THE EXPERIENCES OF ARCHIE ROYCE, YMCA REPRESENTATIVE IN THE AIF 1916–18

DANIEL REYNAUD[1]

Introduction

Among the spiritual influences on the men and women of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) during World War One was that of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), an Evangelical parachurch organisation aimed at promoting the spiritual wellbeing of young men, particularly by integrating it with physical and social activities. The Australian YMCA had negotiated a formal link with the Australian Army in 1910 and on the outbreak of war in 1914, became part of the support services of the AIF, working under the umbrella of the YMCA headquarters in the UK. YMCA Representatives, or Secretaries as they were sometimes called, were given honorary AIF commissions as lieutenants, and were stationed on transport ships and at military bases, as well as being embedded in the AIF divisions at brigade level. The YMCA, like the majority of evangelical Australians, saw the war effort through the lens of "civic religion,"

1 Daniel Reynaud is Emeritus Professor of History at Avondale University. He has published extensively on aspects of the Australian soldier experience in World War One, particularly on matters of religion and spirituality.

whereby the British Empire was God's chosen instrument to bring the Gospel to the world.[2]

Their role was variously described as "to care for the social, recreation and moral welfare of the men of the A.I.F.," and "to bring men definitely and consciously to God."[3] A YMCA Representative described the work 'as O.C. [Officer Commanding] morale, for that is really his job'.[4] There were some similarities between its work and that of two other major war charities: the Red Cross and the Australian Comforts Fund. While all three looked after the men's physical welfare in one form or another, the YMCA added a spiritual role in being 'a refuge and a "moral bastion" against the perceived corruptions of the military world."[5] The role also had considerable overlap with that of the official army chaplains, though in general the chaplains focused more on spiritual duties while the YMCA used social services in order to reach the men spiritually. While there was friction between chaplains and YMCA Representatives in other armies, the relationship in the AIF was largely harmonious because of the pre-war experience of collaboration.[6]

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2 G. R. Treloar, *The Disruption of Evangelicalism: The Age of Torrey, Mott, McPherson and Hammond* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2017), 10; Hilary M. Carey, *God's Empire: Religion and Colonialism in the British World, c. 1801-1908* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 5-6.

3 John Binyon, "A report of the work of the YMCA Australia, during World War I, compiled from Minute Book of the National YMCA Defence Force Committee," 4 May, 2020, unpublished paper; "Religion Comes First," *Melbourne Herald*, 18 February 1918, 3.

4 Frank Grose, *A Rough Y.M. Bloke* (Melbourne: The Speciality Press, 1921), 69.

5 Amanda Laugesen, *"Boredom is the Enemy": The Intellectual and Imaginative Lives of Australian Soldiers in the Great War and Beyond* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 6.

6 Charles W. Bishop, *The Canadian Y.M.C.A. in the Great War: The Official Record of the activities of the Canadian Y.M.C.A. in connection with the Great War of 1914-1918* (Toronto: National Council of Young Men's Christian Associations of Canada, 1924), 179-184, 187; Michael Gladwin, *Captains of the Soul: A history of Australian Army Chaplains* (Newport NSW: Big Sky, 2013), 72.



Archie Royce in his YMCA uniform, 1918. Courtesy Ian Royce

A couple of postwar memoirs from Australian YMCA workers give significant information about the organisation's contribution to the war effort. However, they tend to speak in generalised terms and gloss over many of their personal experiences.[7] Hence the value of one YMCA Representative, Archibald John Royce, whose diary and letters offer insight into the work of the YMCA Representatives in a unique way, as one of the few surviving primary sources detailing their daily work.[8] The YMCA is generally overlooked in histories of the AIF, so Royce's personal accounts are vital in understanding at the experiential level a service described by one AIF general as

7 Grose, *A Rough Y.M. Bloke*; Harold Boas, *The Australian Y.M.C.A. with the Jewish Soldier of the Australian Imperial Force, together with a General Survey of the operations of the Australian Jewish Chaplaincy Department and the English Jewish War Services* (London: Y.M.C.A., 1919).

