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]ch[Entertaining the Anzacs: Performances Australian and New Zealand Troops on Leave in London, 1916–1919

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]p[In 1916, the year of the first Anzac Day commemorating the Gallipoli campaign, Shakespeare’s Tercentenary and the introduction of the infamous Entertainment Tax, the YMCA built two Anzac ‘Huts’ in London: the Shakespeare Hut for New Zealanders and the Aldwych for Australians, providing shelter and ‘suitable’ entertainment for servicemen on brief leave from the Front. The Shakespeare Hut was built to commemorate the playwright’s Tercentenary on land purchased originally for the erection of a new National Theatre (at that time planned to be named the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre). In its own purpose-built performance space it would provide hundreds of entertainments for its Anzac audiences. The Hut provided 90,000 beds per year and provided all those under its roof with free, inhouse entertainments, partly to keep them off the streets. While the Aldwych Hut lacked the performance space and extraordinary commemorative function of the Shakespeare, it too provided a specific Australian ‘home’ for Anzacs, adjacent, as it was, to the site of Australian High Commission, in the process of construction. By 1917, the Australian YMCA had also taken over the next door Aldwych Theatre, bringing the Aldwych Hut in line with the Shakespeare Hut in its inextricable identification with theatre and performance. This essay examines how, in these idiosyncratic spaces, audiences of Anzacs were presented with a diverse range of theatrical entertainments, from concert parties and variety to opera and Shakespeare. On the stages of these Anzac ‘theatres’ notions of Empire, of Anzac selfhood

and even of gender were played out, under the Zeppelin raids of the last years of the Great War.

]ha[Construction

]p[During the war, YMCA Huts for troops on leave were central to the experience of many servicemen, especially those from the 'Dominions' and Allied forces. In London, over forty such Huts were erected. When they opened in 1916, the two Anzac Huts were both unusual in their designation for a particular nationality of soldiers.¶ Though the Shakespeare and Aldwych Huts were built for New Zealand and Australian servicemen respectively, Anzacs moved between the two to choose their entertainments. However, the performances they would have found at each would have contrasted a great deal. While the Shakespeare Hut presented a performance of a particular brand of 'Englishness' via Shakespearean productions featuring stars of the 'legitimate' stage, the Aldwych Theatre was a space in which Anzac culture, via concert parties, was performed. Even the funding of the Shakespeare Hut was 'theatrical': the Shakespeare Hut's largest patron was the Australian theatre manager, entrepreneur and philanthropist, Sir Oswald Stoll. In a letter to the founder of the Shakespeare Hut, Professor Israel Gollancz, dated 11 March 1916, Stoll describes the Shakespeare Hut as 'your patriotic and humane scheme, so fully in consonance with the patriotism and humanity of Shakespeare'.¶ The building of the Hut for New Zealanders was seen as a patriotic endeavor, but patriotic, perhaps not to England *per se*, but to a colonial identity shared by its inhabitants and its benefactor. Nevertheless – or perhaps *because* of this very agenda – both Anzac Huts successfully attracted tens of thousands of New Zealanders and Australians looking for a temporary home. **The Shakespeare Hut's function of establishing 'Shakespeare's England' with which Dominion troops could feel a sense of**

identity, also merged with a sense that the Huts could be used to show appreciation of the sacrifices and efforts of these troops from ‘beyond the seas’ at a time when a series of military and human disasters due to British command decisions had left the prevailing attitude to England at best ambivalent.

The Shakespeare Hut was to be the grandest YMCA hut yet and its apparently incongruous combination of commemoration, performance and pragmatism had come about via a haphazard series of events. In 1908, after decades of debate on how to commemorate Shakespeare stretching back long before the 1916 Tercentenary became the focus, the Shakespeare memorial movement merged with those campaigning for a National Theatre for Great Britain to form the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre (SMNT) committee. However, partly due to financial disagreements, partly to clashes over the nature and function of such a theatre, by 1914 the SMNT committee had made little progress towards realizing the plan. With the 1916 Tercentenary of Shakespeare’s death fast approaching, the SMNT purchased a site in Bloomsbury with the plan of erecting the National Theatre to commemorate Shakespeare. Just months later, the outbreak of war necessarily put the plans into abeyance; the site stood empty until 1916. However, in March of that Tercentenary year, Israel Gollancz, then the committee’s secretary, mooted an unusual plan. He approached the YMCA with the idea that the site could be used, for the duration of the war, to erect a soldiers’ respite ‘hut’ in honour of Shakespeare (see Figure 12.1).

