The Glebe Society Anzac Centenary Lecture*:*

And never to return: The War Memorial Movement

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The Anzac Centenary Lecture was organised by the Glebe Society to complement the theme of its Anzac Centenary Program exhibition **Sacrifice, Struggle and Sorrow** shown in the Southern Hall at Glebe Town Hall, October 7-23, 2015.   The lecture was delivered on Tuesday October 13.

While more than 60,000 Australia lost their lives in World War I, only one body was repatriated. Felt across the nation, such loss saw the emergence of a war memorial movement. Memorials began to spring up across cities, suburbs and towns. Glebe was one of the first of Sydney's suburbs to establish memorials to the fallen.

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And Never to Return: The War Memorial Movement and Glebe in WWI

What is a memorial? A memorial is an object designed to preserve the memory of a person, animal or event that is symbolic. Memorials to people are usually away from where the physical remains are buried, if there are any remains. There are many different types of memorials but the ones I'm going to talk about tonight were designed principally for remembrance: to remember the dead, while also honouring all who had served (excepting, generally speaking, women who participated in WWI). They are material, three-dimensional objects that can be touched, scratched, venerated, visited, photographed or defaced. And they have a visibility in a particular place. They are traditionally designed by specialists, sometimes showing Christian symbolism and made of materials such as stone, marble and metal; they are made to endure. And they are monumental in style.

All societies have traditions that mark the death of their members. And many have public rituals to keep the memory of the dead alive, individually and collectively,

across generations. Some of these traditions appear to remain relatively unchanged over centuries, while others are adapted in relation to different contexts and circumstances. Australian ways of mourning through memorialisation reflect important shifts in the nature of public remembering and people's relationship to the past as well as the secularisation and democratisation of memorialisation. These changes to public memory have taken place within the framework of a broader 'culture of commemoration' emerging in many western societies. Erika Doss has written that this has culminated in the late twentieth century in a 'memorial mania'. Through this commemorative impulse many seek connection with the past and want to strengthen the link between the personal, often intimate process, of remembering the dead and the public nature of mourning rituals.[1] Today, roadside memorials are a prominent example of this. But the evolution of contemporary memorialisation in Australia can be said to have begun during WWI. Though public memorials have a long history, they began to proliferate in the Australian landscape and were firmly identified with the new nation state from the First World War.

A few years ago, Paula Hamilton and I undertook a study of Australian memorials. It was published in 2012 as *Places of the Heart: Memorials in Australia*.[2] We did not look at war memorials since Ken Inglis had covered these extensively in his monumental tome, *Sacred Sites*.[3] (And I'd like to acknowledge Ken's work here which I've drawn on heavily, as has everyone who has written about these objects since his book came out in 1998.) While we were conducting our project, one of our colleagues at UTS who had grown up in England asked us why there were so many war memorials in Australia. We told him that, of the 59,342 Australians who died in WWI, only one body returned home: that of Major-General Sir William Throsby Bridges who was killed at Gallipoli. His Horse, Sandy, was the only one of the 136,000 Australian horses – known as walers – sent abroad that made it back – alive in Sandy's case – to see out his days grazing at the Central Remount Deport at Maribyrnong in Victoria. So the tyranny of distance meant that memorials were to stand in for the lost bodies and non-existent graves of those who paid the ultimate sacrifice. And many, as you know, did.

On a global scale, the Australian sacrifice was relatively modest; 53,884 Australians lost their lives in the war out of over 17,000,000 dead (and 20,000,000 wounded); this represented just over 0.3% of all lives lost. But in a population of around 4.9 million during the war years, this was about 1.1% of the country's population. And when you look at the 416, 809 enlistments (331,781 of whom served overseas), this took in nearly 39% of males aged between 18 and 44.[4] This had an enormous impact on every Australian community and suburb and the loss was deepened by the geographical distance separating the old world from the new world in an era predating civil aviation. (While civil aviation began in Australian in 1920, Australians did not start to take to the airways in significant numbers until the 1970s.)

As the casualties started to mount – and this was initially even more shocking since the Fisher Government was expecting to send no more than 20,000 troops overseas

in an expeditionary force – suburban communities were able to respond more spontaneously to them than the states or the commonwealth. Given the complexity of negotiations over styles of memorials, locations and so forth – not to mention sectarian hostilities between Catholics and Protestants and divisions between capital and labour – the NSW state government did not erect memorials until well after the war had finished. And they were few in number. The Cenotaph in Martin Place was not built until 1927 and Hyde Park's monumental Anzac Memorial with its reflective pool was dedicated in 1934.