8 Letters and diary privately held, courtesy of Ian Royce.

'inestimable', and by a soldier as 'I don't know what the boys would do without it'.[9]

Royce was born in Tarnagulla, west of Bendigo in 1868, the son of a Methodist missionary and minister. He married Alice Henriette ("Ettie" or "Et" for short) Salter in 1895 and had three boys and two girls. The eldest son, Neil, served in the Australian Medical Corps during the war, mostly in hospitals in Egypt and England, though he spent several months at the Front in 1917. His youngest daughter Nancy, in poor health for most of her life, tragically died aged just 6 of adenoidal hypertrophy and laryngitis in May 1916, eight months before he began his overseas service with the YMCA. Prior to the war, Royce had farmed in Ballan, his wife's hometown, moving to farming and running a general store near Orbost in Gippsland in 1904. In 1914 he moved to Williamstown, Melbourne to prepare himself for war service, running the local YMCA and starting a branch in the Altona army camp nearby. He gave generously of his time and talents to the Methodist church, having leadership roles as a lay preacher, circuit steward and trustee. His musical skills graced many church and social events.[10]

Royce volunteered as a YMCA Representative for overseas service and departed from Melbourne on HMAT A34 *Persic* on 22 December, 1916. His wife and dependent children remained on the farm at Orbost for the duration. His service continued until 29 January, 1920, when he finally returned home, having helped with the protracted repatriation of Australian servicemen from England. In between these dates, he served on troopships, in several army bases in England, then at the

9 Grose, *A Rough Y.M. Bloke*, 161; Edward Eames, letter, 18 August, 1918, 1DRL0251, Australian War Memorial (AWM).

10 Ian Royce, personal correspondence, 19 February, 2024; *Bacchus Marsh Express*, 23 January, 1904, 2; "A Sign of Progress," *Snowy River Mail*, 25 November, 1909, 3; "Valedictory," *Snowy River Mail*, 13 February, 1914, 3.



Royce and Henrietta on their wedding day 28 September 1895. Courtesy Ian Royce

front in France for the concluding months of the war, and finally in France, Belgium and England during the demobilisation.

His experiences during this time were multifaceted. On a personal level, he was maintaining contact with his family in Australia, especially his wife, and his son Neil in England, and managing several friendships, including with senior nurses and ladies near his bases that ignited some professional and personal alarms. His work responsibilities saw him running YMCA activities in various places, dealing with management issues and conflicts over authority between the British and Australian YMCA, and between the army

and the YMCA. Most importantly, his spiritual influence was the driving force for his service and featured heavily in his diary and correspondence. These varying facets interacted considerably, but for the sake of analysis will be examined separately.

Personal experiences

An early letter to Ettie, written while still in Australian waters, indicates the personal costs of his service. "I know it was a sacrifice for you to let one go," he wrote, hoping to justify the sacrifice through doing his duty and thus "prove my worthiness to the men, and lead them to a higher life." He thanked his wife for her "loving thoughts and words of comfort," and in a later letter acknowledged that her permission and support made it "your work as well as mine."[11] Given the recent tragedy of their daughter's death, he was leaving at a particularly vulnerable time, when raw grief must still have been tangible. Over the time that Royce was away, Ettie suffered episodes of poor health, including recovering from a buggy accident in 1918, and this put pressure on him to return home. He chose not to, on the grounds of the shortage of suitable workers in Europe, with some new YMCA staff sent home for lack of experience.[12]

At the end of the war, he again chose to stay on to support the soldiers during the protracted wait for shipping home.[13] In many ways, this work was more crucial than his wartime service, as the soldiers had lost their sense of mission and purpose and were more vulnerable to playing up. Such sacrificial behaviour of not only personal needs but also of the emotional and physical needs of the family were not unusual expectations for the times, especially in Evangelical circles.

11 Royce to Ettie, letters, 25 December, 1916, 8 February, 1917 [dated "1916"].

12 Royce to Ettie, letter, 30 April, 1918.

13 Royce to Ettie, letter, 1 December, 1918.

Royce noted with regret his absence from various family anniversaries and birthdays and kept track in his letters of how long he had been away. The most consistently mentioned anniversary was that of Nancy's death, which he remembered each year. His loneliness is strongly evident, repeatedly saying how he missed Ettie's presence, influence, hugs and kisses. She also shared her feelings of loneliness during his long absence. His letters frequently mentioned their children, while individual missives to his sons Max and Cliff praised them for the support they gave their mother, and he let daughter Kath know of his pride in her academic success at boarding school.[14] He was fortunate that his son Neil was posted as an assistant in several London hospitals for most of his stay, and was able to meet up with him on several heartwarming occasions. Relatively few of those associated with the AIF were able to share time with immediate family during the war.

