

Institution: London School of Economics and Political Science		
Unit of Assessment: 28B – International History		
Title of case study: Commemorating the First World War		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
David Stevenson	Professor of International History	2000 to present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) <p>Professor David Stevenson has undertaken a wide-ranging programme of research on the history of the First World War. As the UK marked the conflict's centenary from 2014 to 2018, this research has underpinned collaborations with beneficiaries including the British Library, the Imperial War Museum, the BBC, and the British Army. Through various expert advisory roles, educational resources, museum galleries, and cultural events, Stevenson's research has informed initiatives which have commemorated the dead, stimulated interest in the wider history of the war, and enhanced understanding of its lesser-known stories and events.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>Over the last 20 years, Professor David Stevenson has led an extensive programme of research on the First World War. Adopting a multi-national and multi-lingual perspective, and using a blend of military, political, diplomatic, and economic approaches, his work has investigated and analysed the causes, course, and conclusion of the conflict. Stevenson's research, aided by LSE PhD students Marvin Fried, Michael Hemmersdorfer, and Charles Sorrie, has produced three major monographs [1] [2] [3], drawing on archival sources in Austria, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, and the US, as well as here in the UK.</p> <p>The 2004 book [1] provides a general history of the war, with emphasis on why it began, why it escalated, and on its termination, legacy, and impact. The coverage extends back into the nineteenth century and forward into the late twentieth. In addition to incorporating new archival research, it offers a synthesis of the English-language literature (and much of that in French and German). It relates the outbreak of war to the pre-1914 arms race, and integrates military, technological, political, and diplomatic explanations of the stalemate between 1915 and 1917. Its closing chapters examine how the stalemate was broken, and analyse the conflict's continuing cultural, political, and economic influence through the 1920s, the 1930s, and during and after the Second World War.</p> <p>The 2017 book [2] concentrates on a single, crowded year: 1917. An analysis of strategic and political decision-making, it focuses on the choices to continue and to escalate the conflict. It examines German submarine warfare and American intervention; the disastrous offensives launched by Britain, France, Russia, and Italy; and the global repercussions of the European stalemate, including the Russian Revolution, Chinese intervention, "responsible government" in India, and the Balfour Declaration. The book investigates why governments could not find (or deliberately rejected) strategies for exiting short of total victory, despite there by then being little scope for doubt about the conflict's human cost. By this means, it analyses the forces that perpetuated the conflict.</p> <p>The 2011 book [3] analyses the 1918 campaigning (on all battlefronts) and the factors enabling Allied victory, including technology (tanks, airpower, intelligence), military manpower and morale, command of the seas, military and political leadership, and support from the home fronts. Particularly novel are the discussions of Allied superiority in logistics - especially railways; largely neglected in earlier accounts - and the calculations leading Germany to seek an armistice and its opponents to grant one.</p>		

Stevenson's research has also yielded publications which have examined particular moments, stages, or issues of the conflict. For example, a 2012 article [4] presents the First World War as - paradoxically - a struggle between rival projects for European integration. Stevenson's 2020 article [5] on the engineering strike of May 1917 reflects recent research into the British Left and the war, distinguishing the more focused grievances of British engineering workers from the wider political agendas of their counterparts on the Continent. And finally, his 2006 article [6] illustrates research into the peace settlement, showing that Germany's imposed disarmament was justified as facilitating Allied disarmament – a commitment subsequently regretted.

Overall, Stevenson's research represents a substantial and significant contribution to the literature on the First World War.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[1] Stevenson, D. (2004). *1914-1918: the History of the First World War, 1914-1918*. Allen Lane. (North American edition, *Cataclysm: the First World War as Political Tragedy*, Basic Books, 2004; translations into German, Italian, Spanish, Croatian.) ISBN: 9780713992083.

[2] Stevenson, D. (2017). *1917: War, Peace, and Revolution*. Oxford University Press. ISBN: 9780198702382.

[3] Stevenson, D. (2011). *With Our Backs to the Wall: Victory and Defeat in 1918*. Allen Lane/ Harvard University Press. ISBN: 9780713998405.

[4] Stevenson, D. (2012). The First World War and European Integration. *The International History Review*, 34(4), pp. 841-63. DOI: 10.1080/07075332.2012.690202.

