BRITISH OFFICIAL FIRST WORLD WAR PHOTOGRAPHS, 1916-1918: ARRANGING AND CONTEXTUALIZING A COLLECTION OF PRINTS AT THE ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO


By

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A thesis presented to Ryerson University

in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

in the Program of

Film/Photography Preservation and Collections Management

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2015

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**Abstract**

This thesis approaches a body of 520 British official First World War photographs in the collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, to ask how access to this material can be enhanced. The practical project involves physically arranging the works as well as improving their catalogue records. Additionally, this thesis examines the social and political causes for wartime censorship, leading to the appointment of "official" photographers. It compares the work of Britain's two most prolific First World War photographers to illustrate the benefits of physically arranging historical photographs by maker and to understand their individual approaches to capturing subjects of war.

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## 1. Introduction

In 1914, upon the outbreak of war, journalists and press photographers were banned from the British sector of the Western Front.[1] Although the press circumvented this ban by publishing war drawings, tactical maps and photographs previously published in foreign newspapers, there was a demand for photographs of the British war effort. By 1916, to meet this demand for news images, but also to control the type of photographs published, the British Propaganda Bureau appointed "official photographers." War photography historian Hilary Roberts states, "an official war photographer is one who is employed to photograph a conflict on behalf of a government institution, military force, or other noncommercial organization."[2]

The British official photographers produced approximately 20,000 images between 1916 and 1918.[3] All British press agencies were given access to the photographs, while some images were reproduced and sold as souvenirs. In 1918, the British Ministry of Information (previously the Propaganda Bureau) turned its records, including all official photographic negatives and a set of prints, over to the newly formed Imperial War Museum (IWM).[4] Official photographers Ernest Brooks, John Warwick Brooke and David McLellan were then hired by the museum to arrange and describe the photographs.[5] Due to their wide reproduction and distribution during the war, variant copies of the images can be found in private and public collections.[6]

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[1] Jane Carmichael, *First World War Photographers* (London and New York: Routledge Press, 1989), 25.
[2] Hilary Roberts, "War Photographers: A Special Breed?" in *War/Photography: Images of Armed Conflict and its Aftermath*, ed. Anne Wilkes Tucker et al. (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2012), 10.
[3] Carmichael, *First World War Photographers*, 142.
[4] As we will see, the Propaganda Bureau, also known as Wellington House, experienced a number of reorganization efforts throughout the war.
[5] Hilary Roberts, in a phone conversation with the author, March 10, 2015. According to Roberts, the newly founded Imperial War Museum took over the residence of the former Ministry of Information;

In 2008, the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) accepted the anonymous donation of 463 official First World War photographs. Associate curator of photography, Sophie Hackett, justified this acquisition by arguing that these prints would act as "an invaluable counterpoint to the Art Gallery of Ontario's collection of 495 personal albums from the World War I era."[7]

During the past seven years, the collection of British official First World War photographs has not been organized or researched to open a dialogue between the official photographs and amateur albums. The prints are housed in four Solander boxes without any apparent order. The creators, dates, and historical context have not been noted in the AGO's collections management system, The Museum System (TMS).

The body of photographs addressed in this thesis includes 520 gelatin silver prints made during the war. Of those, 452 are from the 2008 acquisition, while the remaining 68 British official war photographs are from an earlier acquisition and have been included in the theoretical component of this thesis.[8]

Each print's verso holds some piece of information: stamps, handwritten notes, or captions.[9] Each caption includes an alphanumeric code (e.g., D.1875). The prints range from 20 x 15 cm up to 25 x 20 cm, but the majority of prints measure 22 x 17 cm. Most of the photographs are in very good physical condition and will not require rehousing.

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Gaynor Kavanagh, "Museum as Memorial: The Origins of the Imperial War Museum," *Journal of Contemporary History* 23 (1988), 77, 83.

[6] There are also a large number of British official First World War prints in the National Library of Scotland collection, which appear to have belonged to British Field Marshal, Sir Douglas Haig.

[7] Sophie Hackett, "Outstanding Significance and National Importance," (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario Research Report, December 2008).

[8] The body of work considered in this thesis does not include 11 New Zealand official photographs that were also acquired in the 2008 collection of 463 prints.

[9] There is one photograph in the collection that has no information on the print verso, but I was able to find its attribution on the Imperial War Museum database.

This thesis includes practical and theoretical components, each with related research questions. First, it asks the broad question: what can be done to promote accessibility for this collection? In other words, if the collection was acquired to act as a counterpoint to other AGO holdings, how can this be achieved?

The practical component of this project involves physically and intellectually arranging the photographs to improve accessibility. The physical arrangement of the photographs will separate the works by maker and place them into chronological order. I will enhance the collection's existing records by identifying creators, dates, subjects and associated battles in TMS.[10] The physical arrangement is intended to promote basic access for users wishing to retrieve and study the materials, but it is also intended to provide a new access point for users, which draws attention to the photographers' individual approaches to their task.

The theoretical component of this thesis is a historical analysis that asks: why were "official" photographs taken during the First World War, and how do the photographs in the AGO collection indicate how this system of information operated? To answer these questions, I created an alternative database to act as a research tool. It identifies the photographers present in the collection and quantifies the range of subjects they captured. I then compared two of the most prolific photographers' approaches to war photography to understand how their images reflect personal style as well as the agency for which they worked.

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[10] For a detailed explanation of this process, see Chapter Three: Photographic Object Management.

## 2. Literature Review

Multiple branches of literature were consulted in order to understand the historical context of the British official First World War photographs. Because photographs of the First World War exist within the larger historical narrative on war photography, this literature review discusses two recent examples of that historiography. It then examines specific histories of First World War censorship and propaganda, before turning to histories of First World War photography. Finally, it reviews recent literature on arranging and describing photographic collections.

### 2.1 Histories of War Photography

The history of war photography has been studied at length for decades.[11] Two recent histories illustrate dichotomous approaches to this topic, but such studies often suggest the importance of historical context when viewing images of war. Dr. Thierry Gervais' exhibition catalogue, *Dispatch: War Photographs in Print, 1854-2008* (2014), examines the shifting attitudes towards war photographs in the press, expressing the importance of historical context during each conflict.[12] Although the focus of this study is not the British press during the First World War, it indicates that the relationship between photography and the wartime press exists within a larger historical progression.[13]

Curator Anne Wilkes Tucker takes a broader approach to the history of war photography in the exhibition catalogue *War/Photography: Images of Armed Conflict*

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[11] See also: Jorge Lewinski, *The Camera at War: A History of War Photography from 1848 to the Present Day* (London: W.H. Allen, 1979); Frances Fralin and Jane Livingston, *The Indelible Image: Photographs of War, 1846-Present* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1986).

[12] Thierry Gervais, *Dispatch: War Photographs in Print, 1854-2008* (Toronto: Ryerson Image Centre, 2014).

[13] Of the 520 prints in this collection, 444 have a press agency stamp on their verso, although it is unclear how many were printed in newspapers during the war.

*and its Aftermath* (2012), and attempts to put forth a definitive history of 165 years of war photography.[14] The works are thus divided into multiple themes, such as: "Media Coverage and Dissemination," "The Advent of War," "Recruitment and Embarkation," "The Fight," and "Aftermath."[15] Like Gervais, Tucker's approach illustrates the importance of context—particularly the roles filled by "official" photographers for the Allied nations in 1916 (a concept I explore in Chapter 4). Tucker's book provides some of that historical context, but to gain more insight on the socio-political milieu under which the First World War photographers were hired, it is important to consult histories of wartime censorship and propaganda.

## 2.2 Histories of Censorship and Propaganda in the First World War

Historians of British censorship and propaganda argue that the government and military shared a perception for the necessity of both press censorship at home and the dissemination of propaganda abroad. In "Domestic Censorship in the First World War" (1970), Deian Hopkin discusses the relationship between the press and the government in the fifteen years preceding the First World War, and early efforts to establish a bill to codify the rules of wartime censorship.[16] M.L. Sanders builds on this narrative in "Wellington House and the British Propaganda During the First World War" (1975), by

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[14] Anne Wilkes Tucker, ed. et al., *War/Photography: Images of Armed Conflict and its Aftermath* (Houston, Museum of Fine Arts, 2012). This exhibition, organized at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, showed nearly 500 objects, including photographs taken by 280 photographers from 28 nations.

