

Routledge Studies in  
First World War History

# Eric Bogle, Music and the Great War

‘An Old Man’s Tears’



Michael J. K. Walsh

ROUTLEDGE  


‘This book represents the remarkably creative coming together of an academic with a great singer/songwriter. The result is an extraordinarily moving account of a combination of Great War remembrance and committed activism in which Eric Bogle’s songs are analysed in terms of the contexts of their creation and the profound ideals which they promote. The book includes an illuminating interview with Bogle during a centennial visit to the battlefield of the Somme. All those with an interest in the First World War and the poetry and folk music it inspired will find that reading it offers a truly profound experience.’

**John M. MacKenzie**, Emeritus Professor of Imperial History at Lancaster University, UK



**Taylor & Francis**

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

# Eric Bogle, Music and the Great War

Eric Bogle has written many iconic songs that deal with the futility and waste of war. Two of these in particular, 'And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda' and 'No Man's Land (a.k.a. The Green Fields of France)', have been recorded numerous times in a dozen or more languages indicating the universality and power of their simple message. Bogle's other compositions about the First World War give a voice to the voiceless, prominence to the forgotten and personality to the anonymous as they interrogate the human experience, celebrate its spirit and empathise with its suffering.

This book examines Eric Bogle's songs about the Great War within the geographies and socio-cultural contexts in which they were written and consumed. From Anzac Day in Australia and Turkey to the 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland and from small Aboriginal communities in the Coorong to the influence of prime ministers and rock stars on a world stage, we are urged to contemplate the nature and importance of popular culture in shaping contemporary notions of history and national identity. It is entirely appropriate that we do so through the words of an artist who *Melody Maker* described as 'the most important songwriter of our time'.

**Michael J. K. Walsh** has published widely on cultural responses to, and interpretations of, the Great War. He is the author of: *This Cult of Violence* (2002) and *Hanging a Rebel* (2008); editor of *A Dilemma of English Modernism* (2007) and *London, Modernism and 1914* (2010); and co-editor of *Australia and the Great War: Identity, Memory and Mythology* (2016) and *The Great War and the British Empire: Culture and Society* (2016). He is Associate Professor of Art History at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

## **Routledge Studies in First World War History**

Series Editor

**John Bourne**

*The University of Birmingham, UK*

The First World War is a subject of perennial interest to historians and is often regarded as a watershed event, marking the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the 'modern' industrial world. The sheer scale of the conflict and massive loss of life means that it is constantly being assessed and reassessed to examine its lasting military, political, sociological, industrial, cultural and economic impact. Reflecting the latest international scholarly research, the Routledge Studies in First World War History series provides a unique platform for the publication of monographs on all aspects of the Great War. While the main thrust of the series is on the military aspects of the conflict, other related areas (including cultural, visual, literary, political and social) are also addressed. Books published are aimed primarily at a post-graduate academic audience, furthering exciting recent interpretations of the war, while still being accessible enough to appeal to a wider audience of educated lay readers.

Also in this series:

### **Eric Bogle, *Music and the Great War***

'An Old Man's Tears'

*Michael J. K. Walsh*

### **Military Service Tribunals and Boards in the Great War**

Determining the Fate of Britain's and New Zealand's Conscripts

*David Littlewood*

### **The Royal Flying Corps, the Western Front and the Control of the Air, 1914–1918**

*James Pugh*

### **The Great War and the British Empire**

Culture and Society

*Edited by Michael J. K. Walsh and Andrekos Varnava*

### **Aerial Propaganda and the Wartime Occupation of France, 1914–1918**

*Bernard Wilkin*

[www.routledge.com/history/series/WWI](http://www.routledge.com/history/series/WWI)

# **Eric Bogle, Music and the Great War**

**‘An Old Man’s Tears’**

**Michael J. K. Walsh**

First published 2018  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

© 2018 Michael J. K. Walsh

The right of Michael J. K. Walsh to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

*Trademark notice:* Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

*British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Names: Walsh, Michael J. K., 1968- author.