Inglis tells us that the first war memorial in Sydney was probably erected on Darling Street in Balmain where it remains today outside a Woolworths supermarket. It was unveiled on Easter Day, 23 April 1916, the last weekend day before the Anzac Anniversary.[5] Indeed, a survey of Inglis' book reveals that almost all World War One memorials were built by local endeavour using local resources. Suburban councils, churches, schools, businesses and organisations including all sorts of clubs created war memorials.

Thus a war memorials movement spread, at first slowly, across Sydney's and Australian's towns and suburbs. The protocols and politics around the erection of a memorial was complex, so much so that in 1919 the NSW Nationalist Holman Government established a War Memorials Advisory Board, chaired by the patrician architect and planning guru John Sulman who had lost his son in the war. An amendment to the *Local Government Act* 'required… [the Board's] approval of [the] design and the site before any monument could be erected in a public place'.[6] Experts had provided a few hideous, undignified examples of the work of 'anarchic amateurism' for the parliament to consider. Another planning guru and first–class eccentric, George Taylor, wrote that a statue that had been erected in 1918 on a plinth bearing an honour roll in front of the public school at Miranda was 'a grotesque figure in cement… so badly moulded, that if the face were not placed on one side of the head, it would be difficult to tell which was its front or its back'. One of the many local stories about the figure says that it was 'an embarrassment to the headmaster who arranged for robust senior students to dig a hole and bury the OLD DIGGER'. Emphasising the sacred nature of the memorial whatever its aesthetic qualities as well as the strength of local patriotism, another tale tells us that 'some old soldiers resented the removal and one dark night the body was disinterred and set up in a prominent position'. Memorial schools, hospitals, halls and other facilities could be constructed at will since they did not constitute monuments under the Act. But not memorials. On 30 January 1920, local government authorities were advised of the new rules and a booklet providing guidance to appropriate and tasteful memorials was published for their edification.

Glebe residents erected at least five significant and today extant public memorials, thought there would have been private memorials – including photographs on mantle places and bedroom 'shrines' – in most if not all of the homes who lost people in the war. The Glebe Town Hall Honour Role – which is in this building – seems to date to around 1921, though I have not been able to find an exact date. (It

would not, however, have been subject to the amended Act as it did not fit the definition of a monument in the Act.) The second is the Glebe Superior Public School War Memorial in Derwent Street at the Glebe Primary School which was unveiled on 18 October 1919, prior to state intervention in memorialisation. The foundation stone for the Glebe War Memorial in Foley Park was laid by the Governor-General, Lord Henry Foster, on 3 June 1921. These three memorials provide historical evidence in the form of material culture that allows us to look at the experiences of Sydney's towns and suburbs in this period. But we should not use the term 'material culture' in a narrow sense. Some studies in memorial material culture have been criticised for sticking too narrowly to an assessment of materials and form. These can illuminate aesthetic significance. But cultural and social significance requires a more holistic reading of these artefacts.

The Glebe Town Hall Honour Roll
Take, for example, the Glebe Town Hall Honour Role, which has been recorded in the Register of War Memorials in NSW by Rod Holtham, Ray Dehon and Paul Patterson. The main entry about the Honour role reads as follows:

> The Glebe Town Hall honour roll is a cedar panel with a central brass plaque surmounted with an impressed copper armorial of the British Royal Coat of Arms flanked by a pair of arch crested copper pillars, each titled: Roll of Honour.
>
> Each pillar impressed with the dates l914 and l9l9 above impressed panels containing crossed swords over laurel wreaths and a field artillery piece, supported on a bracket impressed with a NSW crest piece, supported on a cartouche and acanthus scrolls.
>
> The metal plaques contain the engraved names of local residents who volunteered (surname and first name initial in alphabetical order) for the conflict. There are two applied oval commemorative plaques engraved: In Honour of those who heard and answered the call of King Country and Erected by the Council, Ratepayers and Residents of Glebe.
> Height: 150cm Width: 244cm[7]

This is a perfectly fine entry in an admirable and useful date base. We could, however, consider the 787 names on the Roll. How did they get there? In his entry on World War I memorials in the *Dictionary of Sydney*, Neil Radford has written that:

> The gathering of the names to be listed on a memorial was a challenging process. Civic memorials were organised by local committees who did not always have access to reliable lists of local servicemen or the casualties among them. The first decision to make was whether the proposed memorial should list only those who paid the supreme sacrifice or honour all who had been patriotic enough to volunteer. Those who served and survived considered that their patriotism deserved to be recognised but others argued

that the only purpose of a memorial was to honour the deceased. In some places men who had volunteered but who had been rejected for medical or other reasons argued, mostly unsuccessfully, that they should also be listed, on the grounds that they were just as patriotic as those whose enlistment had been accepted.[8]

The Honour Roll could be juxtaposed to another piece of material culture: a sterling silver badge cast by the Rejected Volunteers' Association of NSW which had been established not long after the war broke out. It produced thousands of these badges – one of which is in the state library of NSW (item R2005) – in part to diffuse negative reactions to men who could then have been perceived to be what was know as 'shirkers'. After the first failed referendum on conscription, a national network of committees was set up to enlist volunteers. As Joan Beaumont has noted, 'Women were encouraged to target "shirkers", importuning them to volunteer until they finally succumbed.'[9]

Glebe War Memorial
The Glebe War Memorial in Foley Park which faces Glebe Point Road was planned from 1919 and unveiled on 3 June 1921. It has been documented by Rusty Priest AM, former RSL State President (NSW Branch), and Peter Levarre-Waters in the Register of War Memorials in NSW. And Prudence Macleod has written an entry on the memorial in the *Dictionary of Sydney*. It is also heavily inscribed with a plethora of meanings. The seemingly simple statement of fact – 'This memorial stone was set by His Excellency the Governor General… Lord Forster' at the entrance – tells us something about both memorialization practices and the people who were on the Committee who oversaw the commissioning and construction of this memorial.

The Governor General was at the pinnacle of an imperial chain of being of official personages for setting, unveiling or opening anything commemorating the war dead. Below the Governor General came the state Governor. If he was unavailable something other that vice-regal patronage would need to be sought from someone senior in the armed services or a member of parliament. Because these were primarily secular or civic memorials, and given the strong sectarianism at the time as well as the mix of religions, it was difficult to call on clerics to preside over a dedication. (An Australian folk song spoke of another problem given the Bush legend and the growing secular religion of Anzac; its title was 'The Tolerant Man'. 'I don't mind blokes who digs or stokes, who fettle or works on derricks; I can even stand a German band, but I draw the line at clerics.' [WA goldfields late 19th century]) Returned servicemen and the families of the fallen were accorded places of honour at these ceremonies which were usually very well attended by local residents.

The solemnity in which these events were held, as well as the desire for the ultimate respectability or a 'wish of distinction' as Penny Russell has described it –[10] that is, vice-regale patronage – was illustrated in an incident at Katomba. The committee of the Katoomba Anzac Hospital Memorial, as Neil Radford has written:

having installed an Honour Roll in the foyer, took advantage of the 1927 motoring tour of the Blue Mountains by the Duke and Duchess of York. Contriving an unscheduled stop for the royal car outside the hospital, the committee invited their Royal Highnesses in and asked the Duchess to unveil the Honour Roll, which she did, in the presence of the committee members [all men] and their wives. The subsequent outrage from local returned soldiers and bereaved families, who had not been told of these arrangements and were not present, erupted in the press and resulted in an angry public meeting and a letter of protest to the Duke. A judicial inquiry was held which found that although the committee's action was 'ill-conceived and unfortunate' it did not, as the protesters had claimed, amount to 'a gross insult to the relatives of the soldiers.'[11]

The Glebe Memorial Committee was able to secure the Governor General through official channels. It's president, Thomas (Tom) Keeghan, son of Irish migrants who started out as a labourer, had been the MLA for Glebe since October 1910 and a member of the Glebe Local Distress Society and was active in the United Labourers' Union of New South Wales and the Glebe Labor League. Keegan 'stayed with the party [over conscription]… he supported the war, but was anxious that industrial conditions were not altered while "our men" were at the front.'[12] That a state Labor Government had come back into power in 1920 would have greatly assisted the Committee's chances of securing the GG.

