

Miguel Mackinlay in the Great War

It is timely to showcase the lively drawings of an Australian on the Western Front in the Great War 100 years ago. Although the young man fought in those terrible trenches, most of his images have a quiet dignity. Only in the heat of a battle in which he was wounded, do you feel the horror of it all; his frantic charcoal marks leave an indelible impression of conflict. Miguel Mackinlay went on to become the 'talk of the town' being 'hung on the line' at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibitions in the competitive art world of early 1930s London. He never returned to Australia.

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Miguel Mackinlay (**plate 1**), or Mike as he was known in Australia, was born in Spain in 1895 to a Spanish mother and Scottish father.¹ After his mother's death, his father William brought their seven children to Western Australia, arriving in January 1906.

The boy showed a remarkable facility for capturing a likeness and at 14 was apprenticed to sign-writers Meston & Walters. He attended classes at the Perth Technical School, whose art master James W. R. Linton considered him the most successful student he ever taught. Mike joined the Western Australian Society of Arts, exhibited and won prizes including a national poster prize in January 1914 at the Victorian Chamber of Manufactures' *Great All Australian Exhibition*.

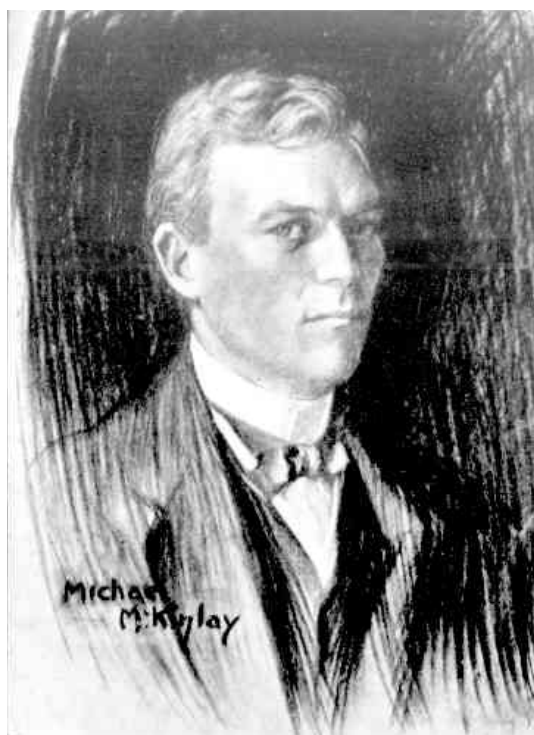
Another apprentice studying at the Technical School was Stan Cross (**plate 2**), later to be a successful cartoonist, and the pair held an exhibition in St George's Hall before setting off for the bright lights of London. Cross's cartoon strips including "Wally and the Major" later made him a household name in Australia. Mackinlay (**plate 2**), who did not return, is not known at all in Australia.

Mackinlay, living in Chelsea and mixing with a lively group of artists, had

many useful introductions and soon was illustrating magazines as well as attending St Martin's School of Art. He was engrossed in painting a large panorama of Perth for Savoy House, the offices of the Western Australian Agent General. This casualty of the war was described as conveying

some idea of the wonderful beauty of the outlook from the summit of Mt Eliza, with the broad waters of the river sweeping around by the splendid Esplanade at the foot of the city, and over the tops of the many magnificent buildings, the outlines of the distant Darling Ranges.²

When Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914, it was expected to end by Christmas so Mackinlay continued with his art studies. However in March 1915, after the opening of Savoy House, he became involved and was making sketches on the Somme dated May 1915. He may have been a war correspondent, but as these positions were not made official until 1916, there are no records to consult. A newspaper editor may have engaged him, or he may have been a regimental artist, as was another of the Meston & Walters apprentices, Reginald J. Walters for the 10th Light Horse in



1.

