



Bird Man of Salonia by Rebecca Jewell. A mixed media composed of an untitled print of a BE 12 aeroplane collaged with printed postcards. The postcards have been hand printed with images of Montague and the collections he made.

Montague believed these and other aspects of Kanak culture were in decline and in danger of being lost. Like other scholars of the time, he believed that urgent scientific fieldwork was needed to document traditional ways of life before they died out. In reality, with the threat of war looming it was Europe that was facing imminent catastrophe.

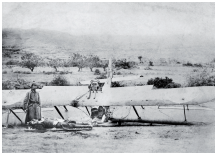
ALONG WITH MANY OF HIS GENERATION, Montague joined the fight for King and Country and became a commissioned officer in the Army in November 1915. The death earlier that year of his younger brother, David, on the first day of the battle of Neuve Chapelle in France may have played a part in his decision. The following year, Montague began training as a pilot in the fledgling Royal Flying Corps and – aware of the dangers – wrote to his sister: ‘Don’t tell my fond parents about the flying corps. One must do something nowadays.’

After completing his training in Egypt, Montague was posted to 47 Squadron which was serving in the Salonia Campaign, fighting against Bulgarian, Austrian and German forces. Conditions on the aerodrome were especially harsh – heat, flies and mosquitoes plagued the troops and disease was rampant. Nevertheless, Montague managed to find time between flying operations to pursue his love of the natural world. As one of his fellow airmen wrote he could usually be found embedded in the thatched roof of some local cottage... A bag on his boots and he would emerge, grimy but grasping a clutch of eggs’. As a result of such exploits, Montague became known as ‘The Bird Man of Salonia’.

Montague was a brave and resourceful pilot. On one occasion, his plane suffered an engine failure during take-off, crash-landed in the sea and broke in half. Writing home to his old school, Montague made light of the accident: ‘I had rather an amusing crash at Salonia... my engine ‘conked’ right out [and] I was obliged to land on the sea... I found myself hung upside down in my belt in the black and abysmal depths of the ocean, but I soon got clear... and came to the top’.

The types of aircraft operated by the Royal Flying Corps in Salonia were judged by one contemporary as ‘wholly unsuitable for aerial combat’. And, in an age before parachutes were readily available, death was an ever-present risk. When Montague took part in a bombing raid over the Dorian front on 29 October 1917, that ever-present risk became a tragic reality. Although the mission was completed successfully, Montague’s plane was attacked and was last seen spinning out of control.

Three months later a photograph was dropped from an enemy plane over a British-held aerodrome with a note explaining that the pilot on the stretcher had been shot down and killed and was buried in an unmarked grave. The number of the aircraft matched Montague’s plane. His flight commander wrote ‘All of us miss him very much, he was the most popular pilot of the squadron, besides being one of the most stout-hearted pilots this flight has ever had’. The site of Montague’s grave still hasn’t been located.



Montague’s plane after it had been shot down in Salonia in 1917. © Imperial War Museum Q110611

REDISCOVERING MONTAGUE’S COLLECTION and researching his story raises questions about how individuals and communities deal with loss, memory and remembrance. Is memory mutable or constant? Fluid or fixed? Do new acts of remembering such as this exhibition recreate the past or help reshape it?

We know that Montague’s mother Amy spent the rest of her life trying to establish where Montague was buried. In the year after his death, she wrote to Professor Hammer, keeper of Zoology at the Natural History Museum: ‘In losing him I feel I have lost all I ever hoped for or set my heart upon’. In Cambridge, his mentor and pioneer of anthropology Alfred Cort Haddon mourned Montague’s loss. He also wrote to Hammer asking ‘Did you know Paul Montague? He was a most charming and talented boy I anticipated a distinguished career for him’.

Montague’s story reflects the layers of loss experienced by millions of families across Europe and the Empire as well as the intellectual impoverishment suffered within many academic institutions. In this context, Montague takes his place within the familiar history of the War’s ‘Lost Generation’ and the national narrative of loss we call ‘Remembrance’.

The centenary of the start of the First World War offers an opportunity to revisit and review the ways in which we

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remember and engage with the events of 1914-1918. Despite an abundance of public memorials (there are 100,000 in the UK), it seems that we still struggle to know how to remember World War One.

Individual stories provide a kaleidoscopic lens through which the many dimensions of the war can be better understood. By focusing on the life of Paul Denis Montague we are able to make connections that help reconcile the personal and the professional, the familial and the national, the near and the far, the past and the present. Despite its global and overwhelming significance, the War, when remembered through individual human experience, brings an immediate and intimate perspective a perspective that resonates today.

As part of the Pacific Presences project, Kanak researchers are visiting Cambridge to examine Montague’s collection and to read his notes and journals. Their work adds new layers of information and interpretation to the collection and reveals that Montague’s fears that Kanak culture would not endure were unfounded. These contemporary encounters with Montague create new ways of remembering him and remind us that memory is an active, creative process that – while concerned with the past – happens in the present.

François Wadra from the Loyalty Islands, New Caledonia, researching Montague’s collection in October 2013. Photograph by Mark Adams



This exhibition is an outcome of the European Research Council funded project ‘Pacific Presences: Oceanic Art and European Museums’, the project’s principal investigator is Professor Nicholas Thomas.