[15] To name a few. Also: "Training," "Daily Routine," "Reconnaissance, Resistance and Sabotage," "Patrol and Troop Movement," "The Wait," "Rescue," "Executions," "Iwo Jima," "Leisure Time," "Support," "Prisoners of War and Interrogators," "Medicine," "Faith," "Portraits," "Civilians," "Refugees," "Children," "War's End," "Memorials," and "Remembrance." Frances Fralin and Jane Livingston organized a large exhibition of war photographs in 1985, but arranged the works chronologically. Fralin and Livingston, *The Indelible Image.*

[16] Deian Hopkin, "Domestic Censorship in the First World War," *Journal of Contemporary History* 5, no. 4 (January 1970): 151-169.

examining British propaganda efforts and establishment of the British Propaganda Bureau, commonly known as Wellington House.[17] The perceived need for censorship and propaganda gave rise to the photographic unit at Wellington House, although photography is not a focus for either of these historians.

Censorship and propaganda are explored in monographs on the First World War, such as Niall Ferguson's *The Pity of War* (1999) and Stephen Badsey's *The British Army in Battle and its Image, 1914-1918* (2005).[18] These historians focus on the influence of London's "Press Gang"—newspaper owners who worked with Wellington House and received numerous peerages during the war. Their studies highlight the complex power struggle between the press, government and military, although it is not within their scope to discuss photography.

John Taylor approaches the topic of censorship and propaganda with specific reference to photography in *War Photography: Realism in the British Press* (1991).[19] His work discusses the perceived need to control the flow of photography from the Western Front and the role official photographers were expected to fill in representing the war. Taylor highlights the struggles of photographers to take photographs that the press wanted, such as images of action, while conforming to the rules of censorship imposed by Wellington House and the limitations of camera technology.[20]

Building on this intersection between war photography and the press, Joëlle Beurier compares the censorship of violent images in the press of three combatant nations

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[17] M. L. Sanders, "Wellington House and British Propaganda During the First World War," *The Historical Journal* 18, no. 1 (March, 1975): 119-146.

[18] Stephen Badsey, *The British Army in Battle and its Image, 1914-1918* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009); Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 212-247.

[19] John Taylor, *War Photography: Realism in the British Press* (London and New York: Routledge Press, 1991).

[20] Ibid., 43.

in "Mapping Visual Violence in Germany, France and Britain, 1914-1918" (2013).[21] Her analysis is an important counterpoint to histories that focus exclusively on the British press. Beurier argues that British newspapers suggest a "polymorphous" approach to publishing shocking imagery; they attempted to strike a balance between realism and "decency."[22] However, Beurier's work is significant because she argues that, conversely, Germany imposed the strictest censorship in the domestic press, while France was the least concerned of the three nations in publishing violent images.

Although these histories do not all directly relate to official photography, they stress the perceived necessity for propaganda and censorship that resulted in the appointment of British official First World War photographers in 1916.

## 2.3 Histories of First World War Photography

Histories of wartime censorship and propaganda highlight why it seemed necessary to control the flow of images coming from the Western Front, while histories that focus specifically on First World War photography provide the most detailed information on how those official photographs were made. This is precisely the goal of Jane Carmichael's *The First World War Photographers* (1989).[23] Carmichael's history is one of the most relevant for explaining how and why official war photographs came to be made—she examines the appointment of official photographers in relation to the tools they used and the photographs they produced.

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[21] Joëlle Beurier, "Mapping Visual Violence in Germany, France and Britain, 1914-1918," in *Liberal Democracies at War: Conflict and Representation*, ed. Andrew Knapp and Hilary Footitt et al. (London: GBR, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 15-34. Beurier also focuses on shocking images published in the French press in "Death and Material Culture: the Case of Pictures During the First World War," in *Matters of Conflict: Material Culture, Memory and the First World War*, ed. Nicholas J. Saunders (Florence, KY: Routledge, 2004), 109-121.
[22] Beurier, "Mapping Visual Violence in Germany, France and Britain, 1914-1918," 16, 25.
[23] Carmichael, *First World War Photographers,* 1.

Mark Holborn and Hilary Roberts' *The Great War: A Photographic Narrative* (2013) likewise focuses on official First World War photography from a British perspective.[24] Holborn and Roberts' work explains the propaganda war in Britain in conjunction with events taking place in Europe, and the resultant official photographs. Carmichael, Holborn and Roberts' discussion on the establishment of Wellington House is a useful complement to histories that focus on censorship and propaganda in greater detail because their works make direct reference to the resultant official photographs.

Ann Thomas' 2014 exhibition catalogue, *The Great War: The Persuasive Power of Photography*, highlights the variety and ubiquity of photographic objects during the First World War era.[25] Like Tucker, Thomas defines what it means to be an "official" photographer, but her perspective is based specifically on the context of the First World War. Furthermore, she juxtaposes official and amateur photographs, highlighting the similarities and differences found in these approaches to war photography. Unlike other historians, Thomas emphasizes the importance photography and photographs held for individual soldiers — as a pastime and as treasured items. This dialogue between public and private photography is useful to establish relationships between official and amateur photographs of war at the AGO.

Histories of war photography, censorship and propaganda illustrate how individual photographers' works were merged to create a singular narrative of the British experience at war, and how the photographs came to be arranged at the IWM. This thesis

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[24] Mark Holborn and Hilary Roberts, *The Great War: A Photographic Narrative* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013).

[25] Ann Thomas, *The Great War: The Persuasive Power of Photography* (Milan: 5 Continents Editions in Association with the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 2014). This exhibition took place at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, from June 27 to November 16, 2014.

rearranges the AGO collection of British official photographs to enhance user access and to identify the individual makers of those photographs.

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**2.4 Literature on Photographic Object Management**

The purpose of this project is to re-establish the contextual framework of the collection to promote user access. This will be achieved by rearranging the prints that arrived at the AGO without any particular order.

According to the *Rules for Archival Description* (*RAD*) principle of *respect des fonds*, "records created, accumulated, and/or maintained and used by an individual or corporate body must be kept together in their original order, if it exists or has been maintained, and not be mixed or combined with the records of another individual or corporate body."[26] However, recent literature on archival practices advocates a shift away from maintaining original order in favour of promoting user access and understanding.

Guidebooks such as the *Introduction to Archival Organization and Description* (1998) by Michael J. Fox and Peter L. Wilkerson, and *Photographs: Archival Care and Management* (2006) by Mary-Lynn Ritzenthaler and Diane Vogt O'Connor state that it is best to adhere to original order as often as possible. They also admit that re-arrangement is acceptable if a collection exhibits no original order, or if it assists in promoting access.[27]

In "Putting the Parts of the Whole Together: Systematic Arrangement of Archives" (2000), Terry Eastwood argues that the word "arrangement" is too narrow

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[26] Association of Canadian Archivists, *The Rules for Archival Description* (Bureau of Canadian Archivists, Ottawa: 1990, revised in 2008), xxiii.
[27] Michael J. Fox and Peter L. Wilkerson, *Introduction to Archival Organization and Description* (Los Angeles: The Getty Information Institute, 1998), 36; Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler and Diane Vogt-O'Connor, *Photographs: Archival Care and Management* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2006), 145-50.

because it indicates that all archival records can conform to the same "process of physically ordering."[28] According to Eastwood, a degree of standardization is important to arranging collections, but the ultimate goal should be to establish relationships between objects rather than adhering to original order.[29]

Jennifer Meehan cites Eastwood in "Making Leaps from Parts to Whole: Evidence and Inference in Archival Arrangement" (2009) and agrees, noting that relationships between objects to promote understanding is preferable to adhering strictly to original order.[30] She argues that records frequently come to institutions as fragmented pieces, and it is the task of archivists to use both historical evidence and personal inference in constructing a "whole" collection.[31]

It is important to be aware of standards for the arrangement and description of photographs, but emerging archival literature demonstrates how establishing relationships and promoting the understanding of photographs is equally valuable to maintaining original order.

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[28] Terry Eastwood, "Putting the Parts of the Whole Together: Systematic Arrangement of Archives," (2000), 93.

[29] Ibid., 96. Eastwood goes on to discuss the relevance of identifying archival hierarchies, which does not relate to this thesis.

[30] Jennifer Meehan, "Making Leaps from Parts to Whole: Evidence and Inference in Archival Arrangement and Description," *The American Archivist* 72 (Spring/Summer 2009), 72-90.

[31] Ibid., 76.

**3. Photographic Object Management**

This thesis proposes two methods to enhance user access to the AGO collection of British official First World War photographs. The first is to arrange the photographs, organizing them by maker and placing them in chronological order. The second task is to enhance the photographs' records in TMS to indicate makers, approximate dates, associated battles, places of creation and related materials. This section outlines the decision-making process and work completed for these tasks.

**3.1 Physical Arrangement**

As stated, the *Rules for Archival Description* recommends respecting the original order of a collection.[32] However, this collection came to the AGO lacking any intelligible order; imposing a new organization will benefit the collection by promoting access and understanding of the photographs.

