

AUSTRALIAN MINING HISTORY ASSOCIATION BOOK REVIEW

Regional Australia and the Great War. "The boys from Old Kio"

Philip Payton, 2012. University of Exeter Press, 24cm, 272 pp, 79 ill., \$44.95 p/back, \$135 h/cover.

Philip Payton is well known for his expertise on the history of the Cornish communities on the Eyre Peninsula in South Australia. In this book he turns his attention to the Great War and how this region and its inhabitants – covering the mining and smelting towns of Moonta, Wallaroo and Kadina – interacted with this extraordinary and traumatic global experience. He delivers a book that represents a highly effective synthesis of local and global history; a powerful insight into the detailed lives of those from one region strongly connected to the world-turning events of 1914 to 1918. War brought hopes and dreams, and grief and loss across all of the combatant nations but it included as Payton notes 'dimensions that were always intensively personal and intensely local, and above all rooted in place.'(p.2)

The author then follows the lives of soldiers and their families as they moved through enlistment, the Gallipoli campaign, the Western Front, and periods of leave or recuperation in Old 'Blighty'. In these diverse experiences Payton explores the complex effects on identity. Visiting England for example was a remarkable experience for young men many of whom had relatives there, but as relationships between the Tommies and the Anzacs soured somewhat, the experience was not always positive. Visiting Cornwall was also a special experience for Peninsula men who were infused with Cornish culture and could visit Cornish relatives. Payton also covers the effects of the divisive conscription campaigns and the continued majority 'No' vote on the Peninsula despite the best efforts of pro-conscription politicians and churchmen.

Finally he covers the last battles of the war, the end of the conflict and the often frustrating process of demobilisation. The end of the war did not mean the end of suffering, as many endured the physical and psychological wounds of the conflict and those on the homefront managed as best they could or were left to mourn those who never returned. To make matters worse the economy went into recession and mining towns were particularly hard hit. All through this extended story, the author probes the personal stories of soldiers and their families, all too often ending with a description of how a man that we have come to know as readers was killed in action or by wounds that failed to heal.

Payton draws on the work on Bill Gammage and John McQuilton in particular, who have expertise on the lives of ordinary soldiers in the case of Gammage, and the relationship between rural regions and the war in the case of McQuilton. There is also a hint of Bruce Scates' work too as the author draws together individual stories from Australian War Memorial Records, soldier's letters and family correspondence to create a picture of the soldiers' experience at war and their changing relationship to the homefront. The rural press on the Peninsula, in particular the *People's Weekly*, played a crucial role initially in publishing letters from soldiers, and later as news from home read by soldiers at the front. While, as one might expect, the war emphasised national and imperial loyalties over local ones, the author shows how regional loyalties were also activated and even strengthened by the experience.

This book makes a very important contribution to two usually distinct historiographies – regional history, and military history. By connecting the two in such an effective and compelling fashion, Payton has shown a new direction in studies of war and history. The approach has all of the strengths of local history with its eye for detail and personal stories, but also possesses the big picture context that comes with a wider global scale. The book is handsomely produced by the University of Exeter Press with a generous number of photographs and reproductions of original documents. For mining historians it offers new ideas about connecting place with global history and also suggests new ways of looking at the impact of war on the Australian mining industry and its communities.

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