Title: Eric Bogle, music and the Great War : 'An old man's tears' / Michael Walsh.

Description: Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, 2018. |

Series: Routledge studies in First World War history |

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017036623 | ISBN 9781138719118

(hardback : alk. paper) | ISBN 9781315195582 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Bogle, Eric—Criticism and interpretation. | Protest

songs—Australia—History and criticism. | World War, 1914–1918—

Music and the War. | Northern Ireland—History—1968–1998—Songs and music—History and criticism.

Classification: LCC ML420.B6566 W35 2018 | DDC 782.42162/240092—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017036623>

ISBN: 978-1-138-71911-8 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-19558-2 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman  
by Swales & Willis Ltd, Exeter, Devon, UK

# Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	x
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xii
<i>Foreword</i>	xiii
<i>Preface: a songwriter among historians</i>	xv
 Introduction: Eric and me	 1
1 Eric Bogle: early life, work and a culture of protest	20
2 ‘Tired old heroes from a forgotten war’: ‘And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda’, Australia and Gallipoli	43
3 ‘When this war is over’: remembering and forgetting in Australia	65
4 ‘A warm summer breeze’: ‘No Man’s Land’, Ireland and the afterlives of Willie McBride	91
5 ‘A stranger without even a name’: an interview with Eric Bogle at the Somme, 2016	114
6 ‘Old men still talk and argue’: remembrance, education and the future of the past	132
 Conclusion: ‘Again and again and again and again . . . ’	 150
 <i>Bibliography</i>	 156
<i>Brief discography</i>	175
<i>Index</i>	177



## Other books by Michael J. K. Walsh

*C.R.W. Nevinson: This Cult of Violence*

*A Dilemma of English Modernism: Verbal and Visual Politics in the Life and Work of C.R.W. Nevinson*

*Hanging A Rebel: The Life of C.R.W. Nevinson*

*London, Modernism and 1914*

*Runaway Dreams: The Story of Mama's Boys and Celtus*

*Medieval Famagusta: Studies in Art, Architecture and History* (with N. Coureas and P. Edbury)

*Crusader to Venetian Famagusta: 'The Harbour of all This Sea and Realm'* (with N. Coureas and T. Kiss)

*City of Empires: Ottoman and British Famagusta 1571–1960*

*Australia and the Great War: Identity, Memory and Mythology* (with A. Varnava)

*The Great War and the British Empire: Colonial Societies and Cultural Responses* (with A. Varnava)

*The Armenian Church of Famagusta and the Complexity of Cypriot Heritage: Prayers Long Silent*

**For Gül, Erdal and Ara**

# Figures

0.1	Eric Bogle, publicity shot	xiv
0.2	'Reserved: Eric, Mike', Adelaide, 2014	xvii
I.1	'In some faithful heart is your memory enshrined': Wilhemina Walsh's brooch, containing a concealed photograph of her son, Harry, killed at the Somme in 1916	4
I.2	'Do those who lie here know why they died?' The Enniskillen Bomb and its aftermath, 1987	6
I.3	'A student of human nature': 'Eric Bogle, song writer and performer', Australian Humanist of the Year 2001	13
I.4	'Eric wonders what the medal's for'	14
I.5	'He's my rock', John Munro, publicity shot	15
I.6	'Car is in dangerous condition'	16
1.1	'Things ain't been the same': Laurence and Nancy Bogle	22
1.2	'We barely cracked the "small time"': The Informers. Bogle is second from bottom.	31
2.1	'And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda': the unforgettable song about Gallipoli	56
2.2	'I'll be singing my song for all those ghosts of all those boys': Eric Bogle performs at the unofficial 100th anniversary of the Gallipoli landings in Turkey, dawn, 25 April 2015	59
3.1	Permission for 'half caste' Rufus Rigney to join the Australian Military Forces from the Chief Protector of Aborigines, 7 August 1916	68
3.2	'He was a coloured chap, like an Australian Aboriginal.' Account of Rufus Rigney's death	69
3.3	'Any information will be thankfully received.' A mother's plea. In search of Rufus Rigney	70
3.4	Photographer unknown. A small group of Australian soldiers walk between the dead bodies of horses lying in the desert. The horses have been shot prior to the return of troops to Australia	76