[Insert Fig. 12.1 near here]

]fcap[*Figure 12.1* The Shakespeare Hut, Bloomsbury

The Shakespeare Hut's extensive external beams were a deliberate design feature, intended to produce a mock-Tudor style, signposting the Hut's link to Shakespeare and 'his England', further invoked by its inbuilt theatre. In a letter to Gollancz, dated March 1916, YMCA Chairman Basil Yeaxlee commented excitedly on architect Charles Waymouth's design of the hut and was especially complimentary about the 'Shakespearean' style, namely the way in which 'he [Waymouth] has provided in the elevation for Tudor touches'.³ This show of pseudo-Elizabethanism was reminiscent of the ambitious Earl's Court 'Shakespeare's England' exhibition of 1912 designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens. This had shown a whole street of Tudor facades and buildings, including a half size 'replica' of the Globe Theatre in which extracts of Shakespeare's plays were performed. The exhibition's cheap admission and widespread advertising led to its being used to present a Shakespeare 'for the people' but it proved a financial disaster. The Shakespeare Hut, however, did prove popular. It appealed to war-time benevolence, bringing much needed legitimacy to the SMNT cause by aligning the commemoration of Shakespeare with care of the troops, in particular, 'Dominion' soldiers, welcoming them into the story of Shakespeare and also English heritage more broadly. Although it was a far cry from the full theatre soon to be annexed by the Aldwych, the Shakespeare Hut was designed to include its own purpose-built performance space, a 'concert hall (including a most artistic stage) to seat 500 or 600 soldiers'.⁴ Distinguished practitioners, including Ellen Terry, Gertrude Elliott, Edith Craig, Ben Greet, John Martin Harvey, Mary Anderson and Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson, regularly directed and performed there, briefly swapping the limelight of starring roles in elaborate commercial productions to small-scale shows at the Hut.⁵

Meanwhile in 1916, the Australian YMCA were also building the more standard, if still large, Aldwych Hut for Anzacs. Lacking as it did its own London performance space, the YMCA Council moved its 'social centre' to the adjacent Aldwych Theatre at the top of the

Strand, annexing it during 1917.⁶ Unlike the Shakespeare Hut's tiny stage and multifunctional performance space (used as an overflow dormitory in times of need⁷), the Australian YMCA's takeover of the Aldwych Theatre gave the Australian Anzacs a well-equipped performance space and high profile location in the theatre district. Both Huts were presented in the Antipodean press as Anzac 'homes' in an alien city,⁸ a space in which Anzacs could find a comfortable balance between Imperial and Antipodean identity and culture. The Strand was still, in the early twentieth century, a focus for nightlife and entertainment and was perceived by the YMCA as an abject danger to the moral life of the troops, offering as it did easy access to alcohol, gambling and prostitution. While the Shakespeare Hut's leafy, more affluent locale and mock-Tudor walls offered a rather idyllic touristic view of Englishness, the view from the Aldwych was very different. Thus entertainments provided by the YMCA needed to be attractive enough to coax men away from the temptations of the streets to enjoy more 'suitable' entertainment.

]ha[Staging and production

]p[Performance was always a part of the plan for the Shakespeare Hut and, built in the theatre district, the Aldwych Hut likewise became equally synonymous with drama and music. The range of performance at the Aldwych Theatre was also diverse, including an extensive classical programme led by its proprietor, conductor Sir Thomas Beecham in a continuation of his pre-War association with the theatre. This was interspersed with other entertainments, including high-profile speakers such as Winston Churchill and Edward, Prince of Wales.⁹ Anzac concert parties also used the theatre, creating an all-Anzac cast and audience. Jack (AKA 'Dinks') Paterson produced a show at the Aldwych having formed a concert party of injured Anzacs at the Kent Anzac field hospital.¹⁰ The Aldwych Hut thus came to hold a very special Australian identity; its proximity to what would become Australia House meant that a

discrete Australian sector began to develop and it is mentioned often in first-hand accounts of wartime London. One Australian war worker wrote in *The Worker* of his experience of the Aldwych Theatre:

]ex[The work carried on there and the excellent theatrical entertainments provided every evening, sometimes by the leading stars of London, are immensely appreciated by the Australian soldiers on leave...The Australian munitioneers have the privilege, too, of buying food at most of the soldiers' rests [...] and all other civilians, whether they are munition workers or not are strictly barred.¹¹

]p[The audiences of the Aldwych were, by virtue of its two stages, more mixed than those of the Shakespeare Hut, where any civilian attendance was strictly prohibited¹², yet, as this extract shows, events would still have been dominated by Anzacs and Australian war workers, who clearly felt a sense of ownership of and identity with the theatre. Performances within both these Anzac spaces, then, need equally to be read in this context.