Before deciding how to organize the AGO photographs, the meaning of the alphanumeric codes found on each print verso had to be determined (fig. 1). The format of the codes was not referenced in any secondary sources, but through a discussion with Hilary Roberts, head curator of photography at the Imperial War Museum, I learned that the letters indicate different photographers, while the numbers follow the chronology in which Wellington House received the negatives. For example, "C.1618" indicates the photograph was taken by Ernest Brooks and was the 1618th photograph by Brooks received at Wellington House—meaning numerical order does not always reflect chronological order. The AGO collection is comprised of photographs with the following

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[32] Association of Canadian Archivists, *The Rules for Archival Description,* xxiii.

codes: "A," for works by the British Royal Engineers; "C," for works by Ernest Brooks; "D," for works by John Warwick Brooke; "L," for works by David Mclellan; and "M," for works by Thomas Keith Aitken. The collection also includes photographs by Ariel Varges that have numbers—such as "1061. British Official Photographs from the Salonika Front. Tommy's Washing Day"—but no letter has been attributed to him. It was possible to attribute his works by searching the Imperial War Museum database, but the inconsistent coding system between Varges and his colleagues remains unclear. Varges was an American commissioned to photograph in the outer theatres of war and was perhaps not considered an "official" British photographer.[33]
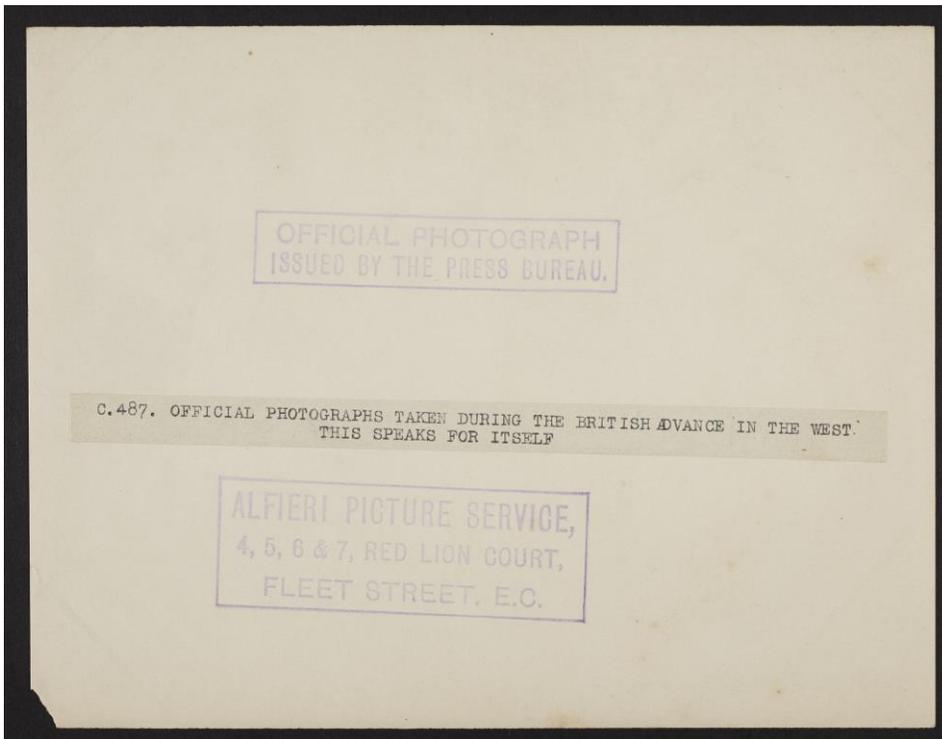


Figure 1: Each print verso shows an alphanumeric code and a caption, as well as press agency and press bureau stamps. Ernest Brooks, C.487: *This speaks for itself.* Gelatin silver print, 17 x 22 cm, August 3, 1916.

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[33] Carmichael, *First World War Photographers,* 94-96.

A possible organization method was to combine the works of all photographers and arrange them in chronological order, to manufacture a single collection of official British First World War photographs. This would have mirrored the arrangement of the original negatives and prints housed at the Imperial War Museum, which were combined in the 1920s to form a unified narrative of the British war experience. Most were given more complete descriptions, and all were renumbered with the letter "Q." I discussed possible options for enhancing user access with AGO associate curator of photography, Sophie Hackett, and we decided the photographs should be separated by maker and arranged into chronological order—this would draw more attention to the historical content of the photographs, as well as the aesthetic approach of each photographer. As a result, this thesis puts forth an alternative method of organizing First World War photographs to suit the needs of an art gallery rather than a war museum.

The first step in physically arranging the photographs was to place a label in the sleeve of each print, showing the object's accession number and title (fig. 2). The label's information faces the same direction as the print recto—viewers can look at the image and read the title without having to turn the photograph over.

I then manually separated all of the photographs based on the letter of their codes, and placed them in ascending numerical order (fig. 3). I returned the photographs in this new order to the original four Solander boxes—there were no other rehousing concerns. I reviewed the images in this new order to note whether the arrangement seemed logical—for example, were all of Ernest Brooks' photographs of the Battle of the Somme (1916) now cohesively ordered, and did they all precede his images of the Battle of Arras (1917)?
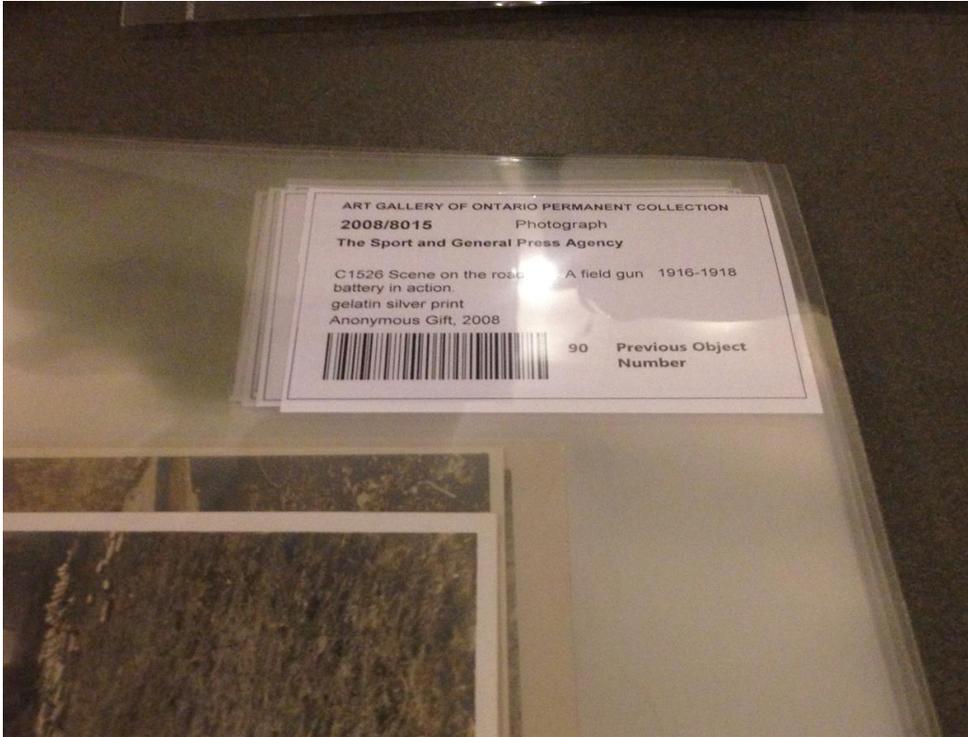
Figure 2: Each print was labelled with its title and accession number.



Figure 3: The prints were manually separated based on their alphanumeric codes.

The most significant obstacle in this arrangement process was identifying the

instances in which the numerical order did not reflect chronological order. Again, the

numerical order reflects the time of receipt at Wellington House, but not always the chronological order in which the photographs were taken. The new arrangement revealed that John Warwick Brooke's works were more frequently out of chronological order compared to his colleagues'. For example, nine of his images of Royal Engineers at work are numbered D1887-1907, indicating they were taken in the summer of 1917, based on the dates of other photographs with numerical codes in the 1800-1900s.[34] However, the IWM database indicates they were actually taken in April 1917.

After finding this discrepancy, I knew it was possible that Brooke's photographs could pose a larger challenge to the chronology. I proceeded to identify as many of his images as possible in the IWM database to confirm their dates. This was not always a simple task because the images on the IWM database no longer have the same codes or titles—they were given new titles in the 1920s. It can be difficult to search for an image with no descriptors in the title—such as "a village we have captured." In contrast, only three of Ernest Brooks' photographs fail to conform to chronological order—his images of the Somme do indeed precede his images of Arras when ordered numerically. In total I found only twenty discrepancies, representing about a 4% margin of error. To maintain a sense of organization, the photographs will remain in numerical order. Any deviations to the chronology have been noted in TMS.

