

Report for Winston Churchill Fellowship

Jane Tolerton

Summary

The Winston Churchill Fellowship has meant I could undertake research in the United Kingdom for a book on New Zealand women who played a role in the First World War – doctors, nurses, ambulance drivers, canteen workers and even a ‘lady superintendent’ in a munitions factory.

The \$5000 grant made it possible for me to spend more than one month in Britain and to: interview about a dozen people who have done research in various aspects of my topic; explore the sites of three New Zealand hospitals set up in Britain in the First World War; speak at a New Zealand Women’s Committee WW1 centenary event (at a hotel that was used as a New Zealand hospital); do research in the Imperial War Museum and the Wellcome Institute in London and the Mitchell Library in Glasgow; and see the IWM’s First World War exhibition.

I thought the easiest way to record the way I used the fellowship was to provide a chronological outline. I am very happy to speak on my research or fulfil any other requirements.

My research trip was highly successful. There was no other way to learn what I did without going there and seeing people and archives – and I am immensely grateful for having been given your support. I hope to put the book together by the end of the year and have it published next year. I will, of course, be mentioning the fellowship in my acknowledgements, and have mentioned it in a piece on the Scottish Women’s Hospital website.

1-2 July: Sydney

I have planned my trip to the United Kingdom to follow on from my speech at the conference of the Australian and New Zealand Society of the History of Medicine’s 14th Biennial Conference at the Australian Catholic University, North Sydney, on 2 July.

My paper is titled ‘A spirit of sisterhood’ in Serbia: Dr Agnes Bennett, Miles Franklin and a Scottish Women’s Hospital unit in World War One’. Dr Agnes Bennett is claimed by both Australia (she was born in Sydney, went to Sydney University and left money to that institution) and New Zealand (as she lived in Wellington for most of her life). Miles Franklin is one of Australia’s most-loved writers. She left money for a literature prize which bears her name, and is probably best known by most Australasians because they have seen the film of her famous novel *My Brilliant Career*, which starred Australian Judy Davis and New Zealanders Sam Neill, rather than because they have read this novel or any of her others.

Thomas Kenneally, who has written a novel about Australian nurses during World War One, put me on to Nemari Nishta – a piece written by Miles Franklin about her work in the Scottish Women’s Hospital unit when he and I appeared together as a breakfast time panel as part of the Wellington International Festival of the Arts in 2014. About six months previously, in the Australian War Memorial I had found the quote from Miles Franklin about how she felt Dr Agnes Bennett ran their SWH unit ‘in the spirit of sisterhood’. I spent a week in the Mitchell Library, New South Wales in May 2015 to find the document which included this quote, and other documents, including Miles Franklin’s notebook diaries with short day to day notes.

Dr Agnes Bennett’s nieces sent me her journal for the time she was in Macedonia. So I wrote the speech from what each woman reported. This was not a comparison of the two women but an

exploration of the information in terms of the conference's theme of Mission, Method and Management. I argued that Dr Agnes Bennett ran the unit in a particularly womanly way – 'in a spirit of sisterhood' as Miles Franklin put it – that this this was highly successful.

The questions were interesting. The man who spoke before me about women doctors who had been Sydney University graduates asked me if I knew how many women doctors from New Zealand played a role overseas in the war – as he thought about 20 Australian women doctors had. I have a list of New Zealand women doctors who worked overseas in the war, and there are 20 names on it. So I could say that – and that I thought it likely that per head of population New Zealand probably had more woman doctors active in the war than any other country. As we only had about 1m people at the time, this is almost certainly the case. Scotland would probably be next as they too had a lot of women doctors.

At the conference I met New Zealander Clare Jordan who is taking a tour of sites associated with 'Anzac' nurses in the Mediterranean later this year, along with English historian, Christine Hallett (which is why I will be unable to meet Hallett in the UK as she will be away on that trip) and Dr Derek Dow, University of Auckland, who chaired my session.