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Cover: Paul Denis Montague
Photograph courtesy of Jennifer Edcourt

MAGIC & MEMORY

PAUL MONTAGUE IN NEW CALEDONIA

Ceremonial Mask (1917.118.131)
Collected in September 1914



AS EUROPE PREPARED FOR WAR in the summer of 1914, a young Cambridge-trained zoologist was living half a world away in the islands of New Caledonia in the South Pacific. The original purpose of Paul Denys Montagu's expedition was to collect wildlife specimens, but in his hand-written journal he recorded his growing fascination with the local Kanak people and their culture. After twelve eventful months, Montague returned to Cambridge with a large and remarkable collection of more than two hundred Kanak objects including a spectacular ceremonial mask as well as natural history specimens, photographs and wax cylinder sound recordings.

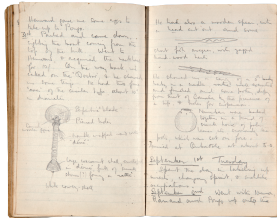
Montague began to catalogue his collection here at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology and wrote up his field notes ready for publication. But before this work was complete he answered the call to arms and was posted to Salonika, where he died in combat in October 1917.

For one hundred years Montagu's collection has been held in the stores here in Cambridge. Now, as part of a major research project called Pacific Presences, staff have been reconnecting these objects with Montagu's original notes, photographs and drawings, as well as learning more about his extraordinary life and tragic death.

Born in Devon in 1890, Montague came from a family of collectors. His father Leopold was a renowned archaeologist whose collection of Egyptian, Greek and Roman antiquities are displayed in the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter. Montague attended the progressive boarding school Bedales, which encouraged simple living and an appreciation of the great outdoors through a regime of camping trips, cold baths and vegetarian food. Boys and girls were encouraged to associate freely and boys took classes in cooking, needlework and handicrafts. Montague developed a love of nature and was a talented artist and musician. The Bedales Chronicle records that when he left to go to Cambridge the whole school cheered him off from dormitory and classroom windows.

Montague entered Gonville and Caius College to study zoology and became well known for his musical abilities, regularly appearing in concerts and recitals. His social circle included Virginia Stephen (later Woolf), Lytton Strachey, John Maynard Keynes and the poet Rupert Brooke, whose famous poem 'Dining Room Tea' was written at Montagu's family home, when Brooke and a group of companions called in and had afternoon tea with Montagu's family while camping in the area. Paul, known to the group as Paily, entertained them in the evenings around the campfire, singing songs he had written and playing a guitar – a type of lute – that he had made himself and which travelled with him to New Caledonia.

MONTAGUE AND HIS FELLOW Cambridge graduate and botanist, R. H. Canston, whom Montague affectionately called 'Pongri', arrived in New Caledonia in time for New Year's Eve (1913). Having finally received official permissions from the island's French Governor to carry guns and acquire a boat, they set sail for the northeast of the main island having been advised that it had been little explored.



Montagu's journal from his expedition to New Caledonia

A group of 'magic stones' used when hunting reefs



Carved funerary figure (1917.118.140)



Bamboo comb engraved with a European face (1917.118.3)



Basket for carrying crops (1917.118.26)



In fact, by the time Montague arrived, the islands were being Christianised by both French and British missionaries and had been officially colonised by the French for sixty years. As a result, the indigenous Kanak people were used to engaging with Europeans and Montague found it easy to employ several young islanders to help in the acquisition of botanical and zoological specimens. He was particularly impressed by the hunting skills of two of the Kanak men he employed Uplio and Narine from the Loyalty Islands, writing in his journal: 'Uplio got 3 new doves in the forest at the foot of the mountain, and a small black bird with orange eyes'. Montague carefully recorded their exploits, which included details of the vast quantities of birds, insects and animals they collected as well as illustrations, Kanak words and even the musical notation of a traditional Kanak song.

Montague and Compton thought little of walking fifty miles in a day clambering up mountains in search of particular specimens and lugging heavy equipment across rugged terrain. Montagu's unconventional schooling at Bedales would surely have served him well on these adventures. Indeed, his journal reveals that

Clam shell ornaments (1917.118.8 and 1917.118.12)



Belt of cowrie shells with flying fox cord (1917.118.7)



Uplio and Narine, Montagu's Kanak assistants (P3994ACH11) while Compton slept on board their boat whenever possible. Montague always preferred to spend the night on shore under canvas. The understated tone of his journal also reflects his reserved approach to physical discomfort and danger. 'Burned my thumbs in the evening endeavouring to free the tent from mosquitoes by means of gunpowder.'

In acquiring ethnographic objects such as pots, weapons, clothing and ornaments, Montague was meticulous in noting down the local names of objects, where they were collected and the names of the Kanak families from whom he acquired them. Such detail was unusual at the time and provides a rich resource for today's researchers.

Montague was particularly intrigued by the so-called 'magic stones' which played a fundamental part in all aspects of Kanak life – from success in growing crops to sexual attractiveness, strength in battle and good health. He collected many examples, carefully labelling each one to indicate his understanding of its particular purpose and wrote extensively about their power and significance. For example, he noted that on the night when a man dies, it is necessary for his relations to watch (out for) his sacred stones... for they are liable to... get lost in the bush – an undesirable happening as they are very valuable.

Montague was able to collect so many of these powerful stones because the Kanak people were in the process of converting to Christianity and – as a symbol of their conversion – missionaries encouraged them to give up or destroy objects that had held specific significance in pre-Christian ceremonies.