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Spring 2015

Nicolleta Gullace Associate Professor of History, COLA, travels to England

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Recommended Citation

Gullace, Nicolleta, "Nicolleta Gullace Associate Professor of History, COLA, travels to England" (2015).

Faculty Travel Reports. 90.

https://scholars.unh.edu/international_travel/90

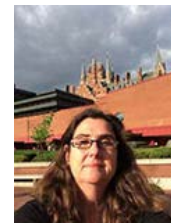
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Nicolleta Gullace

Associate Professor of History, COLA ~ England

On June 16th I travelled to London for a two-week research trip to archives holding valuable material on the history of the First World War. I stayed in a Quaker boarding house off of Russell Square and walked to the Imperial War Museum in Lambeth and the British Library next to Kings Cross Station. I also made several profitable trips to the British National Archives near Kew Gardens in West London, where Government papers are held. On my weekend, I visited relatives in Suffolk, who live near the location of a zeppelin raid that took place over East Anglia in 1917.



Nicolleta Gullace at British Library with Kings Cross Station in background



MB Walker - German bayoneting children;
[Life - July 25, 1915 Public Domain](#)

My CIE grant funded research towards my next book, looking at the way civilian casualties during the First World War – particularly female ones which had been highly publicized in war propaganda – were later eclipsed by the death toll among male soldiers. As pity shifted from the victims of alleged German atrocities towards the very soldiers who went to war to defend them, Europeans and Americans began to deny actual war crimes and see themselves as the dupes of a mass propaganda campaign that fabricated horrors to fuel the war. My research thus began by investigating some of the highly publicized “atrocities” against civilians which took place during the First World War.

At the Imperial War Museum I spent time pouring over the Prichard Collection, an archive of hundreds of letters written by survivors of the *Lusitania* disaster to the mother of Preston Prichard, who was looking for any information she could get on

the loss of her son. On May 7, 1915, the luxury liner *Lusitania* was sunk by a German U-boat off the coast of Ireland, within site of the shore. Over a thousand people were drowned in the disaster, many of them women and children. The 128 dead Americans became a symbol for those who believed the United States should enter the war on the side of Great Britain. The Prichard collection contained fascinating information from eye witnesses who described the way the great ship listed to the starboard, causing life-boats to overturn and dumping passengers, wearing heavy Edwardian dresses and suits, into the cold ocean, where they were dragged to the bottom. Scores of these bodies later washed up on the Irish shore, and were brought to temporary mortuaries in Queenstown, where they were identified by tailors' labels, pocket watch inscriptions, or papers found upon the elegantly-dressed corpses. Sadly, Mrs. Prichard never found the body of her son Preston and, like many other mothers, she dwelled upon his last moments, wondering if he had died alone, trapped in his cabin while searching for one of the scarce lifebelts that saved some fortunate passengers.



Torpedoed Lusitania Public Domain; drawing printed in New York Herald and London Sphere, ca. 1915, Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC

The timing of my trip to Britain was particularly auspicious since it coincided with the coming centenary of the First World War. As I worked on a series of on-line articles on the history of British Women during World War I in my room at night, I was immersed in the atmosphere of debate over the meaning of World War I. For those on the Left, World War I was the quintessential senseless war, where idealistic young men died by the millions for a meaningless cause. For those on the Right, particularly Education Minister Michael Grove, the First World War needs to be reevaluated as a heroic struggle against German autocracy. The on-going debate over the history and meaning of the First World War in Europe gave life and immediacy to my research. Thanks to my CIE grant, my new book will be able to contribute to this discussion.



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