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[34] The collection does not include all twenty images between D1887 and D1907.

## 3.2 Cataloguing

The second method of promoting access to this collection was to enrich the records in TMS for the British official photographs. The previous catalogue records included only titles and dimensions, with press agencies listed in place of creators.[35]

The titles ascribed to each image in TMS are transcriptions of the prints' captions. This approach echoes the AGO's convention for titling press and/or historical photographs.[36] This method does not mirror the approach taken by the Imperial War Museum, who in the 1920s renamed most of the official photographs to add in information that would have been censored during the war. To begin promoting interoperability between collections, I recorded the IWM's titles and codes for 45 photographs in the TMS field "Title-Variation" (fig. 4).[37]
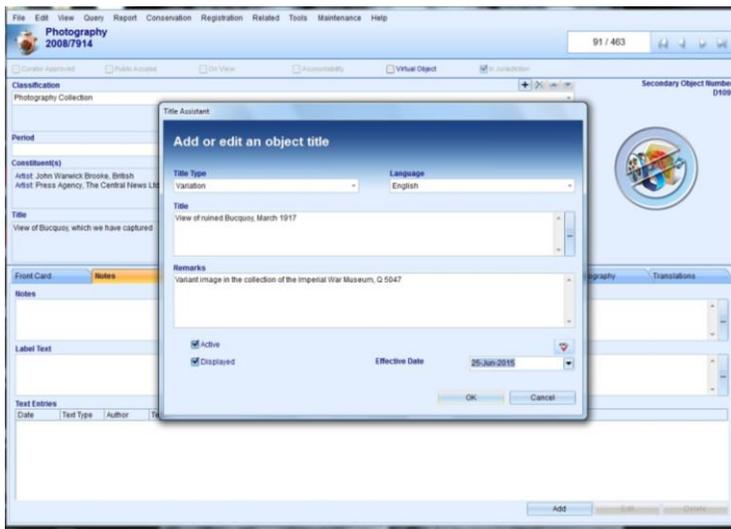


Figure 4: Entering variant titles in TMS.

Using the TMS thesaurus of controlled vocabulary, I assigned between one and three subject headings for each image, and identified associated battles whenever

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[35] As indicated by the press agency stamp on each print verso.

[36] For example, most images in the AGO collection of Klinsky Press photographs are titled with a transcription of their captions.

[37] Again, searching for the images on the IWM website is time-consuming because none of the titles or codes match the prints at the AGO. However, the staff at the AGO are continuing to research the First World War holdings, and related materials between the institutions will continue to be noted.

possible. TMS' controlled vocabulary includes a number of subject headings related to the First World War, such as "ruins," "weapons," "soldiers," "prisoners of war," "land transport," and "trench." I did not have to request that any further terms be added.[38] Most major battles are in TMS' thesaurus, but I included contextual information for lesser-known events, such as the 1917 German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line. The aftermath of the operation is shown in at least ten photographs, but because it is less frequently discussed in histories of the First World War, and not included in the TMS list of major battles, I added a brief description under the field "Cataloguer Remarks."

Finally, I examined fifty of the AGO's First World War amateur albums to find reproductions of works by Britain's official photographers—once I understood who the official photographers were, I could find their works in other holdings. For example, an album of 48 photographs compiled by General Sir Richard Butler includes 13 of the same images made by Ernest Brooks and John Warwick Brooke found in the AGO collection of British official photographs. Similarly, a set of three albums contains 120 photographs compiled by an unknown Dutch constituent. Using name and keyword searches on the IWM database, I discovered that 72 images were taken by Ernest Brooks, John Warwick Brooke, David McLellan or Thomas Keith Aitken. Seven of the same images are found in the AGO collection of British official photographs. These related materials have been noted in TMS to begin identifying links between the AGO's collection of official photographs and amateur albums.

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[38] See also: Marc Boulay, "Description of War Photographs: Designing a List of Subject Headings," (MA Thesis, Ryerson University, 2006).

## 4. Historical Analysis

This section seeks to answer the questions: why were official photographs taken during the First World War? What does the AGO collection of British official First World War photographs tell us about how this system of information operated? This analysis is intended to complement the prints' physical arrangement by explaining the cultural and political milieu from which they were created, and it argues that the arrangement has allowed for an alternative access point to the collection. Rather than view the photographs from the perspective of a singular British experience at war, we can observe the techniques employed by individual photographers in their endeavor to photograph the same event—something that has not been done extensively in the literature on First World War photographers. This approach will assist in building a dialogue between the AGO's collections of official and amateur war photographs, and it will complement the arrangement of the full collection of photographs housed at the IWM.

### 4.1 British Press Censorship, 1900-1916

On August 11, 1914, journalists and press photographers were banned from the British sector of the Western Front.[39] This order was made at the request of Secretary of State for War, Lord Horatio Kitchener, whose mistrust of wartime media was based on what he viewed as irresponsible and sensationalized reporting during the Boer War

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[39] Carmichael, *First World War Photographers*, 25. It should be noted that journalists were equally mistrusted. See Matthew Farish, "Modern Witnesses: Foreign Correspondents, Geopolitical Vision, and the First World War," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 26, no. 3 (September, 2001), 273-287.

(1899-1902).[40] A government-sanctioned program of wartime censorship was considered during the war in South Africa but was never enacted. The Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) cemented British military commanders' belief in the necessity of censorship; unlike Russia, Japan enacted a strict policy of censorship and won a decisive victory.[41] The British government made several attempts to codify a legal framework for censorship during times of war and a bill was formally drafted in 1908.[42]

The press was hostile to any compulsory limitations on their operations, although they expressed a willingness to cooperate with the War Office when necessary. As historian Deian Hopkin states, "however powerful the patriotism of a newspaper, its chief object was to obtain the swiftest possible publication of newsworthy material" in a timely manner.[43] In the opening years of the twentieth century, the custom of "voluntary" censorship had been established and worked reasonably well in times of emergency. Nevertheless, in August 1914 the government and military feared the press held too much power in forming public opinion and were unwilling to rely on self-censorship.

Just four days after the declaration of war on Germany, Britain enacted the Defense of the Realm Act (DORA), a set of wartime measures that restricted certain liberties in order to uphold the war effort.[44] DORA banned the production and/or dissemination of materials—including photographs—that might undermine recruitment, assist the enemy, or otherwise compromise sensitive information.[45] DORA allowed government authorities to enter and search premises that were suspected of writing and

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[40] Carmichael, *First World War Photographers*, 25; Badsey, *The British Army in Battle and its Image,* 17; Hopkin, "Domestic Censorship in the First World War," 152; Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, 212.
[41] Badsey, *The British Army in Battle and its Image*, 110.
[42] Hopkin, "Domestic Censorship in the First World War," 153.
[43] Ibid., 155.
[44] Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, 219; Hopkin, "Domestic Censorship in the First World War,"156.
[45] Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, 219; Taylor, *War Photography,* 43; Hopkin, "Domestic Censorship in the First World War," 156–7.

distributing dissident literature. For example, in 1916 philosopher Bertrand Russell was fined £100 for encouraging conscientious objection.[46]

In conjunction with DORA, the British Press Bureau was created in August 1914 to review information before it was published.[47] The Press Bureau distributed "D-Notices" to the press: communiqués of war news that included both confidential and publishable information. Newspapers that repeatedly broke censorship rules ceased to receive D-Notices, and thus did not have information of the war to report.[48] The Press Bureau also examined all telegraphs and cables sent to and from each newspaper.[49] In 1916 alone, it is estimated that the Press Bureau scrutinized more than 38,000 articles, 25,000 photographs, and 300,000 private telegraphs.[50]

In addition to censorship at home, the British Propaganda Bureau was simultaneously established to disseminate propaganda to neutral states abroad, with a particular focus on the United States.[51] This agency would later establish a photographic unit and hire official photographers in 1916, while the British Press Bureau distributed the works.

The Propaganda Bureau, better known by its address at Wellington House, was under the direction of Charles Masterman, head of the National Insurance Commission. One of his first acts was to meet with London's most affluent newspaper owners—also

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[46] Hopkin, "Domestic Censorship in the First World War," 157; Martin Gilbert, *The First World War* (London: Harper Collins, 1994), 253.
[47] Hopkin, "Domestic Censorship in the First World War," 153.
[48] Ibid., 156. Newspapers could not function without access to information, although some dissident or pacifist papers relied heavily on opinion pieces.
[49] Ibid., 154.
[50] Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, 221.
[51] Stuart Robson, *The First World War* (Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education Group, 1998), 35-6; Sanders, "Wellington House and British Propaganda During the First World War," 119. The French were equally threatened by the German propaganda campaigns, and formed a photographic unit in 1915. See Hélène Guillot, "La Section Photographique De L'Armée et la Grande Guerre: De la Création en 1915 a la Non-Dissolution," *Revue Historique Des Armées*, 258 (2010), 110–117.

known as the Press Gang—to discuss the aims of the agency.[52] Many newspaper owners

were subsequently given positions at Wellington House throughout the war, and in return

for their work, they gained unprecedented access to information on the war. As head of

propaganda for enemy states, Lord Northcliffe, owner of *The Times*, enjoyed unfettered

access to the information and personnel at General Headquarters.[53]

The policy of censorship enacted through DORA created a demand for

photographs of the war in the press. As a result, newspaper staff employed several

techniques to compensate for the absence of photographers on the British Western Front.