3 and 7 and 8 July: Mitchell Library, Sydney

Straddling the weekend, I spend three days at the Mitchell Library, the research library within the State Library of New South Wales looking again at the Miles Franklin material. I find a piece Franklin wrote in England during the war titled 'How the Englishman takes his war'. She also wrote about Australian aspects such as her reaction to the anti-conscription referendum vote in Australia and meetings with Australian soldiers.

I find it surprising no book has been published in Australia with these pieces. I suspect it is because the people who would be interested in Miles Franklin are not interested in the war and do not have enough context about the chronology and events of the war – particularly in Serbia and Macedonia, which are off the beaten track for Australian and New Zealand war books – to provide a really good, contextualising introduction for such a book. Also – the pieces are on a microfilm which is labelled 'Short Stories'. Researchers may have assumed these pieces were 'stories. Many are, but between them are non-fiction pieces for newspapers and magazines, that were not published at the time.

As a result of these three days at the Mitchell Library, I email Henry Rosenbloom of Scribe Publishers, Melbourne and suggest a book on Miles Franklin's war – basically her pieces with good notes and introductory pieces. He replies that this is very interesting – and asks for a proper synopsis.

Tuesday 7 July: I fly to United Kingdom.

Wednesday 8 – Friday 10 July: Frome: Anita Young re Ida Malone

I arrive in London and take a train to Frome to stay with Anita Young, granddaughter of the famous Colonel Malone, commanding officer of the Wellington Infantry Battalion, who died at Chunuk Bair, Gallipoli, killed by "friendly fire" on 8 August 1915. He is probably the best-known New Zealand soldier of the First World War and the most admired.

I talk to Anita about her grandmother Ida – called "Mater" by her family and now famous as the recipient of letters from Malone at Gallipoli. John Crawford of the Defence Department put them out in 2015 in a volume titled *No Better Death: The Great War Diaries and Letters of William G Malone*.

I will include material about Ida in my book – using the piece Anita has written for Sir Peter Jackson's exhibition in the Dominion Museum building. I will also write about Norah, Anita's aunt, who did Red Cross work in the UK.

Anita and I spent our time talking about Mater and the information I will be able to use in my book. Part of this is the question of why her story has been misrepresented in New Zealand. This is because she was Malone's second wife. He already had five children previously. He then had three children with her – and she took them to UK in 1915 so that she would be there in case Malone himself or one of his four older sons, all of whom finally went to the war, were wounded. Initially the New Zealanders thought they would fight in France – so Mater sailed for England about the same time as the Anzacs headed from Egypt not to France but to the Dardanelles.

New Zealand histories and even the very recent 4-minute film shown as part of the war commemorations this year on TV3, always say Mater left New Zealand after Malone was killed. This is not true but seems to have come about because Malone's first family have more or less claimed her as their mother. This probably happened inadvertently because subtlety gets smoothed out – but the mistake has stood and it has been constantly reiterated that Malone's wife left New Zealand after his death – as if she could not bear living there without him – when the truth is that she left, like many officers' mothers and wives, to be on hand closer to the battlefield and that after his death there were major financial issues and she simply did not have the money to pay fares for herself and her children to return to New Zealand.

So Mater is an important story for my book and by coming here I have been able to learn about it – and have been given Anita's piece and has given me permission to use it, having cleared it with Sir Peter Jackson. I will adapt it into the style of my book but will check back with Anita.

This visit was an example of how my research often works to the advantage of the families I am tapping into for information. I asked Anita what Ida's background was. Was she born in New Zealand? What did her father do? She did not know – and had never found out. So we set about with Department of Internal Affairs' Births, Deaths and Marriages site, looked up the National Library's Papers Past website and I emailed Wendy Leahy, the genealogist I employ in such cases. Anita now has a very clear picture of where Ida came from, where she went to school and what prizes she won, who her siblings were – and so on. She knows now that her grandmother was born very near where she lives now, having just moved from London; Ida's family emigrated when she was 9 years old.

In all the research on and writing about the famous Colonel Malone – including the much-published final letter to his wife -- historians have never looked at Ida as a person in her own right or asked the family about it, and strangely, the family does not seem to have wondered either. She has just been the recipient of his famous letters.