Unlike the excellent theatrical facilities at the Aldwych Theatre, the Shakespeare Hut's performance space was as austere as it was pragmatic. The stage seems to have had no movable sets. A surviving image reveals that its stage space was extremely small while wattle-and-daub-effect walls of white plaster and dark beams formed a backdrop. These black and white stripes function paradoxically: they draw attention both to the pseudo-historical, mock-Tudor design of the Hut's exterior and to the temporary, transient substance of its wooden and plaster structure. In a letter dated 26 April 1917, the Hut's Entertainment Director Gertrude Elliott wrote to director Edith Craig about the aesthetic problems of the stage: 'Can you also tell me if it possible without great expense, to get a painted cloth to hang at the back of the Hut stage always, instead of the that [...] white striped effect that is in the woodwork? I can only think of an effect of curtains, but the question is could we get a scenic artist to do it + who?'¹³ These modest requests for simple painted cloths to hide the black and

white stripes of the Hut's walls reveals some acceptance of wartime austerity but rejects the aesthetic barrenness of the Hut's naked stage as a space for performance. It is significant that, pre-war, Edith Craig's production style had involved minimalist sets and props; one of her trademarks was to use only cloths for scenery, shunning the elaborate scene changes of the kind favoured by exponents of what had become mainstream late-Victorian and Edwardian production (most notably, Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree). The performance space and productions at the Hut epitomize the perfect storm of practical necessity and an aesthetic new wave in theatrical production taking place in British theatre. This time of theatrical innovation was not derailed by the crisis, but rather diverted to new spaces, a context in which the Shakespeare Hut flourished

Something of the Hut's performance and production politics of producing minimalist plays using some of the greatest stars of pictorialism can be seen in Maurice Willson Disher's 1948 biography of Shakespearean actor John Martin Harvey. Here Disher offers an account of a Shakespeare Hut performance from a member of the audience (journalist and, at that time, soldier, Gordon Stowell), on 24 December 1916:

[ex]But how on earth was he to spend Christmas Eve? With barely a shilling to spare he turned to the Shakespeare Hut, a Bloomsbury sanctuary built by the Y.M.C.A on the site purchased for the National Theatre. ... Private Stowell, after he had made sure of a bed and something for supper ... found himself on the free-list for a play. He looked at the stage in the hall and decided, 'Anyone who could act on that could act on a tea-tray' and then set his incredulous eyes on the notice-board which announced the personal appearance of Martin Harvey in *David Garrick*. In his tired, outcast-at-Christmas mood, he sat without any great expectations until the visitor appeared. Still he was unimpressed. 'Those little ferrety eyes in that great ham of a face revolted me,' expresses his first feelings. 'Then,' he adds, 'they riveted me.' In all fairness that

performance ought to be on the record of the National Theatre, upon whose soil it undoubtedly took place. Lady Martin-Harvey remembers it because they played by candlelight. That suited *David Garrick* perfectly.¹⁴

The idea that the magic of candlelight suited this Victorian play, about a Shakespearean actor, set in the eighteenth century exemplifies one of the key effects of the austere facilities for performance at the Hut. While the Anzacs at the Aldwych Theatre could be entertained in a purpose-built, well-equipped theatre, those at the Shakespeare Hut received a very different experience of performance. The candlelight was not purely an aesthetic choice, but a necessary one in wartime due to black outs and power failures, yet it had the effect of romanticizing both the performance and the privations of war.

Shakespeare for the Anzacs

From its inception, the Shakespeare Hut was to provide a programme of Shakespeare-themed entertainments, situating it within a larger use of Shakespeare to purvey notions of Englishness and a cohesive identity of the English-speaking world. It was, of course, a trope frequently used in discussions surrounding both the Tercentenary and the war. As Anselm Heinrich has pointed out in Chapter 3 in this book, Shakespeare had become a key tool of patriotic propaganda and, indeed, a central piece of a new wartime national identity. The effect of Shakespeare's already monolithic cultural capital was compounded by the coincidence of the Tercentenary of his death falling in 1916. While plans for the commemoration of this event had been necessarily adapted to accommodate newer, more austere sensibilities, the occasion was nevertheless marked in London by an elaborate gala at Drury Lane theatre and by the erection of the Shakespeare Hut itself. The creation of this monument to Shakespeare, albeit a temporary one, which was simultaneously intended as a

symbol of New Zealand culture and identity, can be seen as a unique microcosmic representation of a broader intersection of imperial and Antipodean identities during the War.