Stanley George Cross (1888–1977),
[Miguel Mackinlay]. *Western Mail*
13 March 1914 p. 30

2.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959),
[Stan Cross]. *Western Mail*
13 March 1914 p. 30



3.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959),
[*Enrolling and immunisation jabs*] 1917.
Pen and ink wash on paper, 20 x 25.5 cm

4.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959),
[*Soldiers marching to the front*] 1918.
Pen and ink wash on paper,
25.5 x 35 cm

5.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959),
A rest camp in France 20/5/15.
Pencil on paper 16 x 19.5 cm. Exhibited
1990 in *The Art of Miguel Mackinlay* at
Bushey Museum and Art Gallery

the Middle East. His images, although needing attention, convey the essence of life at the front (**plates 3–8**).

In the dark days of 1917 when Britain looked likely to lose the war, he was called up to the 3rd Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment, a home front reserve infantry regiment that was now needed on the Western Front. After training he embarked at Dover on 18 March 1918; the battalion was soon embroiled in the horrific German Spring Offensive or *Kaiserschlacht* (Kaiser's battle) launched on the 21st, and the British response that included the bloody but relatively successful Second Battle of the Somme that held the enemy at bay.³

The German attack zone was in Flanders along a line between about ten km east of Ypres in Belgium to about ten km west of B  thune in France, a 40

km front with Arment  res in the centre. The German intention, using newly trained "storm troopers", had been to cut off the British forces' supply lines. Despite all thrown against it, the line held.

British forces were put under the Supreme Allied Commander, the French General Ferdinand Foch, whose strategic planning eventually brought victory. When Foch took command on 28 March, the British Third and Fifth armies were sent further south to hold the line to the Oise River.⁴

The toll was heavy. So many men were killed that units were decimated and reconfigured with remnants of others into new regiments. Three battalions were broken up and the new ones sent to areas where an offensive was not expected, to give the troops a chance

to recover. Miguel's unit suffered heavy losses at Arras and was amalgamated, for by 1 April he was in France with the 2/6th Battalion South Staffordshire Regiment, which was also a territorial infantry regiment, formed originally as a home service ("second line") unit.⁵

Annotated drawings mean we can trace Miguel's movements in Flanders in Belgium, as well as Picardy and Champagne in northern France (**plates 9–15**). They were probably drawn in the seemingly endless waiting time, in the lulls between the offensives, or in recovery weeks when his unit was rested at places where an attack was not expected. In the deadly monotony of the trenches poets wrote poetry, musicians composed, artists sketched or carved sculptures and Miguel made some lovely pen and wash drawings.



6.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), *Out for a rest after some hard fighting in the Kemmel front.* Belgium 10/5/15. Pencil on paper, 17 x 23 cm. Exhibited 1990 in *The Art of Miguel Mackinlay* at Bushey Museum and Art Gallery

7.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), *[Making an arrest]*. Pen and ink wash on paper in two parts, each 18 x 11 cm.

Dated and undated images of Rheims, Albert, Montauban, Château-Thierry and striking ones of wooded destruction at the forest of Épernay indicate he was back on the Western Front on the Somme, Marne and in the Ardennes possibly by March but certainly by April 1918.

Miguel was involved in the first stage of the Spring Offensive known as “Operation Michael”, when the allied forces were up against 207 German divisions. In 1917, Tsar Nicholas had abdicated and Russia had withdrawn from the war, so German troops were being reinforced with those from the east, while America was only just about to send its first battalion. In the six

weeks from 21 March to the end of April, 70,000 Allied prisoners were taken, 1,000 guns lost and 300,000 casualties sustained as 55 divisions faced 102 German divisions.⁶

Miguel was in the thick of this. The 2/6th South Staffs Unit War Diary for April 1 states:

The Battalion left Gauchin Verloingt 7 am and marched to Houdain, entrained 12 noon, arrived the West Flanders town of Proven 7 pm and marched to Watou arriving 9 pm. Draft of 150 other ranks arrived 11 pm.

Here the men were trained on the firing range to use the Lewis machine guns and how to fire gas helmets.

