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Topic

**ANZAC DAY:**

The Undying Debt

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[I hope you realise that in asking me to talk to you about my book, Bruce has in effect asked me to talk about 6 years of my life.]

I began research for a Ph.D. proposal in 2001. The History Department at Adelaide University requires a Ph.D. thesis written about a topic that no one else has written a book on. Originally, I wanted to concentrate on Pilgrimage to Gallipoli, the Western Front and other significant sites related to Australian overseas war service. During the course of preparing the proposal, I discovered that an interstate University Lecturer was writing a book on pilgrimage. While searching for another topic, my Supervisor and I realized that although many academics had written about 'Anzac' nobody had written a history about Anzac Day as a part of Australian culture. My thesis began as "Australian identity and memory of war" but after research developed into "Anzac Culture: A South Australian case study of Australian Identity and Commemoration of War Dead." I define Anzac Culture as anything to do with the commemoration of Australian War dead, therefore it encompasses not only Anzac Day but also Armistice Day, Remembrance Day and other patriotic days. The thesis became a South Australian case study because different legislation in each State governs the observance of Anzac Day. It was impossible to write about Anzac Day nationally when restricted by a specific word limit. Nevertheless, decisions made in Canberra by the Federal Government and the national body of the Returned and Services League have an impact on the way that South Australians observe Anzac Day. Therefore, I carried out research not only in South Australia but also in Canberra. Furthermore, I made a 'pilgrimage' to an Anzac cemetery in England because of a flag brought back to South Australia by Lieutenant Colonel C. Yeatman, last Commanding Officer of the No. 1 Australian Auxiliary Hospital in Harefield, Middlesex. The Australian auxiliary hospital functioned until January 1919.

After my thesis was examined and passed I set about preparing a manuscript suitable for submission to the South Australian History Fund for a 2005/06 publication grant. The manuscript had to focus on South Australian history therefore as well as removing some 'academic scaffolding' I included more details concerning individual South Australians. The book *Anzac Day: The Undying Debt* highlights changes made to the observance of Anzac Day rituals and changing community attitudes concerning the commemoration of Australian war dead. Documents concerning Anzac Day during the 1914-18 war and in the 1920s frequently mentioned the debt that the Australian community owed to those service personnel who had paid the 'supreme sacrifice' and to the service and sacrifice of ex-servicemen and women.

Before becoming a mature age university student I worked 25 years for an accounting firm so I was familiar with the concept of debt and debt repayment indicated by the accounting terms. I also realized that in the twenty-first century the Department of Veterans' Affairs and John Howard still referred to a debt owed for service and sacrifice although the debt had now become a debt of gratitude rather than the 'debt of honor' (sic). I decided to further describe the debt as 'undying' because of the assumptions expressed by protestors during and after the Vietnam War that Anzac Day rituals would die out as a result of the eventual deaths of ex-servicemen and women who served during the two World Wars. In reality, despite the apparent fall in status of Anzac Day rituals during and immediately post Vietnam War, the esteem of Anzac Day rose during the 1990s.

*Anzac Day: The Undying Debt* argues that the observance of Anzac Day has become more inclusive; that successive Australian Governments, both Labor and Liberal, have utilized Anzac Day to foster a sense of Australian consciousness that in the case of pilgrimage to significant sites overseas, has become an Australian civil religion. In order to propound this argument it was necessary to research aspects of collective and individual memory related to the commemoration of war dead and study examples of group and personal concepts of identity.

As examples of collective memory, chapters 1 to 3 utilize sources from the South Australian Branch of the Returned Services League, which I will refer to as the League, the Adelaide City Council Archives, State Library, Hansard, and newspaper reports of Violet, Wattle and Anzac Days.

When I visited the League library, John Spencer, the then State Secretary offered me access to League minutes. If you have every acted as minute secretary you will know institutional minutes record decisions made, but do not necessarily record whether the decisions were carried out. My quandary, after reading and noting the content of the minutes, was that they did not provide evidence of any actual events. League Annual Reports and magazines were more helpful. In attempting to establish whether the League implemented its minuted decisions, I discovered that the Council Archives held information related to early South Australian Anzac Days.