During his time away, Royce formed several warm friendships with women around his own age. These were obviously important to him but also socially problematic, and he had repeatedly to defend himself from charges made from home and in England of impropriety. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that he leaned on their support as emotional surrogates for Ettie, but regardless, it must be conceded that he engaged in professionally and personally unwise conduct, which tainted his reputation. The first friend was Sister Copley, a nurse also travelling on the *Persic*, a friendship that he sustained during the war through correspondence and meetings, and which was shared by Neil. Royce attempted to allay Ettie's mind on the topic, mentioning that Copley "was elderly, so I was safe. You can trust me." He was being disingenuous, for in fact Copley, at 40, was nine years his junior. Royce forwarded letters from Copley, and from an English friend Renie Duffett, to Ettie, begging Ettie to write back to these

14 Royce to Cliff, 7 January, 1917; Royce to Ettie, 19 March, 1918; Royce to Max, 27 March, 1917, Royce to Kath, 8 July, 1918.

ladies, which she eventually did, though she made her reservations evident.

For some time, Royce stayed at Renie's mother Mrs Pearce's home near his base in Portland, where Renie was also living while her husband was at war. This had the distinct advantage of allowing him to escape the claustrophobic masculine intensity of his life on an army base. "It gives a touch of home life, especially when one is with men all the time" he told Ettie, and was important in maintaining his emotional equilibrium.[15] It also had another advantage, providing alternatives to the soul-destroying monotony of army food. On one occasion he recorded a lunch at Mrs Pearce's of "hot green peas and bread and butter, ham and salads home grown tomatoes, cucumber, lettuces and violets (spring onions) ... Had afternoon tea fresh raspberries and they were delicious best I ever tasted."[16] His diet featured especially in his letters to Ettie, who had concerns over how he was keeping without her personal ministrations. Once he shared with her Mrs Pearce's recipe for marrow cream, similar to Ettie's lemon cream.[17]

Part of the criticisms raised against him at the time was that he allowed himself to be addressed in familiar terms rather than in more formal language by a number of women (always at their request, not his initiative), raising questions of etiquette over his proximity to women he was not married to. At one stage, he felt betrayed by a fellow YMCA worker who did nothing to dampen gossip about Royce's excessive familiarity with ladies, and he wrote to Ettie on multiple occasions, insisting on the respectability of the ladies and the appropriateness of his behaviour. Many other people addressed him by his Christian name, or called him "Daddy," "Father" or "Uncle,"

15 Royce, letter to Ettie, 7 October, 1917.

16 Royce, diary, 10 July, 1917.

17 Royce, letter to Ettie, 28 January, 1918.

including many of the soldiers, he argued. "Don't think because I am so far away I love you any the less because I don't," he wrote in May 1918, though he probably undid the benefit of these suspicion-dampening words by immediately adding an ill-timed paragraph about Sister Copley.[18] It certainly highlights a contradiction in his discussions with Ettie of Neil's 'little flirtation' with an English girl, Royce opining his preference for his boys to find "a *good* [sic] steady girl."[19] There was almost certainly nothing morally compromising in Royce's own friendships with female friends, but appearances were against him and he might have taken his own advice about relationships potentially seen as flirty.

Professional experiences

On the professional front, Royce had the typically crowded life of a YMCA Representative, organising and running a host of activities from distributing charity parcels to organising concerts, religious activities and managing every facet of running a canteen, including purchasing supplies in a time of growing shortages, hiring and managing staff, and rigorous book-keeping. These multifarious tasks were part of an intentional effort on the part of the YMCA to shape the men not just into better soldiers but also into "better (for example, more moral) men."[20] On board *HMAT Persic*, Royce distributed many thousands of sheets of letter writing paper and envelopes, worked on committees organising sports and concerts, oversaw the distribution of goods from sixty crates of Red Cross goods, and cooperated with the chaplain on religious services and sing songs. One sergeant consulted him about drafting a love letter to send to a girl in Cape Town, "so we get all kinds of work," he noted

18 Royce to Ettie, letters, 29 January, 1917; 5 August, 1917; 23 September, 1917; 11 November 1917; 25 February, 1918; 14 May, 1918

19 Royce to Ettie, letter 1 October 1917.

20 Laugesen, *Boredom is the Enemy*, 23.

in his diary.[21] In between his formal activities, he took time to simply sit with the men and chat, building relationships which became the foundation of his religious influence.

