

## CHA VISIT TO THE WAR MUSEUM

During CHA council meetings last November of 2006 CHA council members were given a first-rate tour of the recently completed Canadian War Museum, located on the LeBreton Flats, a plain of wetland and former industrial land adjacent to networks of mill races and hydro dams on the right bank of the Ottawa River. The tour was given by CWM World War One curator and historian Tim Cook. The tour allowed visitors to take in the remarkable breadth, chronological and thematic, of the CWM permanent exhibition, from the pre-contact (native) ways of fighting to the Seven Years War and all the way up to and well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century marked by two World Wars, the Korean War etc. Dr. Cook shared with visitors the challenges of preparing a display — what works, what does not work. Our tour guide was quite frank in his describing the public debate and discussion over allied bombing campaigns (World War Two), and nowhere more interesting than in his discussion of World War One. In fact Dr. Cook is proposing to do a temporary exhibition focusing squarely upon the culture of the men in the trenches, from 1914 to 1918. The proposal is promising for it will tap the rich streams of established Canadian working class and socio-cultural historiography of the late Victorian and Edwardian eras. It may engage with popular perceptions engendered by such films as “La vie et rien d’autre” (Bertrand Tavernier) and the more recent “Merry Christmas” (Joyeux Noel) (Christian Carion).

Stephen Lee (UBC Department of History) had his camera with him during the tour. The snap shots are his. The first depicts a scene from the South African (Boer) War, two others show posters promoting the war effort during World War One, one each for the two official languages. The fourth and final one shows a harrowing-looking mannequin fitted out in a gas uniform. Upon gazing at the uniform it is difficult to make the statement that the Museum makes history come alive. Better to conclude that the uniform, and the whole setting speak to war as a historical reality that we cannot afford to ignore.

Many thanks to Tim and the War Museum for the time and the tour.

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