



# Museums and First World War

*Gaynor Kavanagh*

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## **Museums and First World War** Gaynor Kavanagh

The book is concerned with how, during four demanding, dislocating and world-changing years, that most Victorian of institutions, the museum, was forced or prompted to meet the extraordinary test of war on the home front. Museums were no more immune from the pressures of war than any other institution and the changes in museums during this period, some long term, others transitory, do much to explain the nature and character of museums in Britain today. Their history reveals and reflects the broader history of the home front, and the willing, stumbling, confused efforts to do the right thing at the right time. They were far away from the fighting, the despair and degradation of the battlefields. But they were in some measure not only close to, but part of, a society carrying both its fears and expectations for those operating in a war which disassembled all their lives. The discussion covers the progress of museums from just before the advent of war in August 1914 to the immediate post-war period, 1920, although this is set in the context of museum developments before and after this span of time. Museums are considered in relation to the tensions and prevalent conditions of this period. Further, the nature and effect of the experience of them and the public services they provide, in both the long and short term, are examined.

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