One of the reasons why Shakespeare represents an interesting case study of this process is because while the apparently strange pairing of Shakespeare with Anzacs at the Shakespeare Hut was taking place in London, over in Australia the celebrations of Shakespeare's Tercentenary were merging Shakespeare and Anzac. The Sydney 'Historic Shakespeare Tercentenary Matinee' (3 May 1916) in aid of the Anzac Day Fund featured Shakespearean extracts and living tableaux which physically 'entwined' Shakespeare, Britannia and Anzac. Meanwhile, staging of Shakespearean extracts and performances in the Shakespeare Hut in London may have summoned some of the same associations in the minds of the Anzac spectators there. However, the notion of Shakespeare as representing an English 'race' is notably absent in contemporary writing (both press and autobiographical) about the Shakespeare Hut. In contrast, this eugenic undertone is pervasive in the rhetoric of the Shakespeare/Anzac events in Sydney, far from the English 'motherland' of the British Empire. At the Sydney New Adelphi Theatre 'Historic Shakespeare Tercentenary Matinee', the uncanny intersection of Anzac and Shakespeare commemorations was played out in sharp focus, most notably via the event's finale, Dulcie Deamer's reading of her poem written for the occasion, 'The Pen and the Sword':

]vr[Shakespeare! No sun shall ever set on thine undying day –
 Thou art the soul of England – in her crown the gem of purest ray.
 The soul of England! Yes, her soul indeed,
 Speaking clear-voiced down the long centuries,
 The birth-right of all men of British breed,
 From pole to pole, and on the seven seas,
 Where'er the British flag, unconquered, undefiled, floats on the taintless breeze.

Thou art our heritage, and thou hast been,
 Our inspiration still from age to age,
 Thy golden, wondrous pen was deadly keen
 As any sword, and on the world's broad stage
 The sons of England's sons, touched by thy fire, have carved their names with swords
 on Fame's immortal page.

Spirit of Genius that shall never die,
 In all our hero-deeds thou hast thy share,
 Trafalgar, Waterloo, Gallipoli.
 Oh surely thou invisible, were there,
 When Anzac's deathless heights showed all the world what sons of England's sons
 could do and dare.

Thy words were in each claimant bugle cry,
 When winged with death the Turkish shrapnel flew,
 And that wild charge swept up to the pale sky,
 Thy ringing words that thrill us through and through;
 'Come the four corners of the world in arms, but we shall meet
 them, nought shall make us rue if England to herself do stand but true.'¹⁵

]]p[Like numerous postcards and memorials, the poem appropriates these famous lines from *King John* (a play also regularly featured in extracts at the Shakespeare Hut) to conjure a notion of Shakespeare's England as synonymous with victory and Imperial power. The Sydney event as a whole became a performance of Anzac merged inextricably with the

performance of both ‘Englishness’ (Anzacs as ‘sons of England’s sons’) and Empire (‘from Pole to Pole and on the seven seas’). Philip Mead has drawn attention to this poem’s naked exploitation in the rhetoric of race and in the new discourse of Anzac and antipodean identity.

He writes:

]ex[This staging of unabashed patriotism enlists...Shakespeare in the recruiting jingoism of 1916. At the centre of this theatrical finale is the tableau of Shakespeare and the wounded Anzac, a conjunction of the hero of England and Englishness and the Australian/New Zealand soldier who has fought and died in the imperial cause.¹⁶

]p[Back in London, the definition of Antipodean ‘home’ peddled by the YMCA in describing its Anzac Huts was dualistic; both the homeland of their birth and the broader, racialized ‘home’ of England herself. The Shakespeare Hut’s function of establishing an England with which Dominion troops could feel a sense of identity also merged with a sense that the Shakespeare Hut could be used to establish a distinctive Anzac space. Thus while the Deamer poem demonstrates how the Shakespeare–Anzac connection could present Shakespeare as a paragon of an English ‘race’ to which all white Imperial Dominions belonged, a different process was at work in London. At the Shakespeare Hut, a different association of Shakespeare and Anzac served to appropriate one of the most prized symbols of English cultural dominance as a symbol for a new Anzac identity, which began to edge free of its Imperial dominance.

At the Shakespeare Hut, it was not only the stage that offered Shakespeare or indeed a ‘performance’ of Englishness in an Anzac-‘owned’ space. In his autobiography, *A Canterbury Tale*, New Zealand soldier Francis Bennett describes being taken to Shakespeare’s birthplace on an organized trip:

]ex[On the notice board back at the Shakespeare Hut were details of a soldiers’ excursion to Stratford-on-Avon the next day. To me it was more a pilgrimage than an

excursion. ... We went in the room where Shakespeare was born. I was examining the famous window with its many signatures. Our guide invited me to add mine and handed me a diamond stylus. I found a corner and wrote. I noticed a nearby name was that of Walter Scott.

