale, with seven mobile film units by 1916. Malvern suggest that the recruitment of artists in Britain was, in part, a remedy to the tardy response of the British authorities to create mobile picture and film bureaus. See Sue Malvern, *Modern Art, Britain and the Great War*, pp.48-49.

33

Yockney later confirmed that the Western Front books, which were intended for the widest British audience, had failed in that objective: 'The Bone publications were produced at a popular price, in order that they should filter through to the homes of the workers. This effect has not been secured....' Yockney to Sanderson, 20<sup>th</sup> February 1918, IWM, M999/1, part VIII, 'The Western Front: drawings by Muirhead Bone', quoted by Malvern, p.38.

An art journalist of considerable experience, Alfred Yockney was originally employed in Wellington House as an assistant in the Eastern and Moslem Propaganda Department. Between 1917 and 1920 he was central to the administration of the British war art schemes, working closely with Masterman, Buchan, Bennett, and those associated with the British War Memorial Committee and the Ministry of Information. Upon the dissolution of the Committee, Yockney was transferred to the Imperial War Museum (effective from 1<sup>st</sup> January 1919) to carry the memorial scheme to its conclusion.

34

'Paintings and Drawings of War by C.R.W.Nevinson (late Private R.A.M.C.)' The Leicester Galleries, London, September-October 1916. Nevinson exhibited 53 paintings, drawings and etchings and one piece of sculpture.

35

Walsh argues that Nevinson was a crucial bridge between the Modernist movement and the public, bringing a much-needed respectability to Futurism. Frank Rutter supported this view in the *Sunday Times* in 1915: 'If all Futurists gave us such beauty of colour and conveyed movement with such imaginative power as Mr.Nevinson shows us in these aeroplanes rushing through space, we should have no quarrel with them.' (21<sup>st</sup> March 1915)

36

Born in Scotland, John Buchan (1875-1940) was a novelist, poet, statesman, and journalist. A prolific writer, by the end of his student days at Oxford he had already published five novels and numerous articles. In 1901 he became the High Commissioner's Secretary in South Africa, returning to England to head up the publishing company, Thomas Nelson & Sons. His most famous novel, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, was published in instalments in 1914 and has remained popular for over ninety years, having twice been re-made for cinema.

At the outbreak of war Buchan was recruited by Charles Masterman, head of the War Propaganda Bureau, to write a serialized history of the war. *Nelson's History of the War*, in twenty four instalments, was issued in February 1915. At the same time, he became one of just five journalists attached to the British Army, writing for *The Times* and *Daily News*. Two years later, in February 1917 he became Director of the newly formed Department of Information. His time in post was blighted by illness, by the death of his youngest brother from war wounds, and a reverse in his family fortunes, which obliged him to return to novel-writing. Lacking the political power to influence events in government, Buchan role was diminished upon the appointment of Lord Beaverbrook as the new Minister of Information.

After the war, Buchan held many important positions, including Conservative MP for the Scottish Universities, holding the seat until he became Baron Tweedsmuir in 1935 and, that same year, he became Governor-General of Canada, a position he held until his death in Montreal on 11<sup>th</sup> February 1940.

37

Thomas Derrick was an artist and teacher at the Royal College of Art. His memorandum to Masterman is quoted by W.P.Mayes, 'The Origins of an Art Collection', an unpublished account made in 1963 of the history of the large collection held in the Imperial War Museum, London.

38

Lucy Masterman, *C.F.G.Masterman*, p.287.

39

On 5th December 1916, Asquith resigned; on the 7th, Lloyd George became Prime Minister with Bonar Law at his side. On 9th December, Aitken (a Knight since 1911) was offered a peerage.

40

Born in Ontario, Canada, Sir William Maxwell Aitken (1879-1964), was ennobled in 1917 as Lord Beaverbrook. Initially a successful Canadian financier he retired from business in 1910 to pursue a political career, taking a seat in the House of Commons, where he represented Ashton-under-Lyne for the Conservative party. In May 1915 he was appointed as the Canadian Expeditionary Force's official records officer and, from 1916, the Canadian government's official representative in France, publishing, in 1916, *Canada in Flanders*, a three-volume account of the war from the Canadian point of view. On 10 February 1918, he was appointed to the British government, as Minister of Information.