3.5	'You fill up,' Mr Conn said, 'You just fill up.' 'The horse that never came back', <i>The Age</i> , 12 June 1992	77
4.1	'Did you really believe that this war would end wars?' The grave of William McBride, Royal Inniskilling Fusileers, with wreath and crosses	93
4.2	'Although you died back in 1916 . . .': the grave of W. McBride, Royal Inniskilling Fusileers. Note the abundance of crosses, messages, lyrics and flags at this headstone as opposed to any visible in the background	97
4.3	Visitor's book, Authuille Cemetery, August 2016. Note three references to Willie McBride on this page alone	98
4.4	'The sun's shining down': the grave of W. A. Craigie in Fromelles with an extract of Bogle's 'No Man's Land' now added	109
5.1	Eric and Carmel Bogle, Dan Frodsham and Michael J. K. Walsh on location at Le Clos du Clocher, Gueudecourt, 2016	114
5.2	'Well how do you do Private Willie McBride?': Eric Bogle at the grave of W. McBride, August 2016	117
5.3	'But here in this graveyard it's still No Man's Land'. Dan Frodsham and Liam Tully filming at the Somme, 2016	125
6.1	'Meaning is always negotiated': a school group at the Australian War Memorial, October 2016	143
6.2	Screenshot of 'The Future of Remembrance' created by Dan Frodsham: Top left: Eric Bogle; Top right: The grave of W. McBride; Bottom left: Michael J. K. Walsh at the Grave of 'Harry' Walsh, Etaples; and Bottom right: Again and again and again and again. . .	145

# Acknowledgements

My thanks go to the Ministry of Education in Singapore which generously funded my project *Conflict and Culture/Conflicting Cultures: An Old Man's Tears – The War Poems of Eric Bogle* in 2015. Without this funding neither the book nor the film, would have been possible. Thanks go to Dean Alan Chan and Professor Vibeke Sorensen for granting me sabbatical leave to write this book and thank you also to the University of Padua for hosting me during the process. Melissa Lovell was, and always has been, a pleasure to work with getting the manuscript ready for submission. I would like to thank Dan Frodsham and Liam Tulley for their patience and expertise in filming the documentary *Eric Bogle: Return to No Man's Land* in France in 2016, and Dan, in particular, for important discussions on film as research, and the importance of online collaborative/curated platforms to give voices to today's voiceless. My thanks also go to Ryan Johnston and Anthea Gunn at the Australian War Memorial for inviting me to run the curators' workshop on 'The Future of Remembrance' and to speak about 'And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda'. Of course, I need to thank Eric and Carmel Bogle too for all of their kindness and co-operation – from Adelaide, to Singapore, to the Somme. Without their support this project would not have amounted to very much.

# Foreword

‘There is nothing so absurd about risking your life for your country!’ he declared.