At the time I thought little of it – a signature such as might go in an autograph book. But the mystery of how it got there has deepened with time and greater knowledge. It is an honour usually reserved for the famous, the only qualification being merit. Perhaps my guide was indulging an egalitarian whim. Perhaps I was signing in honour of my country, for the news had just come through that the New Zealanders had captured the walled town of Le Quesnoy. ...But, motives aside, the signature was made and is still there.¹⁷

jp[Bennett believed that by signing his name he was somehow representing New Zealand's contribution to the war effort. His contemplation of the guide's 'egalitarian whim' echoes the intriguing position of Shakespeare at the New Zealand Hut: a true intersection of Anzac and Imperial identities and a transgression of notions of value. The permanence of the etched autograph on 'Shakespeare's' window takes on a particular significance in its permanence; a new Anzac mark on a highly symbolic English heritage site.

We know that the Shakespeare Hut's audience was made up purely of servicemen and that the overwhelming majority would have been Anzacs. While some of the performers, especially Ellen Terry and Johnston Forbes-Robertson, may have been known by name to some of the men, it is probable that the audience would never have seen these performers before, since few had toured the Antipodes and, even if they had, many of the young Anzac soldiers would not have seen their productions. Theatrical tours of Australia tended to tour large cities, rather than rural areas. Furthermore, the aesthetically austere style of the Shakespeare Hut performances may have been novel even to those New Zealander and

Australian soldiers who *had* attended performances in their home countries. In 1914, Australian actor-manager Oscar Asche's large-scale pictorial, spectacular versions of Shakespeare were still the most dominant in Australia and New Zealand. Asche had honed his craft working with actor-manager Sir Frank Benson in London and managing His Majesty's Theatre for Herbert Beerbohm Tree. Asche's first two Australian tours between 1909 and 1913 were hugely popular.⁸ However, the 'make-do' style of the Shakespeare Hut would certainly have had some commonality with the concert parties that formed the entertainment for troops while fighting abroad. The Anzac tenants of the Shakespeare Hut who made it home to New Zealand and Australia took back with them memories of entertainments at the Hut and concert parties at the front, blurring a notion of Shakespearean performance with the light entertainment of songs and skits. Far from the pictorial, spectacular performance style hitherto dominant in their home countries, the Shakespeare they remembered would have been one of light entertainment, a morale-boosting evening of fun provided in the most austere of settings.

This agenda of boosting morale and camaraderie is clearly articulated in Fabia Drake's autobiography. In 1978 she recalled playing Henry V on the Hut Stage, when she was fifteen years old: 'We had no extras, we had no army, but we had an audience of four hundred soldiers and Edy Craig had the inspiration that I should come out in front of the curtain and speak the Agincourt speech to my Army on the floor.Four hundred war-weary men rallied to the cry of "God for Harry, England and Saint George", springing to their feet and cheering to the rafters.' In the autobiography, a photo shows Drake dressed in full costume captioned 'Harry of England' / *Henry V* to the ANZAC soldiers, and Drake stresses several times the Anzac identity of the soldiers in the audience and claims that this particular performance was held on Shakespeare's birthday, 23 April 1919.⁹ The show's timing, while the Anzacs were still waiting to be repatriated, was apparently one reason for choosing the

play but Drake also makes much of the play's 'magnificent speeches', citing their 'urgency and a rallying force that can be incandescent'. Her pride in the power of the speeches clearly has something to do with her own performance of them but she is innately conscious of their ability to rouse a 'foreign' or imperial army of Anzacs. Her reiteration of the phrase 'Harry of England' is several times juxtaposed with the identity of the audience. In 1919 the 'urgency' of these speeches was no longer necessary to rally men to fight but it might rally their imperial loyalty and morale before England let go of them.

By 1919 this consciousness on the part of those involved in running the Shakespeare Hut of Shakespeare's perceived 'value' was deeply embedded. A programme for one of the Hut's annual Shakespeare galas (c.1918) exemplifies the type of performance that took place there. Co-directed by Gertrude Elliot and Edith Craig, it included Forbes Johnston performing a soliloquy from *Hamlet* and Jacques' 'Seven Ages' speech, Ellen Terry as Portia, Maud Warrender reciting 'Shakespeare Songs', together with an address by Professor Gollancz, scenes from *Henry V* (Junior Players), and a range of other songs and extracts, including scenes from *King John*.²⁰ On the one hand the choice of extracts could be said to reflect suffragette uses of Shakespeare. Ellen Terry's set piece 'quality of mercy' speech had been widely been adopted by suffragists as supportive of their cause. On the other hand the extracts were also taken from the plays most often used to bolster morale and recruit troops. *Macbeth*, a regular at the Shakespeare Hut, was also used in government propaganda to present the power-hungry, militaristic Macbeths as representing the German threat. The lines 'Stand not upon the order of your going / But go at once' was blazoned on a recruitment poster displayed on walls and billboards throughout the War.²¹ This tiny fragment might become more familiar than the remembered 'whole' of the text, its effect heightened perhaps by the 'foreignness' of its Anzac audiences who were not only new to the country but were

‘Dominion’ soldiers, many of whom had volunteered for service based on a particular view of a ‘Merry Old England’ that was their ‘motherland’ and required protection.