One solution was to publish photographs of military-related activities on the home front,

such as fundraising efforts or munitions work.[54]

Another approach was to print photographs of German subjects that indicated

Allied success. The first cover of the *Illustrated War News*, a weekly subsidiary of the

*Illustrated London News*, showed *The first photograph from the front: German

cavalrymen wounded during the advance on Liège, being bandaged*, (fig. 5).[55] Generic

prewar portraits of military and government leaders were also commonly used—we see

about thirty of these in the August 11, 1915, edition, of a total of fifty-nine photographs.[56]

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[52] Sanders, "Wellington House and British Propaganda During the First World War," 119.
[53] Holborn and Roberts, *The Great War*, 304; Badsey, *The British Army in Battle and its Image*, 23;
Sanders, "Wellington House and British Propaganda During the First World War," 125. At this point,
Wellington House was part of the Department of Information. At different times, the advisory board of this
agency included Lord Northcliffe (*The Times*), Lord Burnham (*Daily Telegraph*), Robert Donald (*Daily
Chronicle*) and C.P. Scott (*Manchester Guardian*).
[54] The August 12, 1914 issue of the *Illustrated War News* includes 21 photographs relating to the British
and allied home fronts, or other settings away from battle. The June 7, 1916 issue includes 8 photographs of
the British home front, as well as 4 from the United States.
[55] *Illustrated War News,* August 12, 1914, Cover.
[56] The other 29 images included in the issue: 5 of British subjects, 10 of allied subjects, 10 of enemy
subjects and 4 taken at various combatants' home fronts.

For more recent photographs of war-related subjects, the British Press had to recycle

images from French newspapers such as *Le Miroir*.[57]



Figure 5: The first cover of the *Illustrated War News,* published on August 12, 1914, shows a group of wounded Germans entitled, *The first photograph from the front: German cavalrymen wounded during the advance on Liège, being bandaged*. Toronto Reference Library.

Newspapers also published technical drawings and artists' renderings of battles. A

year into hostilities, the previously mentioned August 11, 1915, issue of the *Illustrated*

*War News* included nine drawings, as well as four diagrams and two maps.[58] In an

attempt to legitimize hand-drawn illustrations, *The Times* claimed that New Zealand

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[57] Beurier, "Mapping Visual Violence in Germany, France and Britain, 1914-1918," 24-26. Joëlle Beurier explains that the French censored images that might give away tactical information, but often let other photographs go to print. Additionally, she states, many French newspapers simply disregarded the government's censorship laws.
[58] *Illustrated War News*, August 11, 1915, 1-48.

Engineer Sapper Moore-Jones' drawings at Gallipoli, apparently made with great precision, were "better than any photograph."[59]

The most bountiful resource for photographs of the British Western Front came from the soldiers themselves.[60] The 1914 ban on war photography prohibited soldiers from sending photographs home or to the press, but this was the first war in history in which a large proportion of regular soldiers owned or knew how to operate a camera. The rule against taking pictures was not uniformly enforced; some soldiers even supplemented their income by selling photographs to the press.[61] After 1915, soldiers were no longer allowed to even possess cameras, but this rule was likewise irregularly enforced. Amateur photography on the Western Front persisted, although the tradition of self-censorship and a sense of "decency" meant that British newspapers did not publish shocking or controversial soldier-made photographs.[62]

British citizens' increasing level of sacrifice throughout the war resulted in a demand for photographs of British subjects in the press.[63] The production and diffusion of war-related information—written and visual—had to be managed, and the formation of an official photographic unit meant a more positive narrative of the British experience at war could be manufactured.[64]

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[59] "Pictures of Gallipoli," *The Times*, Saturday, April 15, 1916. The short newspaper article did not show Moore's drawings.

[60] Beurier, "Mapping Visual Violence in Germany, France and Britain, 1914-1918," 28.

[61] Andrew C. Rodger, "Amateur Photography by Soldiers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force," *Archivaria* 26 (Summer 1988), 164; Ann Thomas, *The Great War: The Persuasive Power of Photography*, 12-16; Carmichael, *First World War Photographers*, 10-11; Holborn and Roberts, *The Great War*, 501. Richard Holmes points out that it was easier for officers to have cameras: Holmes, *Shots from the Front: The British Soldier, 1914-1918* (London: Harper Collins, 2008), 36.

[62] Holmes, *Shots from the Front*, 36; Peter Barton, *The Battlefields of the First World War: Unseen Panoramas of the Western Front* (London: Constable, in association with the Imperial War Museum, 2005), 50; Beurier, "Mapping Visual Violence in Germany, France and Britain, 1914-1918," 33.

[63] Taylor, *War Photography*, 23.

[64] The idea of wartime press being "managed" and "manufactured" is put forth by Taylor, *War Photography: Realism in the British Press,* 18.

**4.2 Appointment of Britain's Official Photographers, 1916-1918**

The photographic section at Wellington House was formed in 1916 under the direction of Ivor Nicholson, a former journalist. Between 1916 and 1918, nine men were hired to photograph the war on the Western Front, the home front and the outer theatres of war: Ernest Brooks, John Warwick Brooke, Horace Nicholls, G.P Lewis, Ariel Varges, George Westmoreland, Armando Consolé, Thomas Keith Aitken, and David McLellan.[65] Additionally, photographs by Britain's Royal Engineers—reconnaissance photographers—were occasionally used for the press. Their works were labelled with alphanumeric codes using the letter "A." Ernest Brooks and John Warwick Brooke were hired first and produced the largest bodies of work—of 520 photographs at the AGO, 465 were taken by these two men. The following analysis focuses primarily on their approaches to photographing war.

Before the war, Ernest Brooks worked both as a court photographer and as a press photographer for the *Daily Mirror*.[66] He joined the Royal Navy Reserve in January 1915, and was appointed by First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, to photograph operations at Gallipoli. This was an experimental appointment to understand how official photographic projects could function.[67] In March 1916, Wellington House hired Brooks to photograph the Western Front, granting him the honorary rank of Second Lieutenant. Brooks' oldest photographs in the collection were taken at Ypres, Belgium. In *The interior of a church at Ypres which offers still another testimony to the German*

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[65] Carmichael, *First World War Photographers,* 159.

[66] Ibid., 3; Holborn and Roberts, *The Great War*, 56, 108-9; Hilary Roberts, in a phone conversation with the author, March 10, 2015. The sources are somewhat inconsistent discussing Brooks' prewar career: Carmichael states that he worked for the *Daily Mirror*, while Holborn and Roberts state that he was a Railway Porter. Roberts also states that he worked as a court photographer.

[67] Carmichael, *First World War Photographers,* 36.

*ruthlessness*, Brooks aims his lens straight ahead at an opening in the wall of the cathedral through which light emerges (fig. 6). The opening is almost centered in the frame, but it is not the only focal point of the image—Brooks' perspective draws attention to the destruction of the interior. The image is printed in high contrast and the ruins filling the foreground create lines and shapes through the frame—Brooks does not simply document the destruction, he makes use of composition and form. There are no people or other signifiers in the image to provide a sense of scale for the length or the height of the destruction. We will see some of these techniques used again in Brooks' later photographs.



Figure 6: Ernest Brooks, C.62: *The interior of a church at Ypres which offers still another testimony to German ruthlessness.* Gelatin silver print, 22 x 16.5 cm, March 31, 1916.

John Warwick Brooke was appointed in July 1916 to join Brooks in photographing the Western Front. Before the war, Brooke was a photographer for

London's Topical Press Agency.[68] He enlisted in 1914, and in March 1916 he was

awarded a Distinguished Conduct Medal for repairing telephone cables under fire.[69]

Brooke's earliest images in the collection depict the Battle of the Somme, including *A*

*good haul German prisoners being marched in on 14th July 1916* (fig.7).



Figure 7: John Warwick Brooke, D.3: *A good haul German prisoners being marched in on 14th July 1916*.
Gelatin silver print, 22 x 17 cm, July 14, 1916.