In *The Broken Years*, Bill Gammage recorded the emotional history of the men of the first A.I.F.<sup>1</sup> Gammage's work illustrates his appreciation of a need for closure and grief management. My book includes some of the emotional history of Australian women left mourning war dead.

The first chapter 'Honouring the Debt' concerns patriotic days establishing the rituals of Anzac culture. I outline the work of a number of grass roots organizations and their spontaneous use of patriotic days in 1915 as a means of grief management and disability support.

Adelaideans observed the first South Australian Anzac Day on 13 October 1915. Various community groups organised that Anzac Day to raise money for wounded soldiers.<sup>2</sup> However even before the first Anzac Day, women's groups in Adelaide had held services to commemorate the dead and to show that even when events in Adelaide appeared to be continuing as usual, concerned citizens

remembered those whose friends, lovers and relations had died while on overseas service.

On 2 July 1915, the honorary organiser of the Adelaide Cheer-Up Society, Mrs Alexandra Seager, co-ordinated the first Violet Day held in South Australia. The Violet Day Committee organised a memorial service that took place at the South African Soldiers' memorial on the corner of North Terrace and King William Street. Throughout South Australia women sold bunches of violets as a token of remembrance of war dead. The *Register* reported that in their hearts South Australians placed the violets on the graves of men buried in Gallipoli and Egypt.<sup>3</sup> South Australians continued the observance of Violet Day into the 1970s.

On 7 September 1915, the Wattle Day League, an Australian women's organization, held a service at Wattle Grove on Cohen Avenue in the South parklands and arranged for the erection of an obelisk in honour of Australasian soldiers who had died on the Dardanelles.<sup>4</sup> Australia and New Zealand were not the only nations that lost servicemen at Gallipoli. British, French and Indian soldiers also served and died there. During WW1 The Wattle Day League continued to hold services at the obelisk and raised money on button days – badge days - to fund ambulances for the Western Front. The obelisk, which had a cross added to it in 1918, now stands in Lundie Gardens opposite the Trades Hall on South Terrace.<sup>5</sup>

Files in the Council Archives provided evidence that the Brisbane Anzac Day Commemoration Committee was responsible for initiating the national observance of Anzac Day on the first anniversary of the Gallipoli landing on 25 April 1916. That committee intended the day to be an Australian 'All Souls Day' observed with church services and as mourning for Australian war dead. That same day King George V and the Australian Prime Minister Billy Hughes attended memorial services at Westminster Abbey in London. In Egypt, servicemen organised a sports carnival.<sup>6</sup> Here one can see the beginnings of our present Anzac Day observances. The Church parades and memorial services that acknowledge death and sacrifice in the morning with the afternoon set aside for ex-servicemen and women to celebrate their survival and return home to Australia.

Chapter 2, 'Sacred Ground' concerns mourning and memorials at surrogate burial sites. Research gathered from the city archives and from the minute books deposited in the State Library by the Committee of the "Women's Memorial to the Men who fell in the Great War", provided the main source of information for this chapter. Women raised the money and arranged for the erection and dedication of the cross of sacrifice in Pennington Gardens on Anzac Day 1922 and the stone of remembrance on Anzac Day 1923. The Committee decided that they wanted a garden of remembrance in which people of all faiths and denominations could honour their dead. The women wanted the cross of sacrifice and stone of remembrance erected in the 'open-air cathedral' because the Imperial War Graves Commission decided to place those two monuments in British war cemeteries. The Committee first had to obtain copyright from Sir Reginald Blomfield for permission to build the Cross of Sacrifice. The Committee also had to obtain copyright from Sir Edwin Lutyens, the architect who designed the Stone of Remembrance. Other memorials designed by Lutyens include the Cenotaph in Whitehall and the Australian National Memorial at Villers-Bretonneux. Herbert Baker who designed New Delhi in India planned the

layout of the memorial garden in a cruciform shape within a hedge and suggested that the women arrange for the design of the rose beds to represent graves. Women placed the names of the men that they wanted remembered in an urn underneath the foundation stone of the monument.<sup>7</sup>