After a short period of leave and sight-seeing in London upon arrival in England, Royce settled into army camp life, assisting in a British YMCA hut. In mid-June 1917, he was flattered to be given charge of the YMCA establishment at Verne Citadel in Portland, where he mainly dealt with wounded Australian soldiers, though theoretically this role belonged to the Red Cross.[22] Some were in transit back to France after recuperating, while those too gravely injured were repatriated to Australia. His work in this camp meant juggling several key areas of responsibility. The routine was running the canteen, organising a variety of entertainments and facilitating religious activities.

Canteen work was consistent and busy. Royce had a YMCA assistant as well as local ladies employed as service staff. Royce directed its operations, including personally making the purchases of supplies. As the war progressed, this became an increasing challenge, as losses of British merchant ships to German submarines forced severe rationing and shortages in certain goods. The YMCA had to purchase its supplies on the open market, and Royce recorded spending the great part of a day in late 1917 in different queues, finally ending up with 12 gallons (54.5L) of coffee essence, 42 lbs (19kg) of ground coffee, and "a small supply of cigarettes, about 20,000 altogether."[23] His diary repeats the intensity of chasing up scarce supplies and managing the YMCA Hut, while keeping concerts and entertainments going, and maintaining his extensive network of correspondence,

21 Royce, diary, 2 February, 1917.

22 "YMCA Facts and Figures concerning Y.M.C.A. War Service," Australian National Library FERG/3534.

23 Royce, diary, n.d., circa late 1917.

both official and personal. On multiple days, he recorded very early starts to the day, distributing packets of biscuits, chocolates and other edibles to departing soldiers. For the winter months, these pre-dawn efforts were conducted in frosty weather with slick ice-covered paving that threatened to make him slip. Each early morning departure also meant many hours over the preceding days assembling the packets for distribution.

The principal entertainments were concerts, mainly performed by various professional orchestras and theatre groups, the latter including British Army and AIF troupes, though some featured acts drawn from the soldiers in the camp. Music has been identified by numerous scholars as building community and identity, reviving morale and venting pent-up emotions, hence in wartime it is "not a frill but a virtual necessity for survival."[24] Royce found himself often asked to take responsibility for coordinating concerts, seeing this as a compliment to his organisational abilities. These events were usually very well received, and acted as important emotional healing time for traumatised soldiers. "The concert was a huge success and everybody enjoyed it. After the concert we had supper in the hut," wrote Royce after one evening, though at one concert a cannon was fired as a stage effect, triggering a relapse in "one poor fellow … who was suffering from shell shock," leaving him in "an awful state," an example of when a concert was less than healing for a traumatized man.[25]

Royce also organised cinema screenings, and presentations of a favourite lecture of his: a lantern slide show on Victoria which included snaps of his children Cliff and Nancy. This talk, which lasted about an hour and a half, proved so popular that he was asked to repeat it several times in different locations. He also organised

24 Glenn Watkins, *Proof through the Night: Music and the Great War* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 2002), 62.

25 Royce, diary, 25 June, 1917; 9 April, 1918.



A personal slide from Royce's popular presentation on Victoria, of his baby son Cliff, anticipating Anne Geddes by decades. Courtesy Ian Royce

outings such as picnics, being assisted by some of his English friends, including Renie Duffett, who also often hosted evening suppers at her mother's home for officers and men from the camp. The intensity of his work led to fatigue-induced depression over the year end of 1917-18, something he only recognised in hindsight.[26]

If work in camps in England was hectic, things only intensified when he was transferred to France in August 1918. In the leadup to his move, he had considerable trouble over his passport and other official paperwork, finally crossing the Channel in late July. It took several days to locate the 6th Brigade in the 2nd Division, composed of four Victorian battalions, to which he was allocated, as the Allied advance meant that the Australian troops were constantly on the

26 Royce, letter to Ettie, 27 June, 1918.

move. Local YMCA workers were relieved to find that he was an older, seasoned man, having feared they were to be lumped with a junior desk man with no practical experience. He was quickly dubbed "Dad" by the soldiers and given a senior role in the Corps Camp in charge of religious activities.