She has had her "agency" taken away from her. She's only the recipient of war letters, not someone who actively, of her own volition, and bravely (as her husband pointed out, as many ships were sunk by German submarines) went to Britain to be there for her husband and stepsons.

Saturday 11 July: Wellcome Institute

I go to the Wellcome Institute's research centre in Euston Road to do the formalities to become a reader there.

I want to see Dr Bonte Elgood's collection as it may have photographs of New Zealand doctors Agnes Bennett and Grace Russell – and maybe Lady Godley and even Ettie Rout, possibly. Plus information. Dr Elgood, who was English but moved with her family to Egypt as a girl, was a point of contact for many of the New Zealand women in Egypt. She knew the language and the customs. It was Dr Elgood who suggested the Esbekia Gardens, a recreation centre, be taken over by the British Army and turned into a centre specifically for soldiers – and specifically as "counter attraction" to the brothel quarter, the Wazza nearby because of the high VD rate among soldiers. The Esbekia Gardens was run by New Zealand YMCA chaplain James Hay and the New Zealand Volunteer Sisters worked there, and later Ettie Rout, who became a kind of one-woman inquiry centre answering letters from

New Zealand parents about what had happened to their sons on the Gallipoli peninsula; many had had only a telegram saying the man was missing or dead and they wanted details; Ettie gathered those details from their comrades and replied to the families.

Monday 13 to Wednesday 15 July: Germany: the Jewish Museum and Bundestag

German MP Kordula Kovac, whom I met in Wellington in 2012 when New Zealand was the Guest Country of Honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair – while I was working at the Ministry for Culture and Heritage – has invited me to visit her at the Bundestag. So I do a two-day side-trip to Germany and spend about three hours being shown around the Bundestag.

I also go to the research unit of the Jewish Museum to follow up my investigations into one of the mysteries of New Zealand's First World War story: what happened to William Nimot, the German-speaking son of German immigrants who was born and grew up in Carterton and in June 1916 crossed the line at Armentieres – to the Germans. His great nephew contacted me after my book, *An Awfully Big Adventure*, came out and together with a genealogist we are trying to find out what happened to Nimot after he deserted. Aubrey Pomerance, the Canadian historian who heads the Archive team at the Jewish Museum came to New Zealand last year to collect things for the museum from Jewish immigrants, and invited me to the museum if I made it to Berlin.

Thursday 16 July: Kate Adie

I meet Kate Adie at the Army and Navy Club in Pall Mall. She is on the Advisory Committee for commemoration of the First World War in Britain and is very well known in Britain as presenter of *From Our Correspondent* on BBC4 and as a long-time war correspondent herself on television. She fronted a documentary shown on television last year on British women's contribution to the war effort. She also has a fortnightly slot on Radio NZ National on news from Britain.

This is a very interesting meeting as she has thought through a lot of the issues I am working on. She has done a lot of research in much the way I have been doing – working from the evidence rather than trying to find evidence to fit theories.

Friday 17 July: in bed with cold!

I have to cancel my appointment to see Dr Deborah Thom in Cambridge to talk about women in munitions factories. (However, I am able to reschedule for August 17).

Monday 20 July – 24 July: Manchester

I go to Manchester to meet Professor Don Akenson, author of many books including *Half the World from Home*, a history of the Irish in New Zealand. Professor Akenson has been a mentor to me and a number of New Zealand historians since being the Stout Fellow at the Stout Research Centre at Victoria University in the late 1980s. At that time I was doing the World War One Oral History Archive and my first biography of Ettie Rout. He was responsible for my book *Convent Girls* being a book and not a magazine article, as originally planned!

I plan to follow the style of one of Professor Akenson's books for my book on NZ women in WW1 – as a model of how to cover a lot of information about many people in many different places while keeping a chronology so readers don't get lost. This book is titled *An Irish History of Civilisation* and follows Irish people round the globe.

