

THE SUSPENSE  
TASMANIA AND  
THE GREAT WAR  
IS AWFUL

## Media Kit

# The Suspense is Awful: Tasmania and the Great War

Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery

Media contact:  
Andrée Hurburgh  
(03) 6165 7047  
[Andree.Hurburgh@tmag.tas.gov.au](mailto:Andree.Hurburgh@tmag.tas.gov.au)

TASMANIAN	
MUSEUM	&
ART	GALLERY

Small boy in soldier's uniform for World War I peace celebrations at Waratah, c.1919, photographer: John (Jackie) Robinson.

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# The Suspense is Awful: Tasmania and the Great War

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17 April 2015 – 28 February 2016

The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG) is proud to mark the centenary of World War I (WWI) with a new exhibition commemorating the role Tasmanians played in the war and the impact it had on Tasmanian society.

*The Suspense is Awful: Tasmania and the Great War* is drawn from the museum's collections and highlights stories previously untold, including those of Tasmanian Aboriginal servicemen and of the men and women who provided medical support on the front line.

The title of the exhibition is taken from a letter one desperate Hobart father wrote to the authorities seeking news of the fate of his son on the beaches of Gallipoli – “the suspense”, he wrote, “is awful”.

Thousands of Tasmanian men and women enlisted to serve in WWI, and by keeping diaries, writing home and collecting souvenirs they created their own memories of the war as they served on the front line.

On the home front, families found the four years of war awful, as they wondered whether they would ever see their loved ones again.

*The Suspense is Awful* is not only focused on what happened on the battlefields, it also tells the story of the wait so many Tasmanians endured back home during the long years of war.

It explores how families grieved and kept themselves busy, how some joined in to help the war effort, while others were interned as enemy aliens, and also looks at how Tasmanians remembered the fallen and made sense of the sacrifices made when the war was finally over.

The exhibition includes several interactive elements, including *The Islanders* – a resource developed by Tasmanian company Roar Film that tells the story of the Tasmanian Aboriginal servicemen who joined up to serve the Empire, at a time when they were denied many rights at home.

It also features a reconstruction of a typical Tasmanian home from the era where families would have waited anxiously for news from the front, and an audio roll-call of the names of all the Tasmanians who lost their lives during the conflict.

Members of the public are also being invited to contribute their own images of the many war memorials around the state

that sprung up in the aftermath of WWI, as part of an evolving photographic display.

TMAG will be running several public programs throughout the year to coincide with the exhibition, including programs for schools as well as an education kit for teachers to help students explore more of the exhibition's themes in the classroom.

For those visitors who can't make it to the museum to view it in person, *The Suspense is Awful* will also be accompanied by a dedicated website featuring many of the stories and images found in the exhibition.

The exhibition forms part of the Anzac Centenary Program, and the museum has been honoured to receive grants from the Anzac Centenary Arts and Culture Fund and the Anzac Centenary Local Grants Program to make it possible.

***The Suspense is Awful: Tasmania and the Great War* is on show in Argyle Gallery 4 at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery from 17 April 2015 until 28 February 2016.**

**The exhibition website is online at <http://ww1exhibition.tmag.tas.gov.au>.**



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# The Suspense is Awful: Tasmania and the Great War

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## Exhibition Themes

*The Suspense is Awful: Tasmania and the Great War* explores several different themes related to WWI, and unearths fascinating stories about how Tasmanians endured the years of conflict.

### Aboriginal Servicemen

Despite being denied many rights, Aboriginal men from all over Tasmania joined up to fight for the Empire in the Great War. The exhibition reveals the story of 28 men from Cape Barren and Flinders Islands in eastern Bass Strait who enlisted – one of the highest recruitment rates in Australia. Like other young men they embraced the relatively high pay and the opportunity to see the world as well as the chance to prove themselves equal to white Australians.

### Medical Service

It wasn't just soldiers who joined the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) and went to war, with Tasmanian doctors and nurses using their skills and experience in the Australian Army Medical Corps (AAMC) and the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS). The exhibition tells the stories of those who worked just behind the front line in casualty clearing stations and in hospitals further back to tend to the wounded.

### Recruitment and Conscription

In the conscription referenda of 1916 and 1917, Australians were asked whether Australian men aged between 18 and 44 should be forced to serve in the trenches during the Great War. As the exhibition shows, Tasmanians voted 'yes' by a small majority, but across Australia both referenda failed and at war's end the AIF remained the only all-volunteer army fighting.

### Enemy Aliens

Tasmanians of German birth fell under deep suspicion during the war. In the exhibition visitors can learn the story of mining engineer and anthropologist Fritz Nötling, who became an Australian citizen in 1908. He was a respected member of the community and also served as a Trustee of TMAG. In November 1915 he was arrested under suspicion of spying and for "making disloyal statements" – however it remains unclear whether the accusations were true.



Thomas Mansell and Archie Mansell at Claremont Camp, 1916. Photographer: J J N Barnett. Courtesy of Andrea Gerrard.



Red Cross flag, 1915, featuring more than 500 signatures of stretcher bearer Harry Baily's comrades. Purchased with the assistance of the Department of Veterans' Affairs, 2001.



Burge family house in Burnett Street North Hobart on return of sons from WWI, c.1919. Photographer: Brunton & Easton, Hobart.

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## Exhibition Themes

### Waiting

During WWI, Tasmanian families suffered anxiety wrought by distance, with mail taking several weeks to travel between Australia and the front line. The exhibition tells how they waited desperately for news, and often they received letters from loved ones weeks after being notified of their deaths – leaving a devastating impact on them and the wider Tasmanian community.

### Fundraising

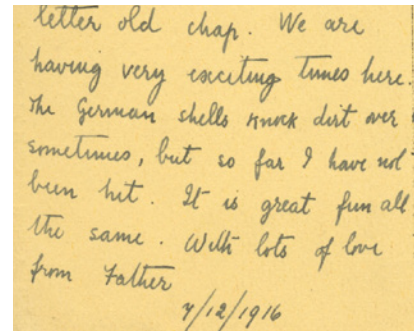
Tasmanian women held their families together and actively participated in the war effort by volunteering as nurses' aides, selling fundraising buttons on street corners, staffing stalls, knitting clothing, making jam and packing parcels to be sent to the front. As shown in the exhibition, much of this activity was overseen by the Tasmanian branch of the Australian Red Cross Society.

### After the War

On 11 November 1918 the guns stopped and across Tasmania people celebrated in the streets. The soldiers came home as heroes but, as discussed in the exhibition, many were shattered by their experiences. Organisations such as returned servicemen's clubs, Legacy and veterans' associations formed to provide support and welfare for men and their families, but the memories of war lingered.

### Remembering

Even before soldiers returned home, Tasmanians began to commemorate their service and the impact it had on the state. The exhibition features poignant images and stories about the memorial avenues, soldiers' memorials and honour boards that sprung up across the state. Visitors can also contribute their own images of memorials to the changing photographic display, via the exhibition website: <http://www1exhibition.tmag.tas.gov.au>.



Postcard from Frank Bethune to his son Angus, 1916. Presented by Mrs Mary Downie, 2010.



Peace celebrations, Hobart, 1919. Photographer: H H Bailly. TMAG collection.

To download images, visit the Media section at <http://www1exhibition.tmag.tas.gov.au>.

For further information, please contact **Andrée Hurburgh**, Communications, Marketing and Media Manager, on (03) 6165 7047 or [Andree.Hurburgh@tmag.tas.gov.au](mailto:Andree.Hurburgh@tmag.tas.gov.au).

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