The adjacent Memorial Hospital is a 'living' memorial set up by the Methodist church. (A memorial designed for the use of the living.) Members of the Methodist Church and Sunday school children raised the money for purchase of the hospital buildings. The Methodist church decided on the purchase of the hospital in repayment of the debt that the Methodist Church felt they owed to the '1000 young Methodists who made the supreme sacrifice' during the Great War. A church souvenir states "We wish to pay our debts, and this in no mean spirit, but lavishly, promptly, handsomely."<sup>8</sup>

The bodies of Australian war dead remained overseas because of decisions made by the British Government. Australians were British subjects. Australian citizenship did not come into force until 1949. Further research showed that women's groups organised the funds for and the erection of other soldiers' memorials. Where soldiers' memorials list only the names of the dead, I believe that the memorials are communal headstones for the absent corpse and that the dedication services at the memorials' unveiling were community funeral services designed to achieve a sense of 'closure'.

During the 1920s, League Councillors wanted a 'Shrine of Memory' erected in remembrance of the 8,000 South Australian service personnel who had paid the 'supreme sacrifice'. The League recognised that the major problem affecting the erection of the National State Memorial on North Terrace was the fact that the 'War Memorial Committee' was too big and unwieldy. The Governor unveiled the State Memorial on the 16<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ANZAC in 1931. On Remembrance Day 1956, Sir Robert George unveiled the additional memorial recording the names of 3,275 of those who made the supreme sacrifice during WW2.<sup>9</sup>

'The One Day' outlines the institutionalisation of Anzac Day utilizing information obtained from Hansard concerning the *Holiday's Act Amendment Act* assented to 21 December 1922. Three returned soldier members of parliament helped pass legislation proclaiming Anzac Day a public holiday. This was a turning point in replacing old ties with Britain with a new sense of Australian identity because the Anzac Day public holiday replaced the old holidays for the King's Accession Day and Prince of Wales' birthday.

Chapters 4 and 5, use League administrative decisions to explore aspects of politics and patriotism and illustrate the progression of Australian identity by discussing the steps taken by the League that made Anzac Day more inclusive within multicultural Australia. The League accepted veterans who migrated to Australia from allied countries as members. However, the League required the return of membership badges from those the League adjudged Italian fascists during WWII, and denied membership to members of the Communist Party during the Korean War. The League progressively permitted migrants to march on Anzac Day. League minutes and National Australian Archives files containing 'Orders of the Day' provided information related to the inclusion of multicultural groups within Anzac

Day ranks. Although the bulk of Allied migrants come from the old British Empire, Americans, Dutch, French, Greeks, Italians, Poles, Serbs, and Vietnamese joined the ranks marching on Anzac Day. Turkish veterans have also marched in Adelaide on Anzac Day.

In the UK Anzac Day services take place at Harefield, Sutton Veny, Walton-on-Thames and London. The city of Bury observes Gallipoli Sunday. Chapter 6 'Harefield and the Remembrance Connection' uses the relationship between the Anzac Cemetery at Harefield, a British Primary School, a Union Jack, and the Adelaide High School, to explore the connection between Briton, Australia and the Kings' commands for Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday. Some sources for this chapter came from the National Archives. Adelaide High School and St Mary's Church, Harefield provided other documents.

Early in the Great War authorities sent men injured at Gallipoli back to Australia to recuperate. After the failure of the conscription referendums authorities repeatedly sent soldiers back to the trenches from hospitals in France and the UK. The Anzac cemetery in the Harefield parish church contains the graves of over 100 Australian service personnel, some of whom died from the influenza pandemic in 1918-19.<sup>10</sup> The cemetery in the parish church at Sutton Veny, near Bath, also contains the graves of Australian servicemen who died during that pandemic. The graves of some New Zealand war dead are in Walton-on-Thames parish churchyard.

My research illustrated that essentially Armistice Day differed from Anzac Day, because Anzac Day emerged from Australian grass roots organizations whereas Australia celebrated Armistice Day in 1919, because of the command of King George V. After WWII, King George VI approved the observance of Remembrance Sunday in place of Armistice Day. In South Australia, in 1951, Premier Sir Thomas Playford authorised the observance of Remembrance Day at 11 am on the 11<sup>th</sup> November. In another turning point Australia reverted to observing Remembrance Day on the anniversary of the WWI Armistice, whereas, Britain continued to commemorate its war dead on Remembrance Sunday.