[Saturday 25 August – 31 August: side trip to Northern Ireland and the Republic visiting historical sites with two Irish history professors]

Saturday 1 August and Monday 3 August: Glasgow: Mitchell Library" Scottish Women's Hospitals

I set up addition to my itinerary: Mitchell Library in Glasgow to see Scottish Women's Hospital archive. I get in touch with Alan Cumming – who sends me two films he has made. Alan Cumming, a landscape gardener, was on holiday in Serbia seeing a friend and going to a football game...when he noticed monuments to the Scottish Women's Hospitals leader Dr Elise Inglis and heard about the love of the Serbians for SWH women, hundreds of whom went to Serbia in World War One, many others working with their soldiers when they were forced into exile in late 1915.

Alan Cumming does a great service for me – by sorting out the files with information on New Zealand women in the Scottish Women's Hospital units. I spend two full days in the library writing notes and ordering photocopies. Luckily the Mitchell Library is open all day on Saturday.

I look at material on the two New Zealand women doctors who headed Scottish Women's Hospital units – Dr Agnes Bennett (in Macedonia in 1916 and 1917) and Dr Mary Blair (in Greece, Corsica and Malta in 1915 and 1916) – and on Dr Jessie Scott who was taken prisoner when the Austrians invaded Serbia in 1915. The stories of these women are little known in New Zealand. In fact people are surprised to hear that New Zealand women doctors played a role in World War One – and particularly that they did so on the Serbia front. A New Zealand nurse who originally left the country with Ettie Rout's New Zealand Volunteer Sisterhood in 1915, Agnes Kerr, also worked with a SWH unit in Macedonia and later in Serbia. And other New Zealand nurses and volunteers were with other groups.

Alan Cumming asks me to write a piece for the Scottish Women's Hospital history website. I write this, including mention of the Winston Churchill Fellowship.

Wednesday 5 September – Friday 7 August: Imperial War Museum

I take notes from the letters and diary of a New Zealand nurse and read the letters and accounts of women who worked with New Zealanders in the Scottish Women's Hospitals in Greece, Corsica and Macedonia. I will use pieces from the diary of the New Zealand nurse – Elsie Grey – in my book. The information from the British women helps round out the picture of the three NZ women doctors who worked with the Serbs during WW1 – Dr Agnes Bennett, Dr Jessie Scott and Dr Mary Blair. One of the women whose letters are in the IWM collection worked for Dr Mary Blair about whom there has been very little publicity in New Zealand. She is a major "find": she took a SWH unit to Salonika, found there was very little work to do and so did not set up a hospital there. Her unit started looking after Serbian refugees as they poured into Salonika. As a result she was asked to take hundreds of refugees to Corsica and set up a hospital there. She landed 800 refugees in Corsica on Christmas Day and set up the hospital for them. She took both her mother and her dog ('Muggins') on this expedition.

Accessing the IWM material is more difficult now than it was when I was researching for my Ettie Rout book in the 1980s. You have to book in for three-hour sessions, either 10 to 1 or 2 to 5. If you have not finished but want to return and the places are full for that afternoon or next day, you can't go there! And they are closed on Fridays. So I book in for the morning and afternoon sessions on Monday 17 as this will be my last chance.

Tuesday 11 and Wednesday 12 August: Jane Thomas: Codford and Brockenhurst

I go to stay with Jane Thomas of the New Zealand Women's Committee and she takes me on a trip to two of the sites of New Zealand General Hospitals in World War One – Codford and Brockenhurst. These are villages in which there is a memory of New Zealanders – not only through the churchyards with graves but also with displays in the churches. They often have visits from New Zealand relations of soldiers buried there. In both cases, there is a retired English nurse who has become fascinated by the history of the New Zealanders who were there in World War 1.

Brockenhurst the New Zealand Women's Committee is raising money for a new handrail down to the graveyard. They were inspired to do this by the visit in 2013 of Hon Christopher Finlayson, the Minister of Arts, Culture and Heritage who told a group of New Zealanders that he wanted 'legacy' projects in the UK. They are raising money for a new handrail for the steps down to the graveyard at the little church at Brockenhurst – where there are NZ soldiers' graves.