[5] Stevenson, D. (2020). Britain's Biggest Wartime Stoppage: the Origins of the Engineering Strike of May 1917. *History*, 105(365), pp. 268-290. DOI: 10.1111/1468-229X.12970.

[6] Stevenson, D. (2006). Britain, France, and the Origins of German Disarmament, 1916-19. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 29(2), pp. 195-224. DOI: 10.1080/01402390600585027.

The monographs have been a critical and commercial success. Both [1] and [3] were published by Penguin and [2] by Oxford University Press's trade division, all targeting non-specialist audiences, as well as demonstrating scholarly rigour and communicating new insights.

Sales figures (to November 2020): [1] hardback, 19,899; ebook, 3,906; paperback, 59,063. [3] hardback, 4,184; ebook, 1,296; paperback, 4,524. [2] (to March 2019) hardback, 4,410.

The Independent hailed [1] as: "Momentous...this history of the conflict surpasses all others". The *Financial Times* praised [3] as a "magnificent and exhaustive account of the war's final year...Stevenson has a deserved reputation as one of the world's leading authorities on the war". In 2017, *BBC History Magazine* commended [2] as "one of the most important books to have been published during the centenary years of the First World War".

This research was partly funded by a 2004-2006 Leverhulme Trust Research Fellowship worth £21,000.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Between 2014 and 2018, the UK marked the centenary of the First World War. As part of this significant anniversary, Stevenson's research has informed a range of initiatives that have commemorated the war dead, stimulated interest in the wider history of the conflict, and enhanced understanding of some of its lesser-known chapters and events. This work includes notable collaborations with the British Library on its pan-European educational initiatives, the Imperial War Museum on its award-winning First World War galleries, the BBC on one of its primetime television series, and other beneficiaries such as the British Army and National Theatre groups. These impacts were facilitated by Stevenson's work in various expert advisory roles and are described in greater detail below.

Europeana: 1914-1918, British Library

In 2013-2014 Stevenson was consultant to [1914-1918](#), Europeana's thematic collection on the First World War, which gathered untold stories and official histories of the conflict [A]. Europeana is a learning website which works with thousands of European archives, libraries, and museums to share cultural heritage for enjoyment, education, and research. The British Library led this

project, liaising with 11 institutions from seven European countries and developing an English-language web resource for First World War teachers. The site provides access to nearly 500 items and exhibits, including photographs, postcards, correspondence, propaganda material, and news clippings, all supported by commissioned articles from leading experts.

While the project was under development, Stevenson advised on a number of editorial matters. Drawing on his experience of researching and writing [1], he advocated and obtained a change to the planned structure of the collection, rearranging the thematic sub-sections into which the material was divided. He suggested prospective article authors and also personally contributed articles [A] – firmly grounded in the underpinning research – on “Europe before 1914”, “Origins and Outbreak”, “Making and Breaking Nations”, “Neutrality and Intervention”, “Supply and Logistics”, “The War Effort at Home”, and “The Aftermath of WWI”. On Stevenson’s recommendation the collection increased its coverage of the second half of the war as part of its expansion in 2018, with Stevenson again called on to recommend authors and contribute another piece on “How the First World War Ended”. These articles drew on research featuring in [1] [2] and [3]. He also delivered a companion lecture for London schoolchildren at the British Library in October 2014.

The site’s associated resources include materials in several languages, tailored to school curricula in the UK and in Europe. It has been promoted by the School Library Association (Resources Blog, “WWI Resources from British Library”, 13 March 2014); the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (“Creative Learning in the Digital Age, Online Teaching Resources for World War One”); the BBC Schools WWI Secondary webpage; the North East War Memorials Project; the United States World War One Centennial Commission (under “WWI Education Resources for Teachers”); and the National World War I Museum and Memorial Education Resources section in Kansas City (this is the only public museum in the US dedicated to WWI). *Europeana 1914-1918* was also featured in *The Guardian* Teacher Network’s (21 July 2014) “How to teach...the First World War” [B]. In a review of several WWI education resources for *Reviews in History*, Christopher Phillips wrote: “the unique selling point for the British Library...is the impressive quality and depth of the [supporting] articles. Written by a combination of internationally renowned scholars such as David Stevenson...the articles offer readers an introduction to the conflict based not upon ‘myths’ and popular perceptions but upon the latest academic scholarship” [B]. As of November 2020, the website has received more than four million individual visits. Location data also shows that 37 countries have each visited the site at least 5,000 times, with visits from users from the United States alone amounting to in excess of 1.2 million [C].