Chapter Seven, 'God Save Australia' (a title made up from the old and new anthems) discusses religious and civic spirituality. Religious services originally conducted in memory of war dead on Anzac Day, have increasingly become civic services embracing multiculturalism. Newspaper reports of addresses and sermons given on Anzac Day, illustrate the evolution from Christian to civic services. I also utilized newspaper cuttings from the papers donated to the National Library of Australia by Historian Ken Inglis. In various journal articles Inglis has written about the significance of soldiers' memorials and attempted to delve into the core of Anzac tradition, especially concerning the spiritual significance of civic Anzac Day services. Outlining yet another turning point, the papers in his collection held by the National Library enabled me to follow the increasing use of 'Advance Australia Fair' as an anthem on Anzac Day, a development that relegated 'God Save the Queen,' to a hymn.<sup>11</sup>

'God Save Australia' concludes with the funeral of the Unknown Australian Soldier in Canberra on Remembrance Day 1993. Simon Berry, a Past President of the Australian Funeral Directors' Association, allowed access to documents, slides and a

video. Representatives of the Australian Funeral Directors' Association and a tri-service party retrieved the body of the Unknown Australian Soldier from Adelaide Cemetery in France. The video, 'Return home of the Unknown Australian Soldier', produced and directed by Peter Tobin, recorded the Unknown Soldier's journey, from the ceremonial handover in France, until his burial in the Hall of Memory at the Australian War Memorial. Prayers given at the service presented Australians with a completely new perception of 'God,' and included a 'God of the Dreamtime.' I see this ceremony as another turning point because the funeral officially changed the notion of Australian identity away from Britain's unknown Warrior in London and focussed Australian national consciousness squarely in Canberra. After the ceremony, Ken Inglis wrote that Remembrance Day had taken on the feeling of Anzac Day.<sup>12</sup>

In chapter 8, 'Australian Britons', I look at memory and identity concerning individuals. Three books that I used to show the progression of individuals' sense of Australian identity concerned medical personnel. In *Doctor and the Aborigines*, Dr Duguid describes his own experiences as a Medical Officer in the Middle East during WW1. Duguid served in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian Stationery Hospital at El Arish on the border of Egypt and Palestine. He dramatically describes his feelings and his concern for his parents after his brother's death in the second battle of Gaza.<sup>13</sup>

The other two books concern Vivian Bullwinkel, formerly of the 13 Australian General Hospital, the sole survivor of a massacre of Australian nurses at Banka Straits after the fall of Singapore. Writing in 1954, former Lieutenant Betty Jeffrey of the 2/10 Australian General Hospital refers to the capture of Vivian. Jeffrey also describes the observance of Anzac Day rituals as a prisoner of war of the Japanese. *Bullwinkel* the book written by Norman Manners in 1999 includes some of the same experiences but also goes on to describe the contributions made by Bullwinkel on her return to Australia and her support for the observance of Anzac Day.<sup>14</sup>

I found that memoirs of individual Australians who lived during the Great War demonstrated the interchange ability of British Australian identity. Given that Australian citizenship did not come into effect until 1949 this interchange ability of Australian Britons is readily reconciled. A study of memoirs written about the life experiences of Australian ex-prisoners of war during the Second World War, demonstrated that Australian WWII ex-servicemen and women had inculcated the rituals of Anzac Day and Armistice Day. Observing the rites of those two days while incarcerated by enemy forces provided Australians with a sense of common identity. Books written by and about ex-POWs provide evidence that the sense of the men's and women's mateship, derived from Christian principles via the traditions of 'Anzac,' resulted in Australian POWs having a greater sense of community, and a better chance of survival from imprisonment, than other nationals during WWII.

In 'Balancing the Ledger', I used creative accounting to work out a metaphorical balance sheet showing the value of commemorative assets such as soldiers' memorials and honour rolls since the 'Australia Remembers' and 'Their Service - Our Heritage' programmes of the 1990s. Although some memorials have been recycled, placed in museums or vandalised, overall it appears more memorials have survived than have disappeared.