Beaverbrook transformed the management of the British propaganda programme, commissioning posters, artists, authors and pioneering the design and use of photographic posters for recruitment purposes at home. He also introduced cinema newsreels for home audiences. He resigned from the post in October 1918. He was the owner of many popular newspapers, including the influential *Daily Express* and the London *Evening Standard*. Beaverbrook returned to government in 1940. Under Churchill he served as Minister for Aircraft Production (1940-41), Minister of Supply (1941-42), Minister of War Production (1942) and Lord Privy Seal (1943-45).

41

William Orpen, *An Onlooker in France* (London: Williams and Norgate / Ernest Benn, 1923) p. 42. As Graham Shaw notes, the original names of Beaverbrook's committee had been the 'Imperial Permanent Memorials Committee'. (see Graham Shaw, PhD thesis, 2007)

42

The Cabinet approved the establishment of a National War Museum on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1917, as a memorial and record of the effort and sacrifice of the men and women of the Empire'. From Mayes, 'The Origins of an Art Collection'. It was re-named the Imperial War Museum in the interim report drawn up by Lord Crawford and the Balcarres' Committee, dated 14<sup>th</sup> December 1917, largely, it appears, at the request of the Dominions sub-committee.

43

Arnold Bennett's article 'Officialism and War Painting', published in *New Statesman*, on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1919 (pp. 347-48) recounts an insider's tale of the motivations and constraints that beset the British War Memorials Committee. As Malvern states, it was a story of obstruction and hostility by the War Office and the Treasury, but also an 'extraordinary combination of vision, talent and expertise' that succeeded in creating opportunities for artists. (Sue Malvern, *Modern Art, Britain and the Great War*, p.69).

44

It was championed in particular by the Hungarian art critic Paul Konody. In Canada Paul G. Konody had been Beaverbrook's master of taste. The mid-European critic and writer had determined the list of those commanded to

create art work for the Canadian War Memorial Fund, the 'Konodian Army' as it was teasingly called. Konody was an unabashed fan of Nevinson, whatever the style. He was much less tolerant of Vorticist or Futurist 'excesses', bluntly informing some of the younger artists that Cubist work was 'inadmissible' for the Canadian scheme. But, here again the true story is cloudy: in 1918 Konody ranted, raged and then rejected David Bomberg's first attempt to paint the work of a tunneling company – describing it, it is said as a 'Futurist abortion' – but subsequently worked closely with the painter steadying his bruised ego and nurturing him to produce further work. (In London, Konody played second fiddle to Arnold Bennett, who made the major decisions in the British War Memorials Committee.

45

C.F.G.Masterman to Hudson, 29<sup>th</sup> October 1917, Imperial War Museum, London, Department of Art, Nevinson file.

46

Nevinson to Masterman, 10<sup>th</sup> March 1918. The painter's initial rejection of Scheme 2 was on the questionable grounds that it might restrict his artistic freedom. He made no such objection when moved to (the better paid and more secure) Scheme I.

47

See Sue Malvern, *Modern Art, Britain and the Great War*, p.46.

48

Robert Ross, gallery owner and Trustee of the Tate was one of the key advisers to Wellington House and determined the aesthetic character and quality of the British War Memorial Committee scheme. He was also Oscar Wilde's executor and friend, and for that association – and on the dubious grounds that he was a pacifist – he became the target of public scorn and harassment. He died in October 1918 aged forty-nine.

49

Arnold Bennett, quoted by Sue Malvern, *Modern Art, Britain and the Great War* fn 36, p.112.

50

It was re-named the Imperial War Museum in the interim report drawn up by Lord Crawford and the Balcarres' Committee, dated 14<sup>th</sup> December 1917, largely, it appears, at the request of the Dominions sub-committee.