On 10 April they marched to nearby Poperinge, went by train to Quentin and then marched to the Maiden Camp at Ypres arriving at 2.30 pm and on to Brandehoek by 5 pm where the enemy shelled the camp. On the evening of the 11th they were engaged in the Passchendaele sector where there was slight enemy shelling. It was quiet all day on the 12th and they withdrew to Brandehoek, moved to Reninghelst and on to Bailluel northwest of Armentières on the 15th.

In the Battle of Bailluel 13–15 April, the 2nd Staffs sustained heavy losses. They were a reserve line but unexpectedly became the front line and a rather chaotic situation developed. They were heavily shelled and a fierce battle ensued in which one officer was killed, two were wounded and 90 other ranks killed, wounded or missing. Miguel received a gun shot wound to his shoulder and was treated by the 103rd Field Ambulance.

War historian Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice in his *The Last Four Months; How the War was Won* discussing the Kemmel Front wrote:

On the fifteenth the arrival of reinforcements enabled them [the Germans] to capture Bailluel, and the strain upon the British army had become all but insupportable. Two





thirds of the divisions engaged in the Flanders battle had been through the fiery trial of the Somme. As fast as they were withdrawn from their first battle their ranks were refilled with drafts from home, which were composed mainly of boys of nineteen and under, and they were sent north. It was these splendid youths, many of whom went into the maelstrom of battle within a few days of landing in France with little opportunity of getting to know their leaders or accustoming themselves to strange and terrible conditions, who saved the Channel ports.⁷

8.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), *In a French Ambulance / France 1915*. Pen and ink wash on paper, 16.5 x 19.5 cm.

9.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), *[A Machine Gun Section in Flanders]* 1918. Charcoal on paper, 10.5 x 15.5 cm.

10.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), *[Transport problems on the Western Front]* 1918. Charcoal on paper, 15 x 10 cm.

11.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), *Belgium*. Pen and ink wash on paper, 20 x 16 cm.

12.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), *[Ruined church, Albert, Picardy]*. Pen and ink wash on paper, 31 x 21 cm





13.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), *Montauban*, [Picardy, after the battle of the Somme]. Pen and ink wash on paper, 17.5 x 23 cm

14.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), *German prisoners*, France 1918. Pen and ink wash on paper, 18 x 23 cm

15.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), *The Spy*, on the wasted landscape of the Somme. Pen and ink wash on paper, 33 x 32 cm

16.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), *“At the C.C.S. [Casualty Clearing Station] 16/4/1918”*, possibly Hazebrouck in French Flanders. Pencil on paper, 15.5 x 19 cm

17.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), *Rheims* in the Champagne/Ardennes region 1918. Pen and ink wash on paper, 20 x 16 cm, 26 x 28 cm. Exhibited 1990 in *The Art of Miguel Mackinlay* at Bushey Museum and Art Gallery





At the time, a field ambulance was not always a vehicle but could be a team of men. A wounded man was first taken to the Regimental Aid Post, which was usually situated in a dugout or trench near the front. There he would be given preliminary first aid and possibly be carried by stretcher bearers to an advanced dressing station or field ambulance some 400 m behind the line, in tents or buildings if available. If necessary, the field ambulance team of men would carry the wounded to a Casualty Clearing Station that was still further back from the front line. All this was part of the evacuation chain to clear wounded men to safety quickly.

Casualty Clearing Stations were staffed by the Royal Army Medical Corps, Army Service Corps and a few by the Red Cross and other civilian organizations.

Here surgery would be performed. CCSs were usually situated near railway lines to facilitate moving the worst of the injured to hospitals or hospital ships and thence back to England. The CCS's job was to treat a man so he could return to duty. Today, we can see immaculate war cemeteries all over the Somme region and many of these are situated near to CCSs and where large numbers died.

Miguel's dated drawing of a Casualty Clearing Station is probably Hazebrouck in French Flanders northwest of Ypres where the 1/2nd London Casualty Clearing Station was operating (plate 16). After time out at nearby 83 General Hospital Boulogne, he re-joined his unit on 5 May before being posted on 21 May to the 4th Battalion South Staffordshire Regiment, an extra reserve battalion, part of the 3rd

18.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), *La Mitrailleuse* [The new machine gun] France 1918. Pen and ink wash on paper, 25.9 x 27 cm.