Imperial War Museum

Stevenson served on the academic advisory committee for the Imperial War Museum’s First World War galleries, which opened in July 2014. Costing GBP40 million, the galleries formed a centrepiece of the UK’s centenary commemorations. Stevenson’s appointment arose directly from his publications [1] [3] and he provided input across a number of areas of preparation, offering detailed comment on the design company’s initial concept, on gallery layout (particularly on sequencing; i.e. the route intended to be taken by visitors), on content (of the different sections in the first part of the exhibition, on the outbreak of the war), and providing expert quality assurance for the entirety of the exhibits’ accompanying text and captions. He coached museum staff on the war’s outbreak, identified by market research as the topic on which visitors most desired information. Stevenson also contributed to the advisory committee’s discussions about how to present more sensitive subjects to feature in the galleries, such as events in Ireland and Armenia.

Daily IWM visitor numbers in the first few months following the opening of the galleries were more than double the average prior to that time (up to 8,000 per day from 3,000) [D]. Visitor numbers remained consistently high throughout the centenary and even in the last couple of years: 2014-2015, 796,000 (70% attending WWI galleries); 2015-16, 709,000 (75%); 2016-17, 741,000 (75%); 2017-18, 678,000 (72%); 2018-19, 187,000 (75%); 2018-19, 221,000 (83%). Writing in the *Daily Telegraph*, Alastair Sooke celebrated the galleries’ “fascinating, and frequently heartbreaking, exhibits” [D], while the *New York Times*’ Edward Rothstein praised the “powerful presentations” as “worth paying attention to, not only for what they say about World War I, but also for what they say about contemporary approaches to history” [D]. The museum’s First World War galleries also received industry acclaim, winning Best Permanent Exhibition at the 2015 Museum + Heritage

Awards, and also being chosen as the winner in the Exhibition Design Category of the Design Week Awards 2015 [E].

In October 2014, the Head of First World War Gallery Content Team wrote to Stevenson to express his gratitude for his contributions, and those of his academic advisory board colleagues: “It has been a fantastic experience for us all and we are hugely in your debt for your expertise, your goodwill and for helping us to craft galleries which our visitors are finding so enthralling and which have won so much praise” [F].

LSE public festivals and exhibitions

Stevenson has worked closely with the LSE on public engagement initiatives to commemorate WWI, which drew heavily from the School’s own archives. He was consultant to the online 2014 exhibition, *WWI@LSE: a Common Cause*, associated with the 2014 LSE Literary Festival, advising on which items to include (such as photographs, minute books, and excerpts from the *Clare Market Review* – the student magazine) and providing the accompanying commentaries. Subsequently this material was also used as the basis of an International History Department podcast (downloaded more than 2,300 times [G] since becoming available in October 2019). With the Library he prepared an online exhibition for Google Arts & Culture, “The LSE’s War, 1914-1918”, selecting themes, texts, and images, and writing the narrative. He was consultant to a 2019 exhibition, “Giving Peace a Chance: from the League of Nations to Greenham Common” (linked to the 2019 LSE Festival), advising on design, again selecting items from the LSE archives and providing the accompanying commentaries, as well as delivering a public lecture. The exhibition had 8,600 visitors [G]. Stevenson’s 2011 book [3] and his research on the British Left in the war [5] directly informed this work.

BBC documentary series

Stevenson was consultant for the BBC series, *Railways of the Great War with Michael Portillo*, produced by Boundless Productions. He was chosen for his knowledge of railways and WWI logistics, particularly as featured in [3]. He viewed first cuts of every episode, corrected inaccuracies, and copy-edited the associated book, *Railways of the Great War with Michael Portillo*, by Colette Hooper (Bantam Press, 2014). For example, he identified one of the proposed illustrations as actually dating from the Second World War. Portillo interviewed him on how railway superiority assisted the Allies’ victory and how the disintegration of Germany’s logistical system contributed to its defeat. The BBC has broadcast this series three times, the first showing garnering an average audience of 1.1 million viewers (6.4% share), outperforming BBC2’s access prime average audience by 14% for total viewers [H].