However, he was soon just behind the lines, organising a canteen at the Main Dressing Station of the 6th Field Ambulance, at that time located in a former Catholic monastery. He had just sufficient time on arrival to organise a supply of cocoa, biscuits and cigarettes, going to bed at 10pm before being awakened an hour later to serve an influx of wounded. Royce was to experience a baptism of fire: it was the eve of 8 August 1918, the opening day of the decisive Battle of Amiens, which German General Ludendorff called 'the black day' that broke the German army. He worked through the night helping the wounded, highlighted by watching a leg amputation. A short nap at 3am was ended by the opening barrage of the main attack at 4:20am. From then, he continued work with the wounded, giving each man refreshments, but quickly ran out. Twice that day he drove back to Division HQ in Amiens for further supplies, many going to the crowds of German prisoners who outnumbered the wounded Australians. He described this momentous day at length in his diary, almost certainly written on a following day:

> I was right in my element amongst the wounded, giving cocoa etc. and passing a word of cheer, and also taking the addresses of friends to where they may like messages sent to. I was in and out of the dressing room helping where I could. In the evening things quietened down so about 10 pm I went and had a lie down for a little (4 hours). Then up at 1 am was amongst the Huns [German prisoners] then.[27]

27 Royce, diary, 8 August, 1918.

The next day was almost as intense, though there were quieter phases in the battle, during which "I got and wrote the boy's letters, so as to get them all away as soon as possible."[28] There was to be no letup; that night he had to pack up his canteen and move to the Advanced Dressing Station at White Chateau, where he worked throughout the entire following day, though again enjoying some breaks, where he could read a bunch of letters he'd just received. Ambulance drivers picking up patients were able to update him on the work of Neil in the hospital behind the lines. That day Royce wrote, "It is in these places one realized the cruelness of the war and the heartlessness of it."[29] A German bombing raid on his position made for a sleepless night in an otherwise comfortable cowshed bed.

In late August, he was delegated the task of setting up a marquee for the 5th Division, his first experience of running a canteen in France. Two novelties struck him: first of all becoming accustomed to dealing in francs instead of British currency, though "that soon came to me." The other was how soldiers managed the shortage of tea cups. "With the hundreds of men, anything and everything was used – milk tins, claret glasses, basins, anything the boys could salvage from the houses in ruins and had been left," he wrote, amused by the adroit improvisations of the veteran soldiers.[30]

Over the next two months, Royce continued his busy work, shifting bases, setting up fresh centres, acquiring furniture (often salvaged from ruined French buildings) and reading materials, organizing and moving up supplies from depots behind the line, serving soldiers and German prisoners-of-war, including once dealing with men in a nearby tent who were killed or wounded by night-time bombing raids. His proximity to the front lines exposed him to the horrors of

28 Royce, diary 9 August, 1918.

29 Royce, diary, 10 August, 1918

30 Royce, diary, 26 August, 1918.

war and the constant stress of fear of wounding or death by shelling or bombing. Admittedly, it was not on the same level of risk as the regular infantry soldier, but it was one shared with support troops and medical staff, and several YMCA staff were killed or wounded during this time.

There was no "typical" day, as daily activities were governed by the imperatives of immediate need. On one, he noted being busy putting out letter writing paper for the men all morning, then liaising with the army over upcoming plans, while spending the evening making up 3,360 packets of biscuits, 1,760 packets of toffee, and the same in matches and paper, to distribute to the soldiers, finishing the night with another successful presentation of his Victoria lantern slide show. "Got back tired but satisfied with the day's work," he wrote with some understatement.[31]

The next day was no better, doing the rounds of the cookhouses to distribute cocoa, then multiple shuttle missions to the train station to see off departing troops and greet 1,600 arrivals with the packets of biscuits and toffee, which was completed by noon. Arriving back at his canteen, he was told by an officer that he was moving back to the Corps Depot, so he immediately set about packing up and loading the lorry, which took nearly three hours, then reversing the process on arrival at the depot. "Found plenty to do," was his cryptic analysis of the day.[32] By the end of the month, he was enjoying working with just one brigade, the Fourteenth, in a rest area, being able to build relationships through sustained contact. A battalion commander did all he could to assist in the supply of cocoa and milk, leading to free distribution every evening, which drew the men from the local

31 Royce, diary, 8 October, 1918.

32 Royce, diary 9 October, 1918.



Royce (front, second from left) and his staff in Belgium, 1919. Courtesy Ian Royce.

estaminets and into the YMCA, where Royce could reach them with his trusty Victoria lecture and spiritual activities.[33]

There is sparse documentation of his work after the conclusion of the war in November 1918, but it involved more of the same welfare and spiritual support for the now bored and restless soldiers impatient to be off home, though having to wait many months for shipping to become available. He spent more time in France and Belgium before returning to England, then finally serving the troops on the ship home.