I am amazed to find the huge difference it makes to actually go and see the hospital sites. Although I need written archives, the value of seeing the lie of the land is amazing. I can now picture the New Zealand nurses and volunteers being there – and it makes a lot of difference. One of the women who ran a New Zealand War Contingent Association canteen at Codford was Maud Wilder. She heard two of her sons had died at Gallipoli – then that one had survived and was in England. She immediately set sail....and then spent about three years running a canteen for soldiers. She was already a grandmother when she made that trip. A number of young New Zealand women, three of them later successful artists, worked with her there.

Thursday 13 August: Walton on Thames centenary event: NZ War Contingent Association hospital

I am the main speaker at a tea party to commemorate the centenary of a hospital set up at Walton on Thames, London, by the NZ War Contingent Association which consisted of New Zealanders who were in London at the time. They and their daughters staffed it! This is an untold story in New Zealand history – one that shows the New Zealand-ness of the New Zealanders! They formed a committee, raised the money, and set up a hospital.

I read pieces New Zealand women – and one soldier – wrote at the time. So it has a real 'first-person' quality to it. Of course people are amazed to find out what New Zealanders, particularly the women, did at that time. I sit next to Alexandra, Lady Smith – wife of New Zealand High Commissioner Sir Lockwood Smith – and met other New Zealanders.

Friday 14 August: Cambridge: Dr Deborah Thom

I go to Cambridge and meet Dr Deborah Thom who is the expert on women working in munitions factories during World War One, author of the book *Nice Girls and Rude Girls: women workers and the First World War*. She is also involved with the Imperial War Museum.

This is an exceptionally useful meeting as I am able to discuss the question of why women have been 'written out' of the war histories by not being written in to them. This is much more marked in New Zealand than in Britain where people were in general proud of the active work women did in the war effort in both the world wars.

Saturday 15 August: author Jenifer Roberts

I go to Chippenham to see Jenifer Roberts, author of *Fitz*, a biography of James Edward Fitzgerald, a founder of the Canterbury settlement. I ask her to put me in touch with Christopher Godley/Lord Kilbracken who is a member of the same family as not only John Robert Godley who was a major founder of the Canterbury settlement but also General Sir Alexander Godley who led the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in World War One.

As a result of my visit to Jenifer Roberts, I am now in touch with Lord Kilbracken and have therefore had the opportunity to ask him for any wartime photographs his family might have of Louisa, Lady Godley – who opened a convalescent home for New Zealand soldiers in Alexandria while her husband was leading the New Zealanders at Gallipoli. This year I turned their letters to each other into a 10-part radio reading, which was on National Radio just before Anzac Day this year – for the centenary of the Gallipoli landings. They were read by Sam Neill and Ginette Macdonald. (Lord Kilbracken is on holiday in France, but has said that when he returns to Ireland he will look! I have written to National Radio to get a copy of the readings, so I can send these to him).

Monday 17 August: Imperial War Museum

I have a final day in the Imperial War Museum, reading microfilm – including account of Dr Mary McNeill and her visit to Dr Agnes Bennett's Scottish Women's Hospital Ostrovo unit in Macedonia and pieces by SWH unit members who walked over the mountains from Serbia to Albania, which one New Zealand nurse and one New Zealand woman volunteer also did (getting frostbite in her legs) after the Austrians invaded Serbia in 1915.

Tuesday 18 August: Mike Wicksteed: ex-Comms, New Zealand Army

Mike Wicksteed, who was the Comms man for the army when I began my research on Ettie Rout and carried out the interviews for the World War One Oral History Archive has always been a helpful source on the war; he proofread my 2013 book based on the New Zealand Oral History Archive interviews with veterans, *An Awfully Big Adventure*.

I fly from Heathrow on the night of 18 August and arrive home on evening of 20 August.

The following day I am interviewed as part of the publicity for my new, shorter book on Ettie Rout – the one New Zealand woman whose name is associated with work overseas in World War One. In another year, many such women will appear in my book.

I wish to thank the Winston Churchill Fellowship committee for giving me a huge boost in researching for the book.