]ha[Entertaining the Anzacs

]p[Alongside this, it is evident that the mission behind the Huts was also intended to be educative, at least to some degree. Both the Shakespeare and the Aldwych Huts, while different in approach, mixed popular entertainment with ‘high’ culture. The Shakespeare Hut, ill-equipped for full-scale productions, combined variety modes with Shakespearean themes to create a hybrid of contemporary production styles. The fragmented version of the Shakespeare on offer reflected something of the eclectic style of the pre-war agitprop productions in which many of the Hut’s practitioners had been involved. These productions mixed music, speech and drama in short ‘sketches’ and ‘refus[ed] to distinguish between [...] the value of a play or a sketch, a raffle and a recitation’.²² This approach represented freedom from the conventions of value, representing instead a democratization of performance.

Meanwhile, at the Aldwych Theatre, the two-stage, civilian/Anzac programming was extremely diverse, ranging from concert parties to full scale opera. Sir Thomas Beecham, in his drive to maintain a musical scene in London, conducted regular events which were often reported back in Australia and New Zealand. Thus in 1917, Beecham staged *Quince*, a new opera by Charpentier (1917), together with revivals of *Samson and Delilah* and *Faust*. In *London in my Time*, Thomas Burke, a resident journalist, described his experience of these events:

]ex[One of the oddest experiences in an odd London, but one accepted then as part of normal life, was to be sitting in the Aldwych Theatre, during Sir Thomas Beecham’s opera season, listening to ‘The Magic Flute’ or ‘The Marriage of Figaro’, while the barrage crashed and rumbled overhead. This I knew three or four times, and on each

occasion not more than a dozen people left the theatre. ... The entertainers [...] helped to nourish the cheerful spirit of the town. The spirit was there to begin with, of course, but they gave it tone. Sir Thomas Beecham notably deserves credit for preserving to us a little oasis of grace and light in a time when all else was darkness and violence. Those opera seasons of his maintained the balance of many a man who might otherwise have fallen to nervous bitterness and melancholia; and for the larger public there were vaudeville and gay musical shows, which performed a similar service.²³

]p[Beecham's operas represented, for Burke, an oasis in war-weary London but his comment that 'for the larger public there were vaudeville and gay musical shows' reveals his enduring belief in the separation of 'high' culture from the entertainment of the masses. Burke's comments on the Aldwych are then followed by more general comments about entertainments available for soldiers on leave as he chastizes the promoters who:

]ex[set out ostensibly to cater for a standardised person whom they called 'Tommy', without any first-hand knowledge of 'Tommy's' taste and intelligence. They seemed to assume that the private soldier of this war was identical with the private soldier of 1881. Still, there were a few sensible productions which did not underrate the intelligence of the average man. I did not see them, not being a theatre man, but I heard about them; and from my own observation I know how thickly each audience of Beecham opera was sprinkled with uniform.²⁴

]p[As is evident elsewhere in this book, Burke was not alone in his concerns for the quality of theatre pitched to the men. As Viv Gardner (Chapter 8) shows, there was widespread concern among theatre critics that the homogenization of entertainment 'for the troops' failed to recognize any intellectual capacity in servicemen. The Shakespeare Hut's ambitious programme of entertainments, alongside a programme of education, was an obvious way of providing the Anzacs with access to 'quality' entertainments. However, the YMCA needed to

engage as many men as possible to stay safely within its walls at night, so a solely elitist approach seemed unlikely to be successful. This necessity to balance Shakespearean with the variety, the 'educational' with the entertaining, led to Shakespeare mixed with variety; plays were never performed in their entirety but rather fragmented into revues and galas, interspersed with songs and skits. The Aldwych stage too, once it had been annexed by the YMCA in 1917, shared the operatic programme that so impressed Burke with concert parties in the 'vaudeville' style he regarded as separate. Both venues then, challenged the still widespread critical compartmentalization of performance as 'high' or 'low' in their entertainments for the Anzacs; even Fabia Drake's cross-dressed portrayal of Henry V can be read as recalling popular music-hall male impersonators such as Vesta Tilley and Hetty King, in the sense of it being a transgression of gender rendered acceptable by its 'variety' entertainment context.