33 Royce, Report to Mr J.H. Lang, Naval and Military Dept, Australian Y.M.C.A. HQ, Melbourne, 29 October, 1918, privately held, courtesy of Ian Royce.

The administrative side of running YMCA huts involved certain strains and stresses. During the first few months in England working as an assistant, Royce chafed under English leadership, considering his boss self-centred and patronizing towards Australians, who used Royce's hard-working ways and success as a useful cover for his own laziness. The Englishman's spiritual leadership was appreciated, though Royce longed for a less academic approach to matters of faith. Royce confronted him over the bullying of women staff and felt that his boss was jealous of Royce's smooth relationship with them. Some of his Australian customers voiced their preference for Royce to lead out, both in welfare and spiritual work. It was a relief to be offered the leadership of the Verne Citadel YMCA, which he took as a compliment to his abilities, with the additional advantage of staying in England rather than riskier work at the Front, which pleased Ettie.[34]

However, all was not plain sailing at Verne either. Highlighting the tensions between the English and Australian administrators of the YMCA, the area supervisor, an Englishman, was uncooperative, launching allegations against various staff and capriciously changing the dates of his visits without accommodating the disruptions that ensued. He criticized Royce and his deputy Greenwood for not running things according to his own formulas, trying to force his program on the Verne YMCA, an action Royce labelled as "very nasty." Royce protested that circumstances forced the changes and felt compelled to write to the Australian YMCA Headquarters to shore up his position. Fortunately, he was well supported by his deputy, though he had to report another assistant for laziness and drinking.

A change in March 1918 brought a more sympathetic area supervisor, who was consultative and supportive in his approach, treating his staff "as men and coworkers." But this merely signaled a switch in opposition, this time coming from the English army base commander,

34 Royce, letters to Ettie, 22 April, 1917, 29 April 1917, 10 June, 1917; diary, 5 June, 1917.

who ordered Royce and the other church-run charities to stop selling coffee as it competed with the army's own canteen. Soldiers took matters into their own hands, boycotting the dreadful army coffee, and starting a public awareness campaign which included letters published in the local press. Royce threw fuel on the flames by offering free coffee. Soon he was able to negotiate a compromise with the colonel in charge.[35] The pettiness of most of these conflicts is thrown into high relief by the absence of any such matters during Royce's time at the Front. It would seem that the pressing realities of survival in the trenches left less room for egos and power plays.

Spiritual experiences

The day-to-day work of running the YMCA huts and canteens absorbed the overwhelming majority of Royce's time and energy, yet it is clear from the commentary in his diary and especially his letters that his work in the spiritual realm was more emotionally important and rewarding. In his first fortnight on board the *Persic*, he engaged in devotional meetings, sing songs on the deck with psalms and a prayer, talks with individual men on spiritual matters, Bible classes, and enlisting men to the YMCA's "War Roll," with its pledge of "allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ as my Saviour and King; by God's help to fight the battles and bring victory to his kingdom." He forged links with the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational chaplains, and even at this early stage, the colonel had already heard "encouraging remarks of what I had already been doing" for the men.[36]

By the end of the voyage in early March 1917, he had run multiple sing songs, Bible classes, and sermons, which resulted in many

35 Royce, letters to Ettie, 1 July, 1917, 29 August, 1917, 26 November, 1917, 25 March, 1918, 27 June, 1918; diary; 3 February, 1918, 12-14 May, 1918.

36 Royce, letter to Ettie, 20 December, 1916; diary, 24 December, 1916, 29 December, 1916, 31 December, 1916, 5 February, 1917.

personal conversations. A talk built around the subject of his daughter Nancy's death generated a strong emotional response from many in his audiences, and several men came to speak to him about it after such presentations, some of whom had also suffered the loss of a child. He wove her story into many presentations. "Had a good service. Spoke on Christ's appeal to Peter – "Lovest thou me" – worked in Nancy's story had splendid attention from the men," he wrote on another occasion, elsewhere writing, "So her beautiful life is being used now." Over 300 men, roughly one-fifth of those on the *Persic*, signed the "War Roll," including the colonel, who also had a reading and prayer with him. One soldier later thanked him for "helping me to decide for Christ and for the shake of the hand on board boat" [*Persic*].[37]