In the last chapter, 'The Pilgrimage Trail,' I used documents from the Australian War Memorial Research Centre and the National Australian Archives to trace the gradual change in Government policy that has allowed pilgrimage to significant sites overseas to become a ritual of an Australian civil religion. Former Australian Prime Ministers Hughes and Menzies travelled to London to observe Anzac Day at the Cenotaph and Westminster Abbey. Initially, Australian Governments considered the financial burden of travel to overseas battlefields and war cemeteries the responsibility of individuals. This policy changed in 1965 when the Menzies Government subsidized travel that enabled the participation of some ex-servicemen and women in the RSL organised pilgrimage to Gallipoli. Prime Minister Robert Hawke gave an address at Lone Pine, Gallipoli on Anzac Day 1990. Acting upon the recommendation of a delegation that accompanied him, the Federal Government, through the Department of Veterans Affairs supports the observation of Anzac Day at significant sites.<sup>15</sup> The sense of *communitas* experienced by 'pilgrims' in the heightened sense of communion, fellowship and common identity is an Australian civil religion. Honouring the debt on sacred ground pays a dividend in terms of Australian national identity.

To sum up:

Of the numerous other fund raising or button days held during the Great War, only Anzac Day has survived and 'morphed' into a manifestation of a civil religion. I believe that this occurred because the Returned and Services League took over the organization of the observance of Anzac Day and made various subtle changes to the 'Day' as Australians' sense of national identity changed.

Civic memorial services on Anzac Day mirror secular Australia, reflecting the demise of Christian memorial services for war dead. Although the RSL is responsible for the organization of Anzac Day, material from the National Australian Archives provides evidence that successive Australian Governments, both Labor and Liberal, through the Prime Minister's Department and Department of Veterans' Affairs have manipulated the development of Anzac Day to foster a sense of Australian identity.

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Gammage, *The Broken Years Australian Soldiers in the Great War*, (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1974).

<sup>2</sup> *Register*, 'To-day's Appeal, The Anzac Celebration', 13 October 1915, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Register*, 'In Memory', 2 July 1915, p.4.

<sup>4</sup> *Register*, 'Wattle Day', 7 September 1915, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Adelaide City Archives, 1918/1451, W. C. Torode.

<sup>6</sup> Adelaide City Archives, 1916/1145, Anzac Day Commemoration Committee (Brisbane) Plan of Observance of Anzac Day, Tuesday 25 April 1916; Mortlock Library, Z Pamphlet, Anzac Souvenir 904.425 A637, Anzac Day Commemoration April 25<sup>th</sup> 1916.

<sup>7</sup> Mortlock, SRG 89, Women's Memorial to the Fallen in the Great War; ACA, SPF 549A.01, Cross of Sacrifice.

<sup>8</sup> Uniting Church Historical Society, 'The Memorial Hospital Souvenir', 1919.

<sup>9</sup> League 24<sup>th</sup> State Council Minutes, 8 June 1926, pp. 295-297; *Advertiser*, 'Youth's Great Tribute to Anzac Heroes', 27<sup>th</sup> April 1931; RSL SA Branch Library, 'Unveiling and Dedication of World War II Memorial, 11 November 1956'.

<sup>10</sup> Patricia Kaye, *Under an English Heaven*, (Harefield, Patricia Kaye, 1993).

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<sup>11</sup> National Library of Australia, MS 389, K. Inglis papers.

<sup>12</sup> Ken Inglis quoting John Lahey in 'Reflections on the Unknown Soldiers,' *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, No 24, April 1994, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Dr Charles Duguid, *Doctor and the Aborigines*, (Adelaide, Rigby, 1972), P. 60, 61, 70.

<sup>14</sup> Betty Jeffrey, *White Coolies*, (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1954, Reprinted January 1958); Norman G. Manners, *Bullwinkel*, (Victoria Park, Hesperian Press, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> Report of the Australian Parliamentary Delegation, Gallipoli, April 1990, p. 30.