Drake's Henry V does not, however, lead us only into debates over value, but also into those of gender and performance in the Anzac entertainments of wartime London. While Drake's cross-dressed Henry placed a woman in a man's role at the Shakespeare Hut, at the Aldwych, female impersonators in concert parties frequently entertained the troops. The Canadian concert party, the Dumbells, for example, performed at the Aldwych in 1918, featuring female impersonator 'Marie' aka Alan Murray.²⁵ These very different transgressive versions of womanhood took place in the context of a very specific agenda of performing 'acceptable' versions of womanhood to the captive audiences of Anzac troops. In keeping with their international mission, the YMCA Huts were developed partly as a means of protecting young men's souls from the temptations of the field and leave, especially the perceived threat of their own sexual desires and the attentions of predatory young women. As a consequence, the Huts thus promoted an ethos of homely escape from 'sin', without an overt missionary function. How successful this mission can be perceived to have been

depends, of course, upon whose account we are reading. George W. W. B Hughes, YM secretary of the Shakespeare Hut, wrote to his wife in 1917 reporting how: ‘We had a social evening at the Shakespeare Hut last night for soldiers. It went off splendidly, with a good crowd of fellows present, and about 60 of the lady workers. It is our plan to have these gatherings every Friday evening, because we believe that many of the men will be kept off the streets and therefore out of danger.’²⁶ Performance was viewed as a means by which to exert moral control over the Anzacs, to keep the men ‘safe’. This was in accordance with the YMCA’s stated mission ‘to lead men into the environment of better surroundings than they might otherwise find themselves in – to shield the wayward from the wiles of the insidious and provide good-living lads with healthy recreation and pastime’.²⁷

That the YMCA was not alone in its fear of ‘the wrong kind of woman’ as a threat to the thousands of young Anzacs is clear both from first-hand accounts and the press in London, New Zealand and Australia. Therefore the approach to performance at both the Aldwych and the Shakespeare should be read in this additional context. Both Huts shared a standard wartime YMCA approach for their general running: an all-female staff of volunteers. At the Shakespeare Hut, this female-led entertainment was compounded by a substantial female dominance in performers, too. Put together, the stages and halls of the Anzac Huts were not only performing empire but performing gender for the young male audiences.

The Shakespeare Hut’s entertainment strategy and provision were managed from the outset by Gertrude Elliott, Lady Forbes Robertson. Elliott was a successful actor in her own right, wife to actor-manager Sir Johnston Forbes Robertson, and had been a leading suffragist, as President of the Actress Franchise League, until the outbreak of war put the suffrage cause at least partly into abeyance. Less well known as an actor, Mary Pitcairn managed the Aldwych Theatre. While Pitcairn’s influence would have been the driving force of programming at the Aldwych, the female focus of Elliott’s approach at the Shakespeare was

more pronounced. In a *Stage* review of an entertainment at the Hut in 1919, it would appear that the show in question was female directed, almost entirely performed by women and featured sketches written by women, including the Australian author Inez Bensusan, most famous for her authorship of pro-suffrage plays, including *Votes for Women*, and for founding the Women's Theatre Company in 1913. In this sense the role of woman war worker being enacted by the Hut's entertainers created a situation which socially legitimized women's theatre while presenting an opportunity for leading suffragists to perform in front of an entirely male audience.²⁸ Bensusan presented her fellow Australians at the Hut with an alternative performance of womanhood that neither fitted with Hughes 'harpies' of the streets nor his 'right sort' of New Zealand ladies, nor even the Huts' domestic female volunteers. Rather, she presented an Australian woman as wit and creator in the uncontroversial context of writing entertainment for the troops.

Years after the demolition of the Aldwych and Shakespeare Huts in early the 1920s and the return of the Aldwych Theatre into civilian hands, the shadows of their significance to returned soldiers back in Australia and New Zealand can still be traced. In 1919, a group of returned Anzac servicemen proposed to build a war memorial back in New Zealand – it was to be a replica of the Shakespeare Hut.²⁹ This ultimate merging of Shakespeare and Anzac was, sadly, never built. However, in 1923, the people of New Zealand presented a gold tiki statuette to Gertrude Elliott in recognition of her services to the country during the war. She was also made guest of honour at a formal tea in Brisbane, where she accepted honours and gifts 'to show [...] appreciation of the war work done by Lady Forbes Robertson (Gertrude Elliott) and, indirectly, of the many other British women war workers'.³⁰ Elliott's management of performance at the Shakespeare was clearly perceived as vital war work back in Australia. The Anzac days of the Aldwych Theatre, meanwhile, survive best in autobiographical accounts of the war, regularly featuring as a key location of Anzac pride;

indeed, it was from the Aldwych Theatre that the Anzacs marched to celebrate victory in 1918. The London ‘Anzac’ performances, now all but forgotten, were a moment of true intersection of Imperial, English and Anzac identities, playing out issues of value, of national identity and even of gender politics on two very different stages to tens of thousands of Anzacs.