To take this photograph, Brooke stands on the left-hand side of a road, standing higher

than the prisoners as they march. This vantage point allows him to compose a wide scene

with a long perspective; it is unclear where the line of prisoners ends. From this

perspective, the procession of Germans creates a diagonal line through the bottom half of

[68] Carmichael, *First World War Photographers*, 48.
[69] Tucker, *War/Photography*, 573.

the image. These are hallmarks of Brooke's style that we see repeated throughout the collection.

Historians of First World War photography concur that the official photographers were given freedom of access throughout the Western Front with few instructions or assignments, beyond comments or sporadic requests.[70] As historian Jane Carmichael argues, Wellington House's photographic operation was too small to assign "elaborate directives;" the photographers' prewar experience working for the press influenced their techniques and photographic subjects.[71]

One of the few assignments was to photograph munitions in order to show audiences that the publicized shortages of 1915 were over.[72] This is reflected in the AGO photographs: of the 48 images that show weaponry as their main subject, 11 are of stockpiled munitions.[73] Brooks' photograph *A heap of trench mortar ammunition behind the lines* shows three men standing atop a pile of ammunition (fig. 8) As in his image of the Ypres cathedral, Brooks photographs subjects that are directly in front of him, allowing them to fill the foreground. The "heap" is cut off on the right-hand edge of the frame, making it seem as though it is too large to be framed in a single photograph.

Stockpiled munitions appear in Brooke's photographs as well. In *A field gun getting into a new position as we advance*, six men are operating a large gun next to a pile of ammunition (fig. 9). Brooke stands behind and to their right; his perspective shows the pile of ammunition in its entirety, and the men standing next to it gives the viewer a sense of its size.

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[70] John Taylor, *War Photography: Realism in the British Press*, 43–5; Hilary Roberts, in a phone conversation with the author, March 10, 2015.
[71] Carmichael, *First World War Photographers*, 142–44 .
[72] "Need for Shells," *The Times*, May 15, 1915; Holborn and Roberts, *The Great War,* 109, 224.
[73] In total, 21 photographs of weapons were taken by Brooks, and 23 were taken by Brooke.

Figure 8: Ernest Brooks, C.302: *A heap of trench mortar ammunition behind the lines*. Gelatin silver print, 21 x 15 cm, June 28, 1916.



Figure 9: John Warwick Brooke, D.1225: *A field gun getting into a new position as we advance.* Gelatin silver print, 22 x 17 cm, April 1917.

There are over thirty photographs showing soldiers firing, inspecting or posing

next to artillery-range weapons. Forty-one photographs—including ones where weaponry

is not the main subject of the image—show or make reference to captured German weapons. For example, Brooks' *One of the 5.9 guns knocked out by our artillery at Pilkem and still in position* shows four soldiers posing alongside a captured German heavy howitzer (fig. 10). In total, images of weaponry, munitions or trophies account for more than one fifth, or 22%, of the photographs.[74]
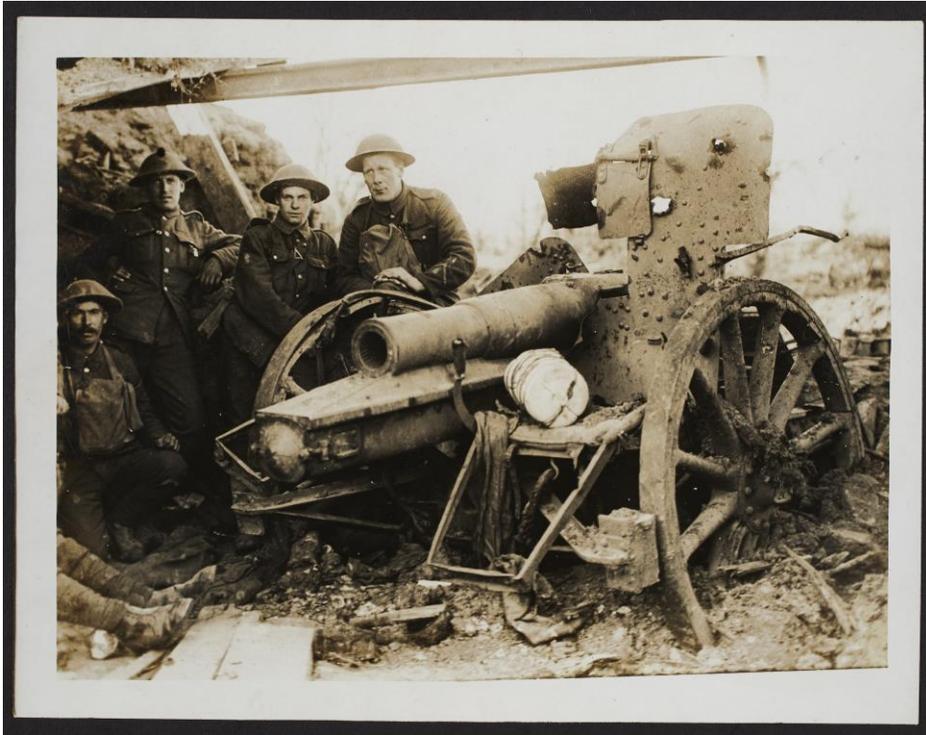


Figure 10: Ernest Brooks, C2276: *One of the 5.9 guns knocked out by our artillery at Pilkem and still in position*. Gelatin silver print, 22 x 17 cm, Summer 1917.

The photographic unit at Wellington House hoped to create a comprehensive body of work showing the British war experience that could serve as propaganda and conform to censorship laws. However, the photographic unit existed within the larger framework of Wellington House—an organization that was established quickly and unsystematically in response to the outbreak of war. Wellington House underwent several institutional reorganization schemes between 1916 and 1918, while Brooks and Brooke were tasked

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[74] The number of photographs depicting weapons, munitions, or soldiers operating, inspecting or posing near weapons is 115 of 520.

with photographing the activities of more than sixty divisions—over two million

soldiers.[75] Finally, during the fall and winter of 1917-1918, three additional

photographers—David McLellan, Thomas Keith Aitken and Armando Consolé—were

appointed and sent to the Western Front. Still, the photographic unit at Wellington House

never formalized a cohesive strategy for photographing the war.

## 4.3 Subjects Depicted in the AGO Collection

The literature on First World War photography discusses a lack of clear

assignments given to the photographers. I chose to catalogue each image in an alternative

database to quantify the number of works by each photographer, the range of subjects

they captured, and the identifiable battles and dates. The database allowed me to cross

reference these fields against each other to better understand what is represented in the

images— a task that would have been impossible using TMS.  I then applied this

information to understand multiple photographers' approaches to the same event.

Almost half of the images—252 of 520—show people as their main subject:

soldiers, officers, prisoners, nurses or civilians. Of all the images of people, 178 (70%)

depict soldiers; 70 images show soldiers working, 40 show soldiers operating or

inspecting artillery range weapons, and the remainder depict soldiers travelling,

socializing or resting.

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[75] In comparison, the Canadian War Records Office had one photographer in the field at any given time following only four divisions, while the French *Section Photographique De L'Armée* had fifty-nine photographers on the Western Front by 1916, covering more than one hundred divisions. See: Peter Robertson, *Relentless Verity: Canadian Military Photographers Since 1885* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973); Mark Levitch, "The Visual Culture of Modern War: Photography, Posters and Soldiers' Art in World War One France" (PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2008), 64.

The AGO collection includes an almost equal number of photographs of people by Ernest Brooks and John Warwick Brooke. Of 252 total images, Brooks' body of work contains 110 images of people, including 79 soldiers, 24 prisoners and 4 civilians. Brooke's 224 photographs include 113 images of people: 88 soldiers, 16 prisoners and 5 civilians.

Brooks' and Brooke's combined 167 photographs of soldiers show the men engaged in various tasks: working, operating weapons, marching and travelling. Very frequently, the men are photographed in groups; their faces are not usually visible because they are shown focusing on an activity. Brooke's *Clearing the ground for a howitzer position* is an example of this common theme: fourteen men are shown working together, and only two of the soldiers acknowledge the photographer (fig. 11).  Brooke's later photograph *Men handling a big howitzer* evinces a similar approach, although the photograph shows a wider scene—there are more men working or observing the task, and the viewer can see damaged trees and buildings in the background (fig. 12). In both cases, Brooke stands above and to the right of the action, framing the image so that the soldiers create a diagonal or straight line through the scene. This echoes his approach to photographing prisoners in figure 7. Brooke operates as a recorder or an observer rather than a participant; he stands from a distance to photograph wide scenes instead of tightly framing his subjects from a close proximity.

Figure 11: John Warwick Brooke, D.1877: *Clearing the ground for a howitzer position.*
Gelatin silver print, 22 x 17 cm, 1917.