British Army and Foreign and Commonwealth Office Historical Branch

Stevenson was consulted by the British Army as part of Operation Reflect, which as well as forming part of the nation’s commemorations also sought to identify contemporary lessons from the history of the war, in particular from the conduct of the British Army’s continental campaigns. Stevenson delivered lectures at the Royal United Services Institution in 2014 and at Sandhurst in 2017, particularly emphasising the importance of logistical factors as described in [3]. He also joined a “staff ride” to Cambrai in 2014, lecturing cadets about the battle that took place there in 1917. He worked with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Historical Branch in organising two public conferences: one on the outbreak of the war (2014) and one (with the National Archives and other stakeholders) on the Treaty of Versailles (2019). Both conferences attracted attendances of over 100, including journalists, diplomats, academics, students, and members of the general public.

In addition to the impacts achieved working with these core beneficiaries, Stevenson’s research has also underpinned several other public-facing initiatives. He wrote the text for two items (on the blockade of Germany and the Battle of Verdun) in the BBC iWonder series, which sought to make the most of the corporation’s vast archives of video, audio, text, and graphics, presented by historians and experts. Stevenson provided further expert quality assurance for the BBC by fact-checking videos and essays for inclusion in its “Bitesize” feature on the 1918 armistice [I]. Drawing on his 2011 book [3], he was consultant to Hotham Productions’ “Countdown to Peace, March to November 1918”, a 2018 audio dramatisation of *With Our Backs to the Wall*, that retold the history of the road to the 1918 Armistice. He wrote the historical programme notes for Sean O’Casey’s play, *The Silver Tassie*, revived at the National Theatre in 2014, and in July 2016 briefed c.100

participants as part of Project Octagon, a modern memorial to mark the centenary of the Battle of the Somme and organised by *14-18 Now!*, the body responsible for art commissions commemorating the war, and the National Theatre. Photos and reactions to the project, which unfolded without advance publicity, soon spread across social media under the #WeAreHere hashtag and garnered national media coverage [I]. Contributions to other educational initiatives include reviewing articles prior to publication in the Germany-based project *1914-1918 Online: International Encyclopaedia of the First World War*, supported by the Freie Universität Berlin, the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft.

Beyond these examples, Stevenson's research and publications led to many appearances before non-academic audiences throughout the centenary. He gave invited keynotes at literary festivals in Toronto, Edinburgh, Malta, and Great Malvern, at the National Defence College in Tokyo, at the Liberty War Memorial, Kansas City, and to the Western Front Association. In all he gave some 40 public lectures, including two recorded talks at Gresham College. A 2014 Gresham lecture providing an overview of the war's military history had received 54,438 views by October 2018.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[A] Europeana 1914-1918 learning website, europeana.eu/en/collections/topic/83-1914-1918. [Stevenson-authored articles](#): 29 January 2014 (x7) and 7 November 2018.

[B] Reviews of Europeana 1914-1918 featured in [The Guardian](#), 21 July 2014; and [Reviews in History](#), July 2014.

[C] British Library, Europeana 1914-1918 online visitor statistics, provided 12 November 2020.

[D] Media coverage of Imperial War Museum exhibition: [Wall Street Journal](#), 10 November 2014; [The Daily Telegraph](#), 16 July 2014; [The New York Times](#), 15 August 2014.

[E] Casson Mann coverage of [2015 Design Week Awards](#) and [Museum + Heritage Awards](#), retrieved 18 September 2020.

[F] Supporting statement from Head of First World War Gallery Content Team, Imperial War Museum, 3 October 2014.

[G] "Giving Peace a Chance: From the League of Nations to Greenham Common" - record of impact, LSE Library, 2019. Podcast statistics provided 6 November 2020.

[H] Viewing figures for *Railways of the Great War with Michael Portillo*, Boundless Productions, provided 1 November 2018.

[I] [BBC Bitesize](#) KS2, World War One, retrieved 18 September 2020; and "#Wearehere: Somme tribute revealed as Jeremy Deller work", [The Guardian](#), 1 July 2016.