

Book Review

Jacqueline Dwyer, *Flanders in Australia: A Personal History of Wool and War*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, North Melbourne, May 2017, 347 p., rrp AU\$ 34.95, ISBN 978-1-92558-812-5.

Jacqueline Dwyer is the grand-daughter of Georges and Marie-Thérèse Playoust, who arrived in Melbourne in 1889. Georges, from Tourcoing in northern France, was sent here to establish an office for the wool broking firm of Henri Cauillez & Cie. He was one of a significant number of such wool buyers who settled in Australia during this period—in many cases never expecting to put down permanent roots. Georges was joined by his brother Joseph. In 1895 the company office was moved to Sydney. Jacqueline Dwyer not only recounts the story of her grandparents, but also her extended family and its links to an entire expatriate community.

With the outbreak of war in 1914, many young men in this community returned to France to serve with the French army. Among them was Jacqueline Dwyer's father, Jacques Playoust (1883–1947), who saw action in the bitter years of trench warfare at Ypres, Verdun and the Somme (where he earned the Croix de Guerre). He also served with Australian units and while returning home on leave, in 1917, was shipwrecked when the *Mongolia* struck a mine. His brothers Stéphane and Marcel also distinguished themselves on the Western Front, but lost their lives in the conflict. Jacqueline Dwyer's book is enriched by poignant extracts from diaries and letters. In a very real sense, these men were fighting for their families, family homes and businesses in Flanders.

The first edition of *Flanders in Australia* was published in 1998 by Kangaroo Press, an imprint of Simon and Schuster Australia. Now, almost two decades later, this Australian Scholarly Publishing edition is much-fortified with fourteen new chapters, several new illustrations, a revised epilogue and some useful new appendices—including a genealogy, bi-notes on twenty-three members of the extended Playoust family and the

transcript of Jacques Playoust's interview with the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1917—totalling some 223 additional pages. The writing is clear, elegant and engaging. This book makes a very significant contribution to our knowledge of French wool buyers and their families in multicultural Australia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Furthermore, it makes a profound contribution to our knowledge of French expatriates in Australia who went back to fight for France during the First World War. (The only other historian to publish in this area is Paul de Pierres.) The revised and augmented second edition of this book includes useful new chapters on the Second World War and the Free French in Australia.

Jacqueline Dwyer's work provides a valuable example of how one family—with the aid of modern communications—developed and maintained multiple familial, commercial, social and military relationships between France and distant Australia. Dwyer has employed diverse sources with canny perceptiveness, wisdom and discrimination, but also a remarkable facility in French (including French military terminology from the First World War). Aside from a rich family archive now in the Mitchell Library of the State Library of New South Wales, she has researched school magazines, numerous biographies and personal memoirs, battalion histories, speeches, newspapers (including *Courrier Australien*, the French-language newspaper published in Sydney) and a range of French and Australian scholarly texts. The second edition has been particularly strengthened, as the author herself admits, with the aid of Trove and the National Library of Australia's digitised archive of Australian newspapers. Jacqueline Dwyer has also utilised interviews and personally visited First World War battlefields in France as part of her research for her Master of Philosophy thesis (ANU, 2015). Ultimately, among the book's greatest resources are the author's incisive intellect and her personal knowledge of events during a long and fruitful life.

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