51

ffoulkes to Hill, 14<sup>th</sup> June 1918, IWM Dept. of Art file 74 / 3 part ii

Home on leave, Adrian Hill had the temerity to visit the War Musuem and show some of his drawings to Sir Martin Conway, the first Director-General of the museum, who admired the precise drawings as well as the young man's sense of initiative. Hill was appointed by the IWM as their first – and as it

proved, their youngest – official artist in March 1918 with the rank of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant.

52

See for example the correspondence between the Director-General of National War Museum to General Haig, 1<sup>st</sup> October 1917; the letter rejecting the oils was from Yockney to Hill, 27<sup>th</sup> February 1919, IWM Dept. of Art file 74 / 3 part ii.

See also Hill's letters of 4 October 1917, 12 November 1917 held in the Brotherton Library, Liddle Collection, Leeds University.

53

Bennett quoted by Sue Malvern, *Modern Art, Britain and the Great War*, p.75.

54

For a full account of the WAAC see: Alan Ross, *Colours of War: War Art 1939 - 45*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1983). In 1942 Clark reflected on the parameters set by the committees' terms of reference:

The War Artists collection cannot be completely representative of modern English art, because it cannot include those pure painters who are interested solely in putting down their feelings about shapes

and colours, and not in facts, drama and human emotions. ('War Artists at the National Gallery', *The Studio*, CXXIII, January 1942, p.586).

He also noted, rather drily, that the Ministry of Information:

Was said to contain 999 employees ...[Its] large staff had been recruited to deal with three of four different objects. The first, and most defensible, was censorship; the second the provision of news; the third a feeble attempt at propaganda through various media; and the fourth to provide a kind of wastepaper-basket into which everyone could throw their grievances and their war-winning proposals... (Kenneth Clark, *The Other Half*, London, 1977, pp.9-16).

Clark trawled far and wide for the best artists. In its first sixteen weeks the committee considered some eight hundred names, including all those employed during the Great War. Few made the grade. Nevinson, was omitted. A few veterans - Paul Nash, Kennington, and Bone - were recruited. The fees offered by the WAAC were lower than those offered in the Great War; £150 to £200 was the average price of an oil painting, watercolours might be bought for as little as £10.

55

Charteris to Masterman, 12<sup>th</sup> March 1917, IWM file G4010 / 17.

56

Talmage, artist's file, IWM Department of Art.

57

For a fuller debate on this topic see Jane Howlett and Rod Mengham (eds.) *The Violent Muse* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

58

Percy Wyndham Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, Autobiography 1914-1926 (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1937) p.114.

When Wyndham Lewis was seconded from the Royal Garrison Artillery and attached to the Canadian Records office he had to present himself to the War Office in London where an indignant officer – a 'fierce little dugout Major' according to Lewis – who bristled at the mention of war art: "To paint a picture!" he exclaimed. "I've never heard of such a thing! Is that the way to win the war?" Causing Lewis to ask, 'I refrained from pointing out that his own occupation was hardly calculated to put the Germans to flight.' (*Blasting and Bombardiering*, p.191)

59

Keith Henderson, *Letters to Helen*, privately published, 1917, p. 66.

60

IWM Department of Art: McEvoy papers. McEvoy to Commander Walcott, undated (possibly August 1918).

61

Only one official artist died in the Great War (a Naval painter, Geoffrey Allfree) whereas three died in the Second World War - Richards on the Maas, Eric Ravilious off Iceland, and Thomas Hennell in Indonesia.

62

See Michael J.K. Walsh, *C.R.W. Nevinson: This Cult of Violence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), in particular chapters 8 and 9. Nevinson's escape to neutral Spain failed when he was refused a permit to travel.

63

Cited in Paul Gough, *The Experiences of British Artists in the Great War* (eds.)

Peter Liddle and Hugh Cecil (London : Leo Cooper, 1996) p.847.

64

Underwood's large canvas 'Erecting a Camouflage Tree' was purchased (for one hundred pounds, plus twenty-five for materials) for the IWM art collection (IWM:ART 2283). There is an accompanying text: 'the construction of a steel tree by the Special Works Park R.E. – Camouflage Corps – is in progress in a line of defence. The time is early morning and the N.C.O. is seen regarding the visibility and calculating the chances of completing and hauling up the tree, or waiting for the succeeding night.' See: Christopher Neve, Leon Underwood (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), pp.26-36. IWM Department of Art file 307/7 contains extensive correspondence between the museum and the painter regarding the subject-matter.

