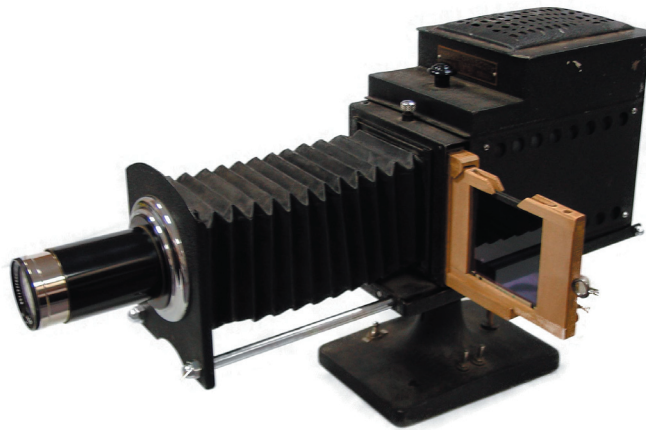


Activities for Secondary Students

These activities can be for on site workshops or classroom activities

Introduction

One of the most famous Australian First World War photographers was Frank Hurley (1885–1962); his work is featured in *Captured in colour*. Most of the Hurley photographs included in this exhibition would originally have been printed in books or shown with a lantern slide projector, like this one.

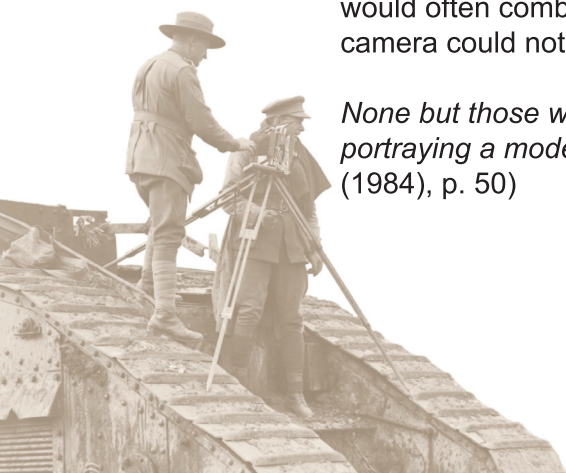


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Hurley, working under the direction of Charles Bean, the Australian official historian for the First World War, was interested in capturing a complete picture of the war. As an official war photographer, Hurley was expected to record exactly what he saw. The images taken by the official photographers were then censored. No pictures of deceased allied forces were allowed to be published at the time, as it was believed they might have disheartened those on the home front.

For his part, Hurley was fascinated by the power of photography and by the processes of using composite photographs to enable him to create a more dramatic image. He would often combine or blend several distinct photographs, to create what he felt the camera could not faithfully capture. As he noted in his diary:

None but those who have endeavoured can realise the insurmountable difficulties of portraying a modern battle by the camera. (David P. Millar, *From snowdrift to shellfire* (1984), p. 50)



Hurley had a library of images he could choose from. If he didn't like the clouds in an image, he would search through his cloud library and replace the existing sky in the photograph with a more dramatic one. He did the same for images of explosions. Charles Bean rejected the artificial images of war that Hurley was creating because they did not accurately record the moment, and he was, in principle, opposed to manufacturing historical records. These images still exist as an example of Hurley's work as an artistic and creative photographer. However, none of the photographs in *Captured in colour* are composite ones. An example of one of his best known composite or combination photographs is in the photograph collection at the Australian War Memorial.



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Activity

A simple activity that is useful for helping students explore Hurley's photographic process of recreating one image from many is photomontage. (This is the technique of making a picture by assembling pieces of photographs, often in combination with other types of graphic material.) The students will need to use photographs from their own collection, make sure that they are "landscape-format" images.

To complete this activity, you will need to cut these images up; if this is not possible, use colour copies instead.

Cut the photographs up into small (but not too small) pieces, then lay them out in front of you and make a new picture using all the smaller parts. Try to highlight the effect of different light from different times of the day or year. (You will need to have chosen your photographs well.) This activity can still work with photographs that are in "portrait-format". The aim is to create a narrative within the created image.



Discussion topic for Secondary English and History groups

The invention of photography in the 1840s meant a breakthrough in our ability to record moments in history. Before photography, an artist would have been commissioned to paint or draw an important moment to keep as a record of an event.

Anthropologists embraced the invention of photography as a means of recording indigenous peoples and their customs in newly explored lands. Botanists also began to use the camera to record newly discovered flora and fauna. The camera fast became an important tool for recording places and historical events.

Many commercial photographic establishments were set up in Europe, Britain, America and even Australia; at such places individuals could pay to have their photographic portraits made. These early photographs (called a *carte de visite* – literally, visiting card) were very popular in the 1850s among those that could afford them. The *carte de visite* was also popular during the American Civil War. For the first time, a family could keep a photograph of their son while he was away at war.

In its early days the photograph was seen as an accurate way of recording information. As technology advanced, photographers were able to manipulate the image. Photography was embraced by artists in the early part of the 20th century. They saw it as a medium that could be used for creative purposes as well as for recording a moment in time.

Discuss the influence that photography had on the practice of recording an historical fact. How useful is a composite photograph as an accurate historical record or as a source for inquiry into the nature of war?

Debating question for Secondary English and History groups

Does a photograph tell the truth? The following article at the Sydney Morning Herald website will help you to discuss this topic.

<http://smh.com.au/text/articles/2004/06/11/1086749890727.html>

Activity

Divide the class into two teams, representing *for* and *against*. Each team must give historical examples to illustrate or support their claims. They should also bring in the current role of the media in reporting war.



Creative writing activity

Ask students to write a short story in response to the Frank Hurley photograph of the light horseman in Palestine. To get them thinking, lead into the activity with a few questions about the image.



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Suggested questions

How old is this man?

What is he doing?

What are the flowers for?

Where was this man born, and how does the photo tell us that information?

Who might be missing him back home in Australia?

Why might he be on his own?

What is in the background of the photograph? More website research

If you have time, visit the Memorial's website and do a collection search in its photographs collection database (<http://cas.awm.gov.au>). Discuss the difference between photographs taken during the First World War and those from the Vietnam War. What other medium was used to record the Vietnam War; how did this change photography? How else was the Vietnam War reported? For more information about the Vietnam War visit www.awm.gov.au/atwar/vietnam.htm

First World War Official photographer Frank Hurley

Memorial web links

- Captured in Colour: Hurley in Palestine
www.awm.gov.au/captured/official/hurley.asp
- Official War Photographers
www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/official_photo/
- Wartime magazine: Captured In Colour
www.awm.gov.au/wartime/24/article.htm

More on Frank Hurley at other sites

- Kodak - Frank Hurley and the Endurance
www.kodak.com/US/en/corp/features/endurance/
- National Library of Australia: Papers of Frank Hurley
www.nla.gov.au/apps/cdview?pi=nla.ms-ms883-1