Figure 12: John Warwick Brooke, D.1880: *Men handling a big howitzer*.
Gelatin silver print, 22 x 17 cm, 1917.

Conversely, Ernest Brooks' *Strafing the Hun* is framed more tightly (fig. 13). He stands closer to his subjects to evoke a stronger feeling of being involved—he appears to be almost at the same distance from the gun as the men standing on the left side of the photograph. Unlike Brooke, he stands on the ground, level with the gun, and photographs the scene directly in front of him.



Figure 13: Ernest Brooks, C.1774: *Strafing the Hun.* Gelatin silver print, 22 x 17 cm, 1917.

Brooks' *Serving the guns* shows a scene of the same artillerymen, now in action (fig. 14). In this image, Brooks stands almost directly behind the soldiers, sharing their vantage point of the scene. The image is out of focus; most of the figures are obscured by

motion, smoke or dust. Rather than documenting the scene as an observer, Brooks'

approach evokes the feeling of chaos through a sense of involvement.



Figure 14: Ernest Brooks, C.1772: *Serving the guns.* Gelatin silver print, 22 x 17 cm, 1917.

Brooke also photographed artillerymen in action using his characteristic style. *A

battery of heavy howitzers pounding the Hun* shows a sharper, wider scene of

artillerymen in action (fig. 15). Rather than focusing on a single team of artillerymen,

Brooke's photograph captures numerous men and their weapons. Again, he stands to the

right of the soldiers, photographing from an elevated vantage point. This affords him a

wider scene of the action, capturing puffs of smoke or dust, the men as they work, and the

terrain of the battlefield. As before, Brooke photographs from the perspective of an

observer—although this is a scene of action, it has been composed deliberately to create diagonal leading lines with the barrels of the howitzers.



Figure 15: John Warwick Brooke, D.1881: *A battery of heavy howitzers pounding the Hun.* Gelatin silver print, 22 x 17 cm, August 1916.

Another widely represented subject in the collection is that of prisoners, accounting for 52 of the images. Historians Mark Holborn, Hilary Roberts and Hélène Guillot state that all combatants made portraits of their captured prisoners to indicate the subjects' weakness or fatigue.[76] The prisoners were categorized as "types," and the portraits were published in weeklies, such as the *Illustrated War News*, whose August 23, 1916, issue includes three portraits labelled "Physiognomy of the 20th Century Hun."[77]

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[76] Holborn and Roberts, *The Great War: A Photographic Narrative*, 342; Hélène Guillot, "L'Image Officielle du Soldat Allemand Pendant la Grande Guerre," *Revue Historique des Armées,* 269 (2012), 36–45.

[77] "Physiognomy of the 20th Century Hun," the *Illustrated War News*, August 23, 1916, 29.

Prisoners are frequently seen in large groups, such as Brooks' *Group of prisoners taken in the new advance* (fig. 16). Brooks takes the photograph standing to the front, right-hand side of the prisoners. His use of a wide depth of field allows the viewer to distinguish individual faces in the group even up to six rows back. Like figure 8, Brooks' earlier photograph of stockpiled munitions, he has framed the image so the group of prisoners continues out of view on the left and the right, giving the illusion that the group is far too large to fit in a single photograph.



Figure 16: Ernest Brooks, C.1784: *Group of prisoners taken in the new advance.* Gelatin silver print, 21.5 x 16.5 cm, 1917.

Brooke's *The new British success. Two Jocks with a few of their many prisoners. These were captured in the German front line* depicts a smaller group of captured Germans (fig. 17). Again, the viewer can see the prisoners' faces because Brooke takes

the photograph from a relatively close range. However, he does not stand at a height, and some prisoners' bodies are obstructed from view by others'.



Figure 17: John Warwick Brooke, D.2340: *The new British success. Two Jocks with a few of their many prisoners. These were captured in the German front line.* Gelatin silver print, 21 x 17 cm, November 20, 1917.

Brooke's photograph entitled *The Battle of Menin Road – Two youthful Hun prisoners waiting their turn for their wounds to be dressed outside a dressing station* shows two captured Germans photographed at an even closer range (fig. 18). The wounded man in the foreground looks directly at the photographer, and there are no other people in the image—the viewer can examine his expression in great detail. Again, Brooke photographs the men from an elevated vantage point, looking down on his subjects, like in figure 7. Brooke creates visual impact by capturing the expression of a visibly wounded soldier at a time of vulnerability.

Figure 18: John Warwick Brooke, D.2041: *The Battle of Menin Road – Two youthful Hun prisoners waiting their turn for their wounds to be dressed outside a dressing station.* Gelatin silver print, 16.5 x 21.5 cm, September 20, 1917.

Brooks' *Types captured in the last push. A member of the All is Lost League*

shows a man in the centre of the frame, photographed at such close range that he is

visible only from the knees up (fig. 19). Brooks' use of a shallow depth of field blurs all

other figures in the background; the prisoner's face is sharply in focus, and he looks

directly into the camera. The viewer is led to focus solely on the man's piercing facial expression and body language.



Figure 19: Ernest Brooks, C.2580: *Types captured in the last push. A member of the All is Lost League.* Gelatin silver print, 21.5 x 15.5 cm, 1917.

One hundred photographs show public buildings or private dwellings, of which 86 are ruined. Unlike images of people, there are twice as many photographs of architecture in the AGO collection by Brooks (62) than there are by Brooke (31). However, both men's photographs of architecture depict the destruction of war—60 of Brooks' photographs show architecture in ruins, as do 22 of Brooke's.

Forty architectural photographs show destroyed religious sites. The photographers' images of the Cathedral of St. Vaast at Arras in the spring of 1917 are one of the only instances in which both men photographed the same building at almost the same time (fig. 20, fig. 21).

Figure 20: Ernest Brooks, C.1562: *Interior of Arras Cathedral.* Gelatin silver print, 17 x 22 cm, May 1917.

As in his earlier photographs of Ypres Cathedral, Brooks photographs *Interior of Arras Cathedral* (fig. 20) by focusing his lens straight ahead, towards a door. This draws attention to the detailed foreground, emphasizing the rubble littering the floor—like his photograph at Ypres, there is no sense of scale to indicate the distance of the door or the height of the bricks. Comparing Brooks and Brooke's similar photographs of the Cathedral interior, we learn that Brooks photographed in front of the altar, while Brooke stood behind.

Figure 21: John Warwick Brooke, D.1317: *Interior of Arras Cathedral taken from the Eastern Altar.*
Gelatin silver print, 16 x 22 cm, April 30, 1917.

Although Brooke photographs the scene that lies before him, he tilts his lens

slightly upward to show more of the open ceiling. Then, in his typical style, Brooke

photographs from a higher vantage point—there is one person on the floor giving a sense

of Brooke's height. His approach draws attention to the open ceiling as well as the

detritus covering the ground (fig. 22).

Figure 22: John Warwick Brooke, D.1319: *Interior of Arras Cathedral wrecked by Boche shell fire.* Gelatin silver print, 17 x 22 cm, April 30, 1917.

The AGO collection also includes 53 photographs depicting entire streets or sections of cities and towns—48 of which show ruins. Again, there are almost an equal number of urban or rural views by both Brooks and Brooke—26 and 27 respectively. Brooks' *Smouldering ruins in Bapaume* shows a city street in ruins, in which the more distant buildings are obscured by smoke and light—illustrating the difficulty of exposing a scene for both the foreground and the background (fig. 23). Brooks stands on the right-

hand side of the road, creating a diagonal leading line from left to right through the frame, drawing the viewer's eye further into the scene. In Brooks' image of Bapaume, a single figure is seen on the road, lending a sense of scale to the image that is absent from his photographs of the Ypres and Arras Cathedrals (fig. 6, fig. 20).



Figure 23: Ernest Brooks, C.1334: *Smouldering ruins in Bapaume*. Gelatin silver print, 22 x 17 cm March 17, 1917.

Brooke's *Building in flames in Péronne* shows the façade of a destroyed building and smoke emerging from behind it (fig. 24). In this case, Brooke also photographs from the right-hand side of the road, but the focal point of this image is the building directly to his right. Unlike some of his other photographs, he does not stand at a distance or a height to show a wider scene—Brooke's images indicate his personal style, and they show instances in which he alters his approach to best capture different subjects. Using perspective, proximity and depth of field, Brooke creates a document of the destroyed building, allowing the viewer to see the extent of the ruins and to read the extant signage.

In this composition, rays of light emerging from above and behind the building create diagonal lines through the left-hand side of the frame.



Figure 24: John Warwick Brooke, D.1014: *Building in flames in Péronne.* Gelatin silver print, 25 x 20 cm, March 1917.