19.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), *A French Post, Château-Thierry, Champagne* 1918. Pen and ink wash on paper, 29 x 32 cm.

20.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), *A "dug-out" on the Champagne front* 1918. Pen and ink wash on paper, 17.5 x 23 cm

21.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), *[Resting in better conditions]*. Pen and ink wash on paper, 19.5 x 25 cm





22.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), *[Entertainment during the rest and refit].* Perhaps the violinist is playing *Roses of Picardy* or *Mam'selle from Armentières*. Pen and ink wash on paper, 20 x 20.5 cm

23.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), *[The Third Battle of the Aisne]* May 1918. Charcoal on paper 10.5 x 16 cm

24.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), *[The Third Battle of the Aisne]* May 1918. Charcoal on paper 10.5 x 15 cm

25.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), *[In retreat – Resting in the Forêt d'Épernay]* France, May 1918. Charcoal on paper 11 x 15.5 cm

Division of the Allied forces in the area near Rheims defending the Aisne and the Marne to prevent the Germans reaching Paris.

There were lulls between the offensives. He would have had time to sketch troops resting, on watch in a house in Château-Thierry, even enjoying musical evenings, before he was wounded again in a major offensive, the Third Battle of the Aisne 27 May – 6 June 1918 (**plates 17–22**).

After the German Lys Offensive in Flanders in April, the next great push by the German Army was the surprise attack that the Germans named Blücher-Yorck on 27 May. The Germans had held the Chemin des Dames ridge from the first Battle of the Aisne in 1914 to 1917, when it was recaptured in the Second Battle of the Aisne and held by the French Sixth Army, reinforced by four divisions of the British IXth Corps posted there for a rest and refit after the

“Operation Michael” offensive. A rest was not what the Germans planned.

Miguel was wounded in the Third Battle of the Aisne. It took place in Champagne in the mountainous region of the Forest of Rheims, where Miguel's striking images may have been drawn using charcoal from the damaged trees (**plates 23–25**). One drawing is marked “Épernay” and the regimental log has entries for Forêt d'Épernay, part of the 500 hectare Forest of Rheims.

The Third Battle of the Aisne commenced at 1 am on the morning of 27 May with a surprise German assault on 39 km of the Allies' front trenches using over 4,000 guns. This was followed by a chlorine gas drop, then the enemy troops came. Taken completely by surprise with defences spread thinly, the Allies, who had been sent there for a rest, were unable to stem the attack. The Germans advanced





rapidly demolishing four French divisions, followed by another four French and four British divisions in the next six hours. Losses were immense.

Miguel was caught up in this battle that continued until 4 June. The 'South Staffs' had been in the Soissons area, having been entrained in for resting, training and clearing up when the offensive erupted. On the 26th, they received orders to be ready to move at a moment's notice and after 8 pm they moved to a position south west of Guyencourt and then again to south west of Cormicy. After fierce fighting on the 27th they withdrew to Pevy.⁸

The 4th South Staffs engaged in a fierce battle on the night of 29 May then withdrew to Sapiecourt, then Rosnay, then Mery-Premicy. Five officers were killed, six officers wounded and one more officer wounded but declared

missing. In the other ranks ten were killed, 92 wounded and 162 missing. The remainder marched during the night to Marfaux, next morning to the Forêt d' Épernay 20 km away, and after a rest on to Souliers next day, 31 May. Those still able marched on to Beaunay, where on 2 June they had a 'Church Parade' and made up a new composite battalion.⁹

Miguel was not part of this parade. He had been injured, shot in the leg and was in a field hospital in Troyes on 2 June and by the 8th in the General Hospital at Rouen. He was invalided out, returned to England and from 9 June until 16 August recuperated in the Royal Victoria Military Hospital at Netley near Southampton (**plates 26–28**). This had been erected during the Crimean War to accommodate 2,500 beds; the 200 acre (81 ha) site was as large as a small town with its own gasworks, reservoir and prison.