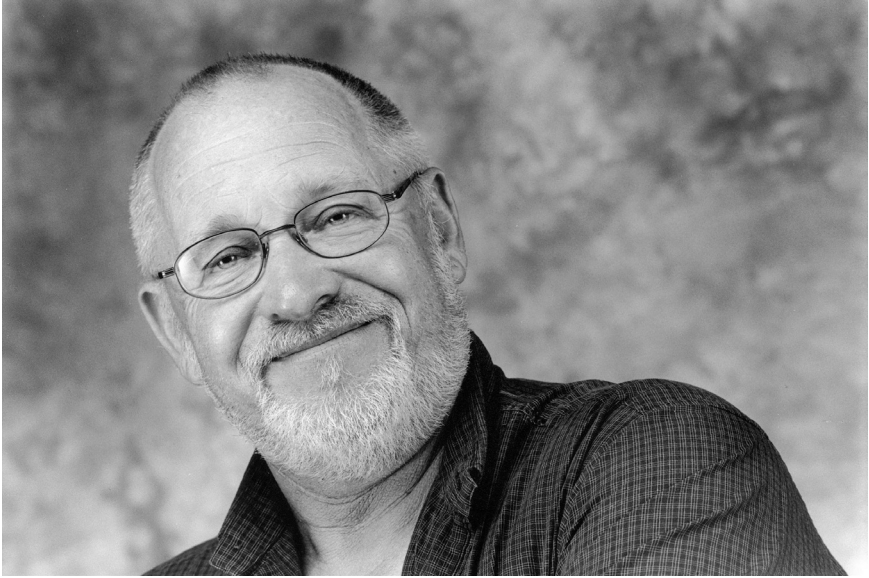
‘Isn’t there?’ asked the old man. ‘What is a country? A country is a piece of land surrounded on all sides by boundaries, usually unnatural. Englishmen are dying for England, Americans are dying for America, Germans are dying for Germany, Russians are dying for Russia. There are now fifty or sixty countries fighting in this war. Surely so many countries can’t *all* be worth dying for.’

‘Anything worth living for,’ said Nately, ‘is worth dying for.’

‘And anything worth dying for,’ answered the sacrilegious old man, ‘is certainly worth living for.’<sup>1</sup>

## Note

- 1 Joseph Heller, *Catch 22* (Simon & Schuster, 2011), p. 257.



*Figure 0.1* Eric Bogle, publicity shot.

Source: Eric Bogle collection.

# Preface

## A songwriter among historians

In February 2014 I asked Eric Bogle to perform in Singapore at an academic conference I had organised with Andrekos Varnava called 'The Great War and the British Empire: Colonial Societies/Cultural Responses'. The keynote speakers at Nanyang Technological University were Sir Hew Strachan, Professor Jay Winter, Professor John Mackenzie and Professor Tim Barringer, with many other distinguished scholars coming from all over the world. I knew from the outset, as did Eric, that this would be a 'tough' audience to crack especially as the debate about centenary commemorations was raging and the rivalry between 'career' and 'popular' historians was getting bitter. Some measure of it could be felt, for example, when Rhys Crawley wrote: 'Frustratingly, public discourse within Australia has not evolved in line with these developments in the international scholarly literature. Popular histories, with little basis in archival research or the wider literature, continue to flood the bookshelves.'<sup>1</sup> It was clear, as Martin Stephen had already reminded us, that 'military history and literary criticism do not sit easily side by side'.<sup>2</sup>

The same may be said of music and its relationship to history – the latter being dependent on methodologically meticulous and verifiable construction; the latter devoted to the search for emotion, reflection and intangible aesthetics. Not everyone, it seems, endorses Plato's observation that 'poetry is nearer to vital truth than history',<sup>3</sup> nor is there universal acceptance in the value of burdening popular culture with a serious message. W. B. Yeats had declared 'passive suffering is not a theme for poetry',<sup>4</sup> while Theodor Adorno had utterly dismissed popular music as a mode of delivery saying that its 'cross-eyed transfixion with amusement' meant it was 'doomed from the start'.<sup>5</sup> In a more recent study Peter Grant summed up the situation with particular reference to the subject of the Great War in particular, saying:

So musicians who decide to approach the subject of the First World War take up a poisoned chalice. The chances of ridicule are high and yet the potentialities are enormous. It is why the subject has attracted such a diverse group of artists from passionate pacifists to preening narcissists and even a few extreme militarists.<sup>6</sup>