More than fifteen images of destroyed cities depict sites that have become unrecognizable landscapes. Brooks' *View of Guillemont – once a flourishing village* shows a decimated field littered with severed tree trunks, which create a faint diagonal leading line from the lower right to the upper left of the image (fig. 25). The perspective of this scene is very long—the sky takes up approximately a third of the image, drawing the viewer's eye to the rigidly straight horizon. Like his earlier photograph of the Ypres Cathedral, there is no sense of the horizon's distance or the size of the trees. It is also

difficult to understand the terrain because the texture of the landscape offers little contrast and the viewer cannot get a sense of its peaks or valleys.



Figure 25: Ernest Brooks, C.694: *View of Guillemont – once a flourishing village*. Gelatin silver print, 22 x 17 cm, 1916.

Brooke's *View of Athies which we have just captured* shows a similarly decimated scene (fig. 26). The horizon line is also flat but there are some structures in the distance. The rubble in this scene is larger, and the print has greater contrast, showing a little more of the terrain and the texture of the forms. Unlike Brooks' photograph of Guillemont, there are figures in this scene to lend a sense of scale. The road on which they stand draws a diagonal leading line from the lower left to the upper right of the scene, a technique seen in many of Brooke's other photographs.

Figure 26: John Warwick Brooke, D.1224-*View of Athies which we have just captured.* Gelatin silver print, 22 x 17 cm, 1917.

Britain's foremost official war photographers were appointed to create a visual document of the British experience of war, but each man's work shows his individual approach to the task. The collection also shows instances in which the photographers modified their approaches based on the subject matter they captured. However, none of the official photographers attempted to portray a contrarian opinion on the war. As Martyn Jolly states, "official photographers were given honorary ranks and saw themselves as propagandists, not reporters, their photographs were part of the war effort, not a comment on it."[78] Understanding each photographer's approach and techniques has

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[78] Martyn Jolly, "Composite Propaganda Photographs during the First World War," *History of Photography* 27, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 156; Carmichael, *First World War Photographers,* 74. Stephen Badsey states

been the intention and the accomplishment of the physical arrangement put forth by this thesis.

## 4.4 Emphasizing Meaning with Captions

Official war photographers wrote their own captions in the field with the intent to document events and locations. Captions were then reviewed by a field censor, and again by Wellington House in London.[79]

Just as I catalogued each image to quantify the various subjects represented in the collection, I used File Maker to understand the photographers' approaches to captioning their works. One of the most notable patterns is the use of derogatory language.

Forty-eight captions use the terms "Boche," "Hun" or "Fritz." These terms are often used when describing artillery bombardments—four photographs use the same caption, "Strafing the Hun." Another example is the caption "The Battle of Flanders. The only form of speech the Germans understand. Big British guns pounding Boche." Derogatory terms were also used to describe regained territory, designated as "Boche supply lines," and captured German weapons.

This use of derogatory and colloquial language speaks to the malleable nature of propaganda photographs. British audiences knew their soldiers were at war with Germany, regardless of whether a caption read, "Strafing the Hun" or "Soldiers firing a Howitzer." Yet, Wellington House and its photographers each played a role in using captions to emphasize the anti-German intent of the images.

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that journalists also thought that questioning the validity of the war was inappropriate: Badsey, *The British Army in Battle and its Image,* 20.

[79] Hilary Roberts, in a conversation with the author, March 10, 2015. Because there were so many individuals involved in the captioning process, it is unclear who specifically wrote the captions for each of the AGO photographs.

The gratuitous use of derogatory language is evinced in captions for photographs of prisoners. Of 52 images of prisoners, only two captions use the word "Hun," such as *Battle of Menin Road – two youthful Hun prisoners waiting their turn for their wounds to be dressed outside a dressing station* (fig. 18). None of the captions describing prisoners use the words "Boche" or "Fritz." Photographs of prisoners did not need to be labelled with derogatory terms because audiences knew who the prisoners were—in the remainder of the captions the captured troops are simply described as "prisoners" or "Germans."

Derogatory language was not restricted to describing photographs of war, nor was it uncommon. In *Memoirs of an Infantry Soldier,* Siegfried Sassoon recalls his Major saying, "Remember that every Boche you fellows kill is a point scored to our side…Kill them! There's only one good Boche, and that's a dead one!"[80] Similarly, socialite and wartime nurse Lady D'Abernon wrote about her visit to a casualty clearing station, describing the segregated rooms for men of differing injuries, "and of course separate tents for the Boches."[81] The AGO collection of private albums by French *poilu* L.J. Patras uses the word "Boche" to describe the identification of dead bodies—indicating that language is another point of entry through which users can examine the official and amateur approaches to wartime representation.[82]

British soldiers are also described with a distinctive handle—nine captions describe the British as the heroic everyman, "Tommy." Three captions describe British soldiers as "cheery," despite challenging conditions, such as *A field gun in difficulties*

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[80] Sassoon quoted in Martin Gilbert, *Battle of the Somme: The Heroism and Horror of War* (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 2007), 30.

[81] Lady D'Abernon quoted in Martin Gilbert, *The First World War*, 293.

[82] It is also worth examining Harold Picton, *The Better Germany in Wartime: Being Some Facts Towards Fellowship* (Manchester and London: The National Labour Press, Ltd., 1918). Picton gathered news articles and anecdotes that highlighted the friendly and compassionate relations between Allied and German soldiers.

*during the advance - such episodes as this occur daily during bad weather, but our*

*cheery gunners soon put matters right.* However, the British are described with a moniker

less frequently than the Germans.

After the war, the first generation of Imperial War Museum curators—including

official photographers such as Ernest Brooks, John Warwick Brooke and David

McLellan—revised the photographs' captions. They added geographical information that

would have been censored during the war. Describing the photographs has continued at

the IWM as part of an ongoing research initiative, and derogatory names have since been

removed.

## 4.5 Conclusion

Beginning in 1916, Wellington House hired official photographers to create a

visual narrative of the British experience at war, but the agency did not train the

photographers or give them specific assignments. As a result, each of these former press

photographers was left to use his individual instincts and techniques—elements of these

styles emerge when we separate and analyze the works of each photographer. Brooks'

photographs show his willingness to stand closer to the soldiers and tightly frame his

shots to show the perspective of a participant. Conversely, Brooke often found an

elevated vantage point to photograph from, to show wide scenes from the perspective of

an observer. The individual approaches taken by each photographer, as well as the

repetition of subjects, confirm the lack of centralized training or focus from Wellington

House. Despite constant bureaucratic reorganization strategies and an inability to put

more photographers in the field, Wellington House accumulated tens of thousands of

images during the war. The AGO collection is a useful and telling sample of those images that provides new entry points to understanding First World War photographic representation—through the perspective of the photographers and the subjects they chose to capture.

**5. Conclusion**

This thesis has approached a collection of British official First World War photographs that lacked physical or intellectual order. I have devised an arrangement to promote basic access to the material—by separating the works by maker, placing them in chronological order and enhancing their records in TMS. Additionally, this arrangement has established an intellectual entry point to the collection that more readily facilitates users' examination of the individual photographers' attempt to photograph the war—providing a counterpoint to the arrangement of First World War photographs housed at the Imperial War Museum.

The comparison of the photographers' styles and subjects in Chapter Four leaves room for other scholars to explore the collection further. A more thorough examination of photographers' styles can be conducted, or users can compare the works of official photographers to amateurs, such as French *poilu* L.J. Patras. The AGO currently holds three albums by Patras, an amateur photographer who ascribed codes to all of his own works to indicate where they were taken—"R" for Reims, and "S" for Soissons, and so on. His photograph entitled *R.21 Reims. A part of the interior, 'Passage des Variétés,'* echoes aspects of Ernest Brooks' style of creating a seemingly long perspective without any people to show scale (fig. 27). He also mirrors John Warwick Brooke's technique of photographing from a height, as Patras seems to be standing on a slightly elevated surface to show more of the destroyed material littering the floor. Users of the collection can view how an infantry soldier—rather than an official photographer—attempted to photograph the war.

Figure 27: L.J. Patras, R.21: *Reims. A part of the interior, 'Passage des Variétés.'* Gelatin silver print, 12 x 17 cm, c.1918.

Examining the works with individual photographers in mind allows users to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the collection. This thesis has focused primarily on the work of Brooks and Brooke, because the majority of the collection is comprised of their photographs—a great strength of this holding. A weakness of the collection is that there are fewer works of the later British official photographers, such as Thomas Keith Aitken or David McLellan. The newly established order and historical context of this collection will allow the AGO to direct their acquisition of First World War photographs in the future.

Finally, this project has initiated the process of identifying relationships between objects within the AGO collection, but it has also involved forging a relationship with the Imperial War Museum, allowing two distinct institutions to ameliorate the understanding of historical photographs.

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