Working in camps in England gave Royce consistent opportunities for spiritual work. His musical abilities came to the fore, playing the piano and organ for church services and for popular sing songs. He always finished concerts with a prayer, telling Ettie, "and you should hear these fellows sing 'Jesu lover of my soul' – it does one good to hear these fellows who have all been in the trenches and have been wounded and are now going back to the front." His English YMCA boss praised him, saying, " 'My old chap, you just did grip those fellows in your remarks' and out of about 600 fellows who were in the hall only about half a dozen went out before prayers."[38] At another sing song "the men kept me playing and singing for nearly an hour. I then gave a reading Matthew 5 and spoke on influence. Had a fine crowd of men in, the largest I have had yet, and had a good time."[39] On another occasions, after a busy day's work, he ran an evening sing song then found himself tasked with the evening sermon at short

37 Royce, diary, 8 February, 1917, 18 February, 1917, 23 February, 1917, 28 February, 1917, 1 March, 1917, 2 March, 1917, 15 May, 1918; letter to Ettie, 29 April, 1917.

38 Royce, letter to Ettie, 25 March, 1917.

39 Royce, diary, 13 August, 1917.



Figure 3 Royce, in his sermons, which touched many hearts. Courtesy Ian Royce.

notice as well, when the designated chaplain failed to arrive. "Spoke on St Paul's conversion–had a good time," he noted.[40]

He also ran Bible study classes and organised church services in cooperation with the chaplains, and on many occasions he preached. He extended his preaching to local civilian congregations, occasionally taking sermons in several Evangelical churches. Royce concurred with the judgement of Australian camp chaplain Vivan Bradbury, who said "give me a congregation of Diggers and they will do me every time," concluding that "They are fine fellows to

40 Royce, diary, 22 May, 1917.

speak to."[41] These observations are further evidence supporting a wider scholarship dispelling the old myth that the Anzacs were irredeemably irreligious.[42]

Writing to Ettie, he thanked her for the idea of using social contact to increase the appeal of religious meetings.

> I have this week just had some experiences and had some fine talks to them. Get them and invite them to tea on Sunday evenings and make them feel at home and from these generally get them into the Bible Circle, so you see your advice has not been forgotten and is being used.[43]

The tension between the social and spiritual dimensions of the role bothered other YMCA workers, as well as chaplains, some fearing that their social work would interfere with their spiritual mission. Many acknowledged, however, that providing for the men's material needs made their spiritual roles more effective.[44] "There is sometimes a great deal of religion in serving tea or cocoa – the sympathetic personal touch means so much," wrote one historian of the YMCA postwar.[45]

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41 Royce, diary, 22 May, 1917.

42 See, for example, Robert D. Linder, *The long tragedy: Australian Evangelical Christians and the Great War, 1914-1918*, (Adelaide: Open Book, 2000); Gladwin, *Captains of the Soul*; Colin Bale, *A Crowd of Witnesses: Epitaphs on First World War Australian War Graves* (Haberfield NSW: Longueville Media, 2015); Daniel Reynaud, *Anzac Spirituality: The First AIF Soldiers Speak* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2018). Compare with Bill Gammage, *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1974), xiv-xv; H. C. Gullett, *The AIF in Sinai and Palestine* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1944), 551.

43 Royce, letter to Ettie, 29 April, 1917.

44 Gladwin, *Captains of the Soul*, 84.

45 James W. Barrett, *The War Work of the Y.M.C.A. in Egypt* (London: H. K. Lewis, 1919), 22.

Royce's move to France reduced opportunities for formal religious work, as soldiers were heavily engaged in the closing battles of the war, but he was able to take several services at the Front. In one sermon, he spoke on 'What think ye of Christ,' (Matthew 22:42), a topic which had been made popular by preachers such as George Whitfield and Dwight L. Moody. He also enjoyed the ministry of influential chaplain Padre Gault, who he had known in Australia, and was impressed by a "fine earnest appeal to the men" in a sermon from a platoon commander in the Fifty-third Battalion, Lieutenant John Ridley. Royce observed that he was "an officer who is popular with the men and immensely interested in their spiritual welfare," and that 'one can easily detect the effect of such an officer among the men'.[46] Ridley had a prominent post-war career as an evangelist, perhaps most notably inspiring Arthur Stace to chalk the word "Eternity" on Sydney's footpaths for over three decades.