In Singapore I wanted to see if the demonstrable universality of Bogle's message across geographies, generations and disciplines could evoke emotional (or intellectual) responses from an audience for whom the Great War could hold few secrets. I insisted then, as I do now, that popular culture could not and should not be ignored and that its value in whatever form was not 'simply to help us remember epochal events and their impact upon us, but also to enable the much more difficult task of reflecting critically both on that past and ourselves'.<sup>7</sup> A song, quite naturally, has no chance of capturing the complexity of the war in all its myriad forms in a few verses and over a few minutes, just as no single canvas can achieve the same. Why would we expect it to do so? Instead, work such as Bogle's, being simultaneously poetic and intellectual, strives to sophisticate opinions in a committed yet discrete way. It forms, performs and informs our perception of history and needs therefore to be taken very seriously indeed. It is hard to imagine, for example, that popular works such as Bogle's 'No Man's Land', Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy (1991–1995), the film treatment of Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* (2014), or even the BBC's *Blackadder Goes Forth* (1989), has not made an impact on popular imagination. Across the Atlantic, I don't think it is wise to ignore the fact that Barry Sadler's 'Ballad of the Green Berets' sold 9,000,000 copies at the time of the war in Vietnam either.<sup>8</sup> Recent scholarly investigation tends to support my notion as Jonathan C. Friedman points out

[p]erformance is clearly a potent medium for spreading and making accessible what otherwise might be problematic and unpopular. A song's poetry and music can change reality, maybe not by immediately resulting in changes in law, but by having a deeper impact on the society that makes laws.<sup>9</sup>

Allan Moore made a similar point saying 'to protest a situation means, in some measure, to *express* opposition to it, but it also implies something less than to *oppose* it outright. To sing a song is not, in itself, to land a blow.'<sup>10</sup> Music, with its extremely long reach, and especially since the emergence of 'protest' in the 1960s, has provided a pro-active link between culture, politics and change, the impact of which is powerful, lasting and lifelong . . . a point made in the recent exhibition *Louder than Words: Rock, Power & Politics* at the Newseum in Washington DC.<sup>11</sup>

How, I wondered, would Bogle's music be received by the gathered academics in Singapore? What follows is a small, yet representative, sample of the responses I received after his performance.

For most Australians, Eric Bogle's 'And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda' has become part of the soundtrack to our lives. The haunting music and melancholic refrains of the song both remind and inspire. No Anzac Day commemoration would feel complete without hearing it. While Eric's music takes us back to the Great War, the horrors of Gallipoli, the pathos of battles lost and won, and the human indignity of war, the music has relevance for all generations. It also transcends geographical borders and has resonated in

many parts of the world. As a person who holds campaign medals for service in the Vietnam conflict, it was especially emotional for me to be back in Asia and to be present as Eric gave voice to his best-known composition.

(Associate Professor Martin Hadlow, University of Queensland)

For me, Eric's performance took me back to the first time I heard his music, as a primary school student, learning about the First World War in Melbourne in the 1980s. I had to steel myself before he started singing, because I knew what the emotional effect would be . . . And sure enough, 'And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda' brought the tears welling up in my eyes. I quietly – and happily – bawled my way through the rest of the set.

(Dr Richard Scully, University of New England)

I was surprised by the level of emotion I felt during Bogle's performance in Singapore, and the level of emotion I sensed among my fellow conference participants. In Australia at least, I think there's a huge degree of cynicism among historians, including many who attended the conference, about the



*Figure 0.2* 'Reserved: Eric, Mike', Adelaide, 2014.

Source: author's collection.

First World War, the Anzac legend, and how they're received (or reimagined) by the public, including in Bogle's songs. At the conference [because of Bogle's performance] it seemed that the barrier of that cynicism came down, at least a little bit and for a little while.

(Ashleigh Gilbertson, University of Adelaide, PhD Candidate)

It struck me how the Great War still has this intensity and ability to travel down to us in the present. Music is a very powerful vector. Eric's songs also reminded me, inevitably, of talking with my grandfathers about the War. Eric's words often concentrate on the 'ordinary man' and remind us very poignantly of the sort of 'bloke next door' dimension of the conflict, so that the everyday, banal, somehow seems to rub shoulders all the time with the sublime/grotesque nature of the slaughter. I think the (very talented) simplicity of Eric's songs managed to keep together the banal and the tragic very well.