26.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), [*A hospital in Blighty*] 1918. Red Cross huts, Royal Victoria Hospital Netley, England. Pen and ink wash on paper, 17.5 x 23 cm

27.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), *A bad case*, England 1918. Pen and ink wash on paper, 29 x 23 cm

28.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), [*Convalescing in England*]. Pen and ink wash on paper, 23.5 x 28 cm

29.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), [*A young soldier shot in the foot*]. He is wearing the hospital undress uniform. Pen and ink wash on paper, 28 x 23 cm. Exhibited 1990 in *The Art of Miguel Mackinlay* at Bushey Museum and Art Gallery





30.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), *Laurie and Theresa, the artist's daughters*, signed lower left, oil on canvas, 1938. Exhibited the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition 1938. Collection: Bushey Museum Trust

Patients wore blue woollen suits with white lapels and red ties, called “hospital undress” – a reminder to anyone who might encounter convalescent soldiers that they were still serving men and not cowards to be handed white feathers. A young soldier shot in the foot can be seen wearing this uniform in one of Miguel’s drawings (**plate 29**).

Miguel, granted a week’s leave before being transferred to the 4th South Staffordshire Regiment at Lichfield Station,¹⁰ married his artist’s model Laurie Carruthers on 19 August 1918. She was 21, working in a factory making screws for aeroplanes, and living at 65 Surrey

Lane, Battersea, the home of her father (a former gardener now a wartime railway gateman). Miguel was 23 and recorded on the certificate as No 43596 in the 4th South Staffordshire Regiment. A ‘fit for duty’ form showed him fit for duty at the Regimental Command Depot but not for active duty.¹¹ On August 23 he was sent to the depot at Ripon until 7 November. The Regiment was disbanded in November and Miguel was transferred to the 3rd Staffordshire Regiment.

Armistice Day came on 11 November. The Great War was over much to everyone’s relief. The Allies had been victorious. Miguel’s drawings are a reminder of the war that was “the war to end all wars”.

From 1928, he lived in an artists’ community at Bushey in Hertfordshire, about 23 km northwest of London. He enjoyed a successful career as a busy commercial artist illustrating books, posters and advertising materials, when commercial art was arguably at its apogee.

His paintings reflect a contented family man in peace time (**plate 30**). He never returned to Australia, and died in 1959 still with shrapnel in his leg.

The images shown here are some of hundreds preserved by the family of Miguel Mackinlay in the collection of the Michael McKinlay Trust. All the photographs are by Ric Bower. Dorothy Erickson is writing a book and compiling a *catalogue raisonné* on this artist and his career and would be grateful for any information on him or works of his held in private collections in Australia and elsewhere. A further article will detail his later career.



Dr Dorothy Erickson is a distinguished historian, author, practising jeweller and frequent contributor

to *Australiana* who lives in Perth WA. You can contact her at dorothyerickson@ozemail.com.au

NOTES

- 1 His surname can be variously spelt Mackinlay or McKinlay.
- 2 Battye Library, State Library of Western Australia, Q 994.1 WES. *The Western Mail*, 26 Feb 1915 p 2. The painting was destroyed by a Zeppelin attack in November 1915.
- 3 <http://www.suffolkregiment.org/Calendar.html> accessed May 2016.
- 4 Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice. *The Last Four Months; How the War was Won*. Boston, Little Brown & Co 1919, p 23.
- 5 www.1914-1918.net/sstaffs.htm accessed April/May 2016.
- 6 Maurice, *op cit* p 243.
- 7 *Ibid* p 48.
- 8 “War Diary 25th Division 7th Infantry Brigade 4th Battalion South Staffs Regt. Oct 1917- July 1918”. WO95_2244_2.
- 9 “War Diary 25th Division 7th Infantry Brigade 4th Battalion South Staffs Regt. Oct 1917- July 1918”. WO95_2244_2.
- 10 Furlough, Army Form W3016.
- 11 Amending Slip, Army Form W3016.