Another inscription indicates that the memorial was erected by 'Glebe Residents' who contributed around 2140 pounds for its design and construction. This is a statement about the democratic, local nature of the site; it is a memorial by the people for the people, though this did not reflect class divisions in the area. But the war and its toll blurred class boundaries. That the memorial is also on Crown land, acquired in 1908, reinforces the theme of 'common ground'. It was imperative that these types of memorial stood on crown or civic land. Memorials erected on other sorts of land were almost universally seen to be denominational or serving a particular secular community, not a town or suburb. Laying the foundation stone for a circle of column in from of the Drummoyne Town Hall Major-General Sir Charles Rosenthal told the gathering that it was 'peculiarly fitting that this memorial should stand within civic grounds as the men who served came form all the churches, and some form no church at all.'[13]

The NSW Government' role in the process of memorialisation at the local level is symbolised by the presence (twice) of the State's badge on opposites sides of the front of the memorial. Classical marble busts speak not only of an aesthetic but of respectability. So, too, do the inscriptions with their restored gilding on the left and right of the interior chamber at ground level as you enter which proclaim the names of some of the worthies involved in the monuments construction. The Honour Roll inside the chamber lists 173 names lists the names of all who 'paid the supreme sacrifice' unlike the Glebe Town Hall Honour Roll which includes all who served. The

decision to exclude survivors would have been a difficult one but this would have been made easier by the existence of the Town Hall roll. Phrases and symbols on the memorial – such as the eternal flame – quickly became part of the lexicon and pallet of the nation's war memorials.

Glebe Superior Public School War Memorial and Conclusion
This memorial was dedicated on 18 October 1919. The School Committee consisted of William Brown JP, President, Mrs H. Tamsety, Secretary and Thos A. Henbilty, Headmaster. The architect was William Martin. This was not perceived to be a 'community' memorial since it only memorialized the 303 former students and staff who had been veterans in the war. Vice-regal patronage was not secured for the laying of the foundation stone; rather, this was performed, as the inscription on the memorials states, by 'T. Keegan Esq MLA'.

In the mid 1990s David Lowenthal published his highly influential book *The Past is a Foreign Country*. And indeed it can be. Reflecting in the mid 1990s on his memories of North Sydney in the 1920s, life-time resident Jack Sullivan remembered a safe and stable place where identities were more or less fixed. 'North Sydney', he said, 'was such a close community that everybody knew each other… it was all just around here because you never travelled'.[14] Such a recollection may say as much about an elderly man's need to remember an organic, secure community during a period of rapid and perplexing social, economic and technological change at the close of the 20th century. But it may also explain the mixture of anxiety, fear and pain that was being felt in a small settler society with an isolated culture that was becoming increasingly quarantined during and after World War I.[15] Private Charles Tupper's name appears on the Glebe Superior School War Memorial. He was a single, Methodist 25-year old man who worked as an attendant at the University of Sydney. He lived at 52 Glebe Road Glebe with his parents. His officially listed place of birth was 42 Glebe Road, Glebe (possibly the address of a local woman who acted as a midwife for neighbours). Glebe and surrounds was his world. He enlisted on 28 December 1915 and was killed in action on 28 August 1916 at Poziers, Somme Sector, in France, 10,486 miles away. His place of burial was listed as: 'No known grave'.[16]

Endnotes

1 Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2010. It is the title of her book but she also discusses it at length in the Introduction and Chapter 1.
[2] Paul Ashton, Paula Hamilton and Rose Searby, *Places of the Heart: Memorials in Australia*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, North Melbourne, 2012.
3 K. S. Inglis, *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape*, Miegunyah Press, Melbourne, 1998.
[4] Michael McKernan, War', in Wray Vamplew (ed), *Australians: Historical Statistics*, Fairfax, Syme and Weldon Associates, Broadway, 1987, p. 410.
[5] Inglis, op cit, pp. 108-9.
[6] Ibid, p. 150; the following quotes are at pp. 151;152.
[7] http://www.warmemorialsregister.nsw.gov.au/content/glebe-town-hall-honour-roll <accessed 30 September 2015>.

[8] Neil Radford, http://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/war_memorials_for_world_war_i <accessed 1 October 2015>.

[9] Joan Beaumont (ed), *Australia's War 1914-18*, Allen And Unwin, Sydney, 1995, p. 52.

[10] Penny Russell, *'A Wish of Distinction': Colonial Gentility and Femininity*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1994.

[11] Radford, op cit.

[12] Heather Radi, 'Thomas Keegan', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/keegan-thomas-michael-7088 ,accessed 30 September 2015>.

[13] Inglis, op cit, p. 136.

[14] Paul Ashton, '"Our Splendid Isolation": Reactions to Modernism in Sydney's Northern Suburbs', *The UTS Review*, vol 6, no 1, May 2000, p. 38.

[15] See, for example, John Williams, *The Quarantined Culture: Australian Reactions to Modernism 1913-1939*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1995.

[16] AIF project www.aif.adfa.edu.au/showPerson?pid+305666 < accessed 10 October 2015>.