(Professor Trevor Harris, Université de Picardie Jules Verne, France)

What particularly resonated with me was the detail of his contextualizing introduction/explanation to each item. He clarified his hesitation about performing some because of the ways their subsequent elevation in popular understanding had challenged his intent, but also his changed perspective about some events spoke powerfully of a deep thinker – one whose voice needs to be heard.

(Stephanie James, Flinders University, Research Fellow)

What struck me about Bogle's songs about the war was that they were emotive and poignant, without being overly sentimental or idealised. Bogle managed to capture the humanity of his subjects in a very powerful way, without oversimplifying or over-sentimentalising the stories, or imposing too heavily a message about the conflict. Instead, he let the songs, and the experiences, speak for themselves, which made them all the more powerful.

(Greg Hynes, University of Oxford, PhD Candidate)

Given Eric's Scottish background, accent, and mode of expression, it was all a deeply nostalgic experience, as well as being of course exceptionally moving. I think, and hope, that I did tell him of my connections with the last Scottish veteran of the First World War, Alfred Anderson, whose years were 1896–2005, for whom I wrote a short booklet biography entitled 'A Life in Three Centuries'. Alfred was sharp, dignified and full of memories to the end (at 109 ½). He was also extremely funny and somehow Eric's performances reminded me of him.

(Professor John MacKenzie, Lancaster University)

Eric Bogle is an everyman, he writes from the heart, songs that inspire a generation.

(Cherie Prosser, Australian War Memorial)

Although as academics we are not activists – like Bogle – but try to explain how, why, in what context and with what consequences the war took place (to mention just a few aspects), what Bogle does should remind us that war is such a terrible and brutal thing and that therefore activism is as much needed as academic reflection.

(Professor Marc Segesser, University of Bern, Switzerland)

## Notes

- 1 R. Crawley, 'Marching to the Beat of an Imperial Drum: Contextualising Australia's Military Effort During the First World War', *Australian Historical Studies* 46, no. 1 (2015): p. 66.
- 2 Martin Stephen, *Poetry and Myths of the Great War: How Poets Altered Our Perception of History* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 1996), p. xiv. See also: Emma Hanna, *The Great War on the Small Screen: Representing the First World War in Contemporary Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 3.
- 3 See <http://thevirtualworld.blogspot.sg/2005/08/dont-come-to-me-with-entire-truth.html> (accessed 5 November 2017).
- 4 W. B. Yeats, letter dated 26 December 1936, in *Letters on Poetry from W. B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesely* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 113.
- 5 See: Ric Brown, 'Theodor Adorno on Popular Music and Protest', archive.org. For viewing purposes see [www.youtube.com/watch?v=njxKF8CkoU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=njxKF8CkoU) (accessed 7 November 2016).
- 6 Peter Grant, *National Myth and the First World War in Modern Popular Music* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 10.
- 7 P. Tregear, 'For alle Menschen?' in *Music in the Post-9/11 World*, ed. J. Ritter and J. M. Daughtry (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 168.
- 8 John Haycock, 'Protest Music as Adult Education and Learning for Social Change: A Theorisation of a Public Pedagogy of Protest Music', *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* 55, no. 3, (November 2015): pp. 423–42.
- 9 Jonathan C. Friedman, 'Introduction', in *The Routledge History of Social Protest in Popular Music* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. xv.
- 10 Allan Moore, 'Conclusion: The Hermeneutics of Protest Music', in *The Routledge History of Social Protest in Popular Music*, ed. Jonathan C. Friedman (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 387.
- 11 [www.newseum.org/exhibits/current/louder-than-words-rock-power-and-politics/](http://www.newseum.org/exhibits/current/louder-than-words-rock-power-and-politics/) (accessed 20 February 2017).



**Taylor & Francis**

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>