

# Lasting legacies

## Barbed wire and other technology

World War I (1914–1918) was supposed to be the war to end all wars, but it was in fact the beginning of all modern conflicts. The new technology that reached the battlefields forever changed the way that armies fought. It could be argued that technology had always played an important part in war, but previously it had not been so sophisticated, and above all, so destructive. However, it wasn't only armoured tanks, high-powered machine guns, and aerial bombardment; as Adam Hochschild describes in his essay, *To End All Wars*, the most important innovation of all was the barbed wire fences, the most unassuming weapon used. **(1)** What barbed wire did was prevent direct charges on the men in the trenches. Hochschild got it right, unlike Douglas Haig, the commander of the British forces in France. Haig said, 'I believe that the value of the horse and the opportunity for the horse in the future are likely to be as great as ever. Aeroplanes and tanks are only accessories to the men and the horse.' As on so many other occasions, he could not have been more mistaken.



## Women's emancipation

**(5)** Something that historians still wrangle over is how much World War I liberated women. In reality, women's work was already on the rise before 1914, and once the war was over many women went back to their old jobs. However, without doubt women successfully carried out a huge number of traditionally masculine roles during the war. And without doubt, some of the post-war fashions, such as the flapper garçonne (little boy) look, flew in the face of pre-war feminine dress codes. Also, crucially, it was after the war that women in certain countries achieved the most important political right: the right to vote. In Great Britain they could vote from the age of 30 in 1918; in Germany they could vote in 1919; in the USA women could vote in all states from 1920; but in France, not until 1944, towards the end of World War II.



## Blood banks

The first blood banks, called 'blood depots', were set up by Oswald Hope Robertson, a medical scientist and US Army Officer, while serving in France in 1917. Just before the war, in 1914, it had been discovered that transfused blood could be prevented from clotting if mixed with sodium citrate. In the same year it was established that blood could be stored in refrigerators. These two huge breakthroughs paved the way for Robertson's 'blood depots'. Prior to this, blood transfusions had had to be made vein to vein, directly from donor to patient. Medics used the 'preserved' blood at casualty stations for wounded soldiers. However, survival rates were not good because (4) one vital thing they had overlooked was the importance of blood groupings (three blood groups, A, B, and O, had been identified in Vienna in 1901 by an Austrian, Karl Landsteiner). Nevertheless, the wartime advances led to a blood-donor service being established in London in 1922. Here all volunteers were tested for blood group and screened for diseases.



## The decline of the aristocracy



World War I had a devastating impact on the British upper classes. The sons of the aristocracy fortunate enough to survive the war returned to find their place in society no longer automatically assured. Their numbers were severely reduced – even the prime minister's son was killed. This meant that in the immediate post-war period, those who had been expected to become leaders – particularly in politics and business – were no longer there.

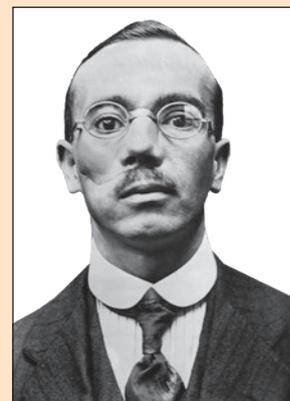


There was also a fall in the number of those willing to work as their servants. History professor Joanna Bourke says, 'In the past, the servant class in upper-middle-class homes were those people whose family tradition was to work there. When someone left, the cook would recommend her niece – and that no longer happened.' The introduction of conscription had turned a professional army into a civilian one. New officers could now come from humble backgrounds and, like the many thousands of emancipated women, they were not prepared to abandon the possibility of social advancement that the war had brought them and go back to being shopkeepers and servants.

### **'Broken faces' – the first plastic surgery**

Modern surgery was born in World War I. Civil and military hospitals acted as theatres of experimental medical intervention and the outbreak of war changed the course of plastic surgery forever. Trench warfare meant that the head and the face were especially exposed to enemy fire and received extensive trauma wounds. Countless veterans survived the war, but paid the price by ending up maimed, mutilated, and disfigured. These were the so-called 'broken faces', named after an expression coined in France by Colonel Yves Picot, president of the Union des blessés de la face et de la tête, which was founded in 1921.

By the end of hostilities, there were about 6.5 million war invalids in France. Surgeons from the warring countries faced a considerable flood of these 'broken faces', and were charged with giving them human features again, to ease the plight of their reintegration into civil life. Missing flesh and bone were covered up with grafts, an innovation that came about by using skin from other parts of the body.



## Recognition of PTSD or ‘shell shock’

Psychological victims of war are as old as war itself. The Bible, the Greeks, and Shakespeare all tell us this. But it wasn't until World War I that science began to understand this properly and give the kind of diagnoses that are familiar to us today. During the war, medics still thought that ‘shell shock’, as it was known, was down to the physical impact of military explosions. But gradually another theory began to form: that **(2)** what caused the peculiar symptoms exhibited by huge numbers of soldiers (80,000 in the British army alone) were emotional, not physical, stress factors – in particular, the proximity to death and the hideous sight of watching a friend – or enemy – meet a gruesome end. Traumatized soldiers shared many common symptoms, such as speech difficulties, twitches, anxiety, and digestive disorders. **(3)** The thing doctors found baffling was that these symptoms persisted long after the war was finished. It wasn't until over 60 years later, in 1980, in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, that this affliction would be formally recognized as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