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¹ More were to follow; the Beaver Hut for Canadians and more famous Eagle Hut for US soldiers were both erected nearby on the Strand.

² Oswald Stoll, to Israel Gollancz, 11 March 1916, National Theatre Archive SMNT2/2/56.

³ Basil Yeaxlee to Israel Gollancz, 3 March 1916, National Theatre Archive, SMNT/2/2/55.

⁴ ‘Heroes All’, *Wanganui Chronicle*, 28 August 1917, 5.

⁵ Maurice Willson Disher, *The Last Romantic: the Authorised Biography of Martin Harvey* (London: Hutchinson, 1948), 252.

⁶ This can be verified by the YMCA booklet ‘Souvenir of the Aldwych YMCA Hut’, a copy of which is preserved in the National Library of Australia (call ref. SR 940.477894 A365).

⁷ An image of the inside of the concert hall in the collection of the YMCA shows beds, some folded, some being put out, with the small permanent stage in the background. Album of photographs of the Shakespeare Hut, YMCA Archive, Special Collections, University of Birmingham, archive ref. Q1 Acc 2002/62 pt.

⁸ *Northern Advocate*, New Zealand, 13 December 1918.

⁹ The Shakespeare Hut also played host to visits from dignitaries, including Queen Mary and the Prime Minister of New Zealand.

¹⁰ ‘Jack Paterson’ Australian Variety Theatre Archive, <http://ozvta.com/practitioners-p-q/>.

¹¹ ‘Aldwych Theatre’, *Worker*, 28 November 1918, 19.

¹² This can be verified by every surviving poster advertising entertainments at the Hut, for example on a poster for *Macbeth* at the Shakespeare Hut states ‘Men of HM and Allied Forces Only’, Macbeth Hoover Institution Political Poster Database 3943.

¹³ Gertrude Forbes-Robertson to Edith Craig, 26 April 1917, Ellen Terry & Edith Craig Archive, National Trust, British Library, BL 125_1_6_Z3258_LETTER.

¹⁴ Disher, *The Last Romantic*, 252.

¹⁵ Dulcie Deamer, ‘The Pen and the Sword’, Programme, ‘Historic Shakespeare Tercentenary Matinee’, 3 May 1916.

¹⁶ Philip Mead, ‘Antipodal Shakespeare’, unpublished conference paper, Société Française Shakespeare conference, Shakespeare 450, Paris, 2013.

¹⁷ Francis Oswald Bennett, *A Canterbury Tale: the Autobiography of Dr. Francis Bennett* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 78.

¹⁸ Richard Madelaine, ‘Substantial Pageants: Oscar Asche, latter-day pictorialism and Australian audiences, 1909–22’, in *O Brave New World: Two Centuries of Shakespeare on the Australian Stage*, eds. John Golder and Richard Madelaine (Sydney: Currency Press, 2001), 110–11.

¹⁹ Fabia Drake, *Blind Fortune* (London: Kimber, 1978), 36–7.

²⁰ Programme for entertainments at the Shakespeare Hut, Ellen Terry & Edith Craig Archive, National Trust, held at British Library: BL/125/25/2/Ellen Terry Archive/ET/D439.

²¹ For example, see ‘Stand not upon the order of your going, / But go at once’ (*Macbeth* III. 4). Poster issued in early 1915 by the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, Imperial War Museums, London Art. IWM PST 5154.

²² Katharine Cockin, *Edith Craig (1869–1947): Dramatic Lives* (London: Cassell, 1998), 93.

²³ Thomas Burke, *London in my Time* (London/New York: Loring & Mussey, 1934), 120.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

²⁵ Jason Wilson, *Soldiers of Song: the Dumbells and other Canadian concert parties of the First World War* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012), 122.

²⁶ George W. B. B. Hughes to May Hughes, 17 December 1917. Hughes' letters are uncatalogued. Access was provided by the Hughes family, in whose private possession the letters remain.

²⁷ 'London at Midnight', *The Dominion*, 10: 3196, 21 September 1917, 7.

²⁸ See Ailsa Grant Ferguson 'Lady Forbes-Robertson's war work: Gertrude Elliott and the Shakespeare Hut performances, 1916–1919', in *Women Making Shakespeare*, eds. Gordon McMullan, Lena Cowen Orlin and Virginia Mason Vaughan (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 233–42.

²⁹ 'Work of the YMCA', *Feilding Star*, 29 January 1919, 4.

³⁰ 'Lady Forbes Robertson', *Brisbane Courier*, 13 May 1924, 14.