In England and in France, Royce worked successfully with a variety of chaplains on both social and spiritual events, sometimes even sharing quiet moments of socialising over a game of cards together, though he sometimes struggled with the ritual of Anglican services. On one occasion he listened to a young chaplain about to leave for the Front worry on how to fend off the unwanted advances of an English officer towards the chaplain's fiancée. Royce suggested the happy solution of immediate marriage, which left the chaplain and his bride delighted.[47] Royce's collaboration with the chaplains around him was typical of the broader AIF, and was a distinguishing mark of the AIF in comparison with other British Empire armies.[48]

Royce noted the impact of his own ministry with gratitude. Officers praised him for his influential personality "carrying weight with you in

46 Royce, diary, 25 August, 1918, 20 October, 1918; letter to Ettie, 29 October, 1918.

47 Royce, letter to Ettie, 10 March, 1918.

48 Gladwin, *Captains of the Soul*, 72.



Padre Gault with Nancy Royce on her 6th birthday, Victoria 1916. Courtesy Ian Royce.

your work." One colonel described him as "our popular and energetic Secretary," and treated him as a sounding board for confidential advice. Methodist chaplain Albert Mitchell appreciated his friendly help and said he was "very highly thought of by the boys."[49] A decline in drinking in the officers' mess was credited to his influence, as

49 Chaplain Rev. A. H. Mitchell, 'Our Chaplains on Service,' *Spectator and Methodist Chronicle*, 5 December, 1917, 1256.

was the banning of gambling on the *Persic*. His diary and letters are studded with examples of his influence.

Building on a relationship developed on the *Persic*, Royce had multiple long conversations with a West Australian soldier and the "result was he decided for Christ requiring a conversion and covenant card." Another soldier, waiting for the pubs to open, dropped into a Congregational Church where Royce happened to be preaching. The sermon transformed his life from that of a heavy drinker to a committed Christian. Royce felt particularly relieved and encouraged by this, as he had reluctantly changed the sermon topic at the last minute to one better suited to a civilian audience, given the large numbers of women present. Letters of appreciation included one from a soldier in a V.D. camp thanking him for advice and friendship, and pledging "to lead a pure clean life." He was proud to help soldiers resist the "awful" temptations of the women on the streets of London. Others voiced appreciation for his Bible classes, thanking him "for the very great help I had been to them in their Spirit," and worked to bring other men along to them.[50]

The impact of the war on those Evangelicals who served was mixed, with some renewing their energies and others finding the war had sapped them of faith and hope.[51] Royce was one of those whose war service inspired him to seek a greater engagement with ministry in peacetime, contemplating a career in the YMCA.[52] Upon his return to Australia in 1920, he devoted more time to a succession of spiritually oriented work, though he always combined this with some farming. At first he stayed with the YMCA, transferring to Western Australia

50 Royce, diary, 8 June, 1917, 12 July, 1917; letter to Ettie, 23 July, 1917, 4 July, 1917, n.d. circa mid-1917, 11 November, 1917.

51 Stuart Piggin and Robert D. Linder, *Attending to the National Soul: Evangelical Christians in Australia 1914-2014* (Clayton Vic: Monash University Press, 2020), 84-9.

52 Royce, letter to Ettie, 5 August, 1917.

in 1922. Two years later he began work as an assistant missionary with the Perth Central Methodist Mission, also serving with a charity raising funds for children and Armenian refugees. He then undertook a sequence of Home Missionary appointments in the Methodist churches of Beverley, Moora and Mullewa, the latter two being remote postings several hundreds of kilometres north of Perth. He came out of retirement to fill gaps in the ministry caused by the outbreak of World War Two, passing away from a heart attack in 1944.[53]

Royce's war work was characteristic of his life, one spent in active service of humanity, meeting material, social and spiritual needs. In particular, his wartime YMCA service deserves special attention, as it is a facet of Evangelical Christianity's reach that is under-documented and underrepresented in both Australian Christian history and within the voluminous history of the Anzacs of World War One.

While the bulk of his time was filled with social welfare, Royce maintained a very clear vision and mission for the salvation and Christian transformation of the lives of the men that he met, and his literary remains testify to the spiritual impact that he had.

53 *Williamstown Chronicle*, 25 February, 1922, 3; "Mainly About People," *Perth Daily News*, 3 May, 1924; "Save the Children Fund," *West Australian*, 3 July, 1925, 10; "Local and General," *Geraldton Guardian*, 16 December, 1944, 2.