As may be evident from scrutinizing the finished canvas, all the figures were taken from the same model, in this case the painter's brother, Horace.

65

John Nash to Dora Carrington, quoted by Ronald Blythe, *First Friends* (London: Viking, 1997) p.136.

66

John Lavery, *Life of a Painter* (London, Cassell, 1940) pp.145-146.

67

Alfred Munnings, *An Artist's Life* (London, Museum Press, 1950) pp.296.

68

William Rothenstein, *Men and Memories*, pp.178-179.

69

Frederick Villiers, *Five Decades of Adventure*, (London, 1921) Vol.2, pp.316-318.

70

John Nash, 'Artists in an Age of Conflict', Imperial War Museum, Department of Sound Records, Accession No.000323/05. Nash was interviewed by Joseph Darracott of the Imperial War Museum and David Brown of the Tate Gallery.

71

James Parkes, *Voyage of Discoveries* (London: Gollancz, 1969) p.52. See also Parkes' sketchbook 'The Red Book Volume 1, April-May 1917, in the Brotherton Library, Leeds University.

72

See Meirion Harries and Susie Harries, *The War Artists*, p.33.

73

Lee's diary entry, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1917, quoted by Meirion Harries and Susie Harries, *The War Artists*, p.32-33, which also carries a balanced account of Lee's work, character and contribution.

74

Nevinson to Masterman, 25<sup>th</sup> November 1917, IWM Nevinson file.

75

Lee to Yockney, 13<sup>th</sup> December 1917, IWM, Nevinson file.

76

Nevinson recounts his dispute over 'Paths of Glory' in *Paint and Prejudice*, pp.110-11. There is some doubt that Nevinson ever showed the painting in its

'wrapped' form, but he certainly had photographs taken and had posters printed from it.

The title was taken from lines in Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' and was the third title, preferred over 'Dead Men', and 'Shall their sacrifice be in vain'. Having been censored and forbidden from display the canvas, it was bought by the government in January 1918 to ensure control over its use and reproduction., but it remained in Nevinson's possession and was defiantly displayed in March 1918 with the title in the catalogue 'Censored'. (See Charles E Doherty, 'Nevinson's Elegy: 'Paths of Glory'', in *Art Journal*, Vol.51, no 1, 1992, p.65.)

77

The picture is IWM :Art 939. See also Hardie File.

78

Nevinson, *Paint and Prejudice*, p.107.

79

Further phrases were added to the Defence of the Realm Act amendment of 28th August 1914 so as '... to prevent the spread of reports likely to cause disaffection or alarm.' This was a convenient catch-all phrase which would allow the authorities a free hand in regard to censorship. In 1917 Yockney also wrote to Nevinson to remind him that "It is stated that the War Office has prohibited the appearance of dead bodies, even German, in any official photographs or film. It is requested you should not exhibit the picture under discussion.' Nevinson was told that this was 'a formal reminder'. IWM Art-Nev files, p. 116.

80

The phrase is Graham Shaw's, unpublished PhD thesis, p.119 and see also p.124.

81

Bradbury to Ernest Blaikley, Keeper of Art IWM, 14<sup>th</sup> January 1933, IWM Department of Art file 150/4 part i.

82

Quoted in Caroline Dakers, *The Countryside at War, 1914-1918* (London: Constable, 1987) p.183.

83

Paul Maze, *A Frenchman in Khaki*, pp.205-206.

84

William Rothenstein, *Men and Memories*, p.181.

85

Adrian Hill interviewed in *The Graphic*, 15<sup>th</sup> November 1930.

86

*The Graphic*, 15<sup>th</sup> November 1930.

87

D.S.Mcoll, *Life, Work and Setting of Philip Wilson Steer* (London: Faber, 1945) p.118.

88

For full accounts of this exhibition see: Sue Malvern, *Modern Art, Britain and the Great War*, and Richard Cork, *A Bitter Truth*.

