

Memory, commemoration and the meaning of a suburban war memorial

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Abstract

War memorials are a significant feature of the Australian landscape. Thousands were erected after the First World War in towns and suburbs across the nation as a community focus for memory, grief, and pride of their soldiers lost in the war. The Victoria Park memorial in Perth, Western Australia, originally constructed in 1917 before the war ended and replaced in 1957, was a small suburban memorial that was born in the enthusiasm of Empire and the growing concept of Anzac. The biography of this memorial reveals a chequered and contested history typical of many local memorials in Western Australia. Concentrating on the Victoria Park memorial this paper seeks to explore the relationships between its physical aspects and setting, its meaning to the community and the linkages between objects and memory.

Keywords

War memorial; commemoration; community meaning; memory; cultural biography.

In May 1915, John Rushton, the Mayor of the municipality of Victoria Park in Perth, Western Australia, addressed the town council on the “Great European War” that was now raging on the other side of the world and was “...devastating every part of the British Empire”. In his speech Rushton appeared to be less concerned about the effects that the war was having on the world at large and was more focused on the local scene.

The reality of the war is being brought nearer home to us as a district inasmuch as many of our fellow townsmen have fallen on the field of battle, some rest for ever beneath the sky of strange lands, their graves tended by strange hands but our memories enshrined for ever in the hearts of a grateful people, who have watched their heroic deeds from the calmer shores of their dear homeland (Victoria Park Municipal Council, 1915: 1-5).

Rushton’s speech was background to a proposal to find land for a memorial garden and to raise a monument to those that had answered the call and those that had fallen.

This memorial spot, would be a place of beauty, in its quietness the relatives could remember with feelings of affection how their loved ones crossed the great ocean to the land of eternal peace, and ourselves and our children gazing upon this monument of a district’s gratitude would ever remember with pride the great debt which we as citizens of a free country owe to these our fellow townsmen who fought and died that the country might still be free for (ages?) yet unborn (Victoria Park Municipal Council, 1915: 1-5).

While his speech talks of Empire, it also speaks of country and home confirming growing sentiments of an Australian identity that was buoyed by the legend of Anzac.

People in the Victoria Park district suffered from the war because many men were away or were killed leaving grieving widows and families with little financial support.¹ This

financial distress was not helped by the poor fiscal condition of the council which could only offer limited assistance. Despite straitened circumstances the council went ahead with the memorial proposal. The memorial, which was eventually completed in 1917, was one of the earliest built in the state (Richards, 1995a: 115). It was demolished in 1957 to make way for another memorial. The decision to build the memorial was not just simply a matter of glorifying empire and an act of recruitment propaganda – which in many respects it was - but part of a growing movement to provide a focus for those relatives who suffered loss in the war. The decision to build a memorial in Victoria Park was something that was played out by local communities across the State in the years to come and amongst its complex purposes it gave relatives a concrete expression of their memory, loss, and grief in the absence of the return of their loved ones.

The first Victoria Park Memorial was built in specially purchased land in a prominent position on the Albany Highway. It consisted of a soldier in ‘on guard’ stance atop of a large plinth of Donnybrook stone designed by Pietro Porcelli an accomplished local sculptor . On the four faces of the plinth were tablets with the names of those that had enlisted with a star beside those that had been killed to that date. While the memorial may be simply read as a soldier actively guarding the citizens of Empire and a call to arms – its recruitment purpose was clearly stated in the newspaper report of the opening ceremony - it was also the focus of complex ideas about citizenship, identity, and memory. In many respects it was at the confluence of diverse political and community meaning which was manifest in its physical form, symbolic design, setting and ritual commemorative use. It was also the only tangible focus that many had of relatives lost in the war.

Focussing on the Victoria Park Memorial this paper seeks to explore relationships between the setting, and physical characteristics of First World War memorials and community meaning. It asks the questions, what are the connections between the materiality of the memorial and its meaning to the community? What are the linkages between objects and memory in the context of war memorials?

This paper is part of a much larger project to examine the community meanings of war memorials in Western Australia, focussing particularly on the connections between the design and planning of memorials and commemorative practices.² This has been motivated by the recent revival of interest in commemoration in Australia which is linked to our current search for a national identity or a ‘national story’ (Reed, 2004: 121). A prime player in this search and indeed a commanding national mythology is the phenomenon of Anzac.³ Born in the carnage of the Gallipoli campaign in 1915 Anzac, as a nationally binding spirit of bravery, duty and sacrifice, still has the power to motivate Australians. In many respects Anzac has the elements of a civil religion – especially in its forms of commemoration and ritual. Australia and New Zealand consider Gallipoli as a ‘coming of age’ when both showed their mettle as sovereign countries on the world stage.⁴ It is the “...consequences of historical, social and cultural processes that lie at the core of Australian national identity.” “The power of Anzac is its ability to connect the potent notions of community, nation and war” (Seal, Graham. 2004:vii). War memorials still have much currency in Australia as ‘sacred places’ offering a focus for grieving relatives and the commemoration of loss and as powerful mnemonics of citizenship, duty and national pride (Inglis, 2005).⁵

As objects that have particular social and political meaning to communities war memorials have recently been the subjects of much historical study. What this paper argues is that

there is value in the idea of cultural biography or ‘life history’ applied to memorials that may help to capture the community meaning of these objects. The memorial at Victoria Park was chosen as a place that spans commemorative practice from before the close of the First World War to the present and has held two memorials of widely different design and symbolic meaning offering a rich background for discussion.

Biography

Marius Kwint (1999) offers important insights into the connections between memory and objects. Material objects ‘furnish recollection’ and provoke remembering through mnemonic processes including the stimulation of forgotten memories. Objects also form records which are analogous to memory itself “storing information beyond human experience”. He contends that in this sense objects can be read (Kwint, 1999: 2). Kwint argues that “objects have consequences and therefore a history of their own.” In this context human memory has “...undergone a mutual evolution with the objects that inform it (Kwint, 1999: 4)”. Hence war memorials can be understood as objects that are participants in a reciprocal and dialectical relationship between the material environment and the imagination. Sarah Tarlow (1997) reinforces this with the notion that memorial forms are expressive of particular emotions and overlaying commemorative agendas but also have the role of transcending these to a separate and personal consolatory understanding (Tarlow, 1997: 115).

These insights may be taken further by using the notion of ‘cultural biography’ to analyse the life history of memorials. Originally proposed by Igor Kopytoff (1986) this approach seeks to establish how objects are invested with meaning through social interaction (Kopytoff, 1986). “The central idea is that, as people and objects gather time, movement and change, they are constantly transformed, and these transformations of person and object are tied up with each other” (Gosden and Marshall, 1999: 169) The present significance of an object is the accumulation of a life history of associations with people and events to which it was connected. “Things like humans have life histories” (Holtorf, 1998: 23).

Such an approach is reinforced by Ruth Tringham’s (1995) concept of the ‘life-history’ of prehistoric houses. She claims that ‘life history’ is interested in the time aspect “...the duration of the house, the continuity of its next generation (its replacement), its ancestors and decedents, the memories that are held by its actors, the ghosts that are held within its walls and under its foundations. In other words I am interested in its biography” (Tringham, 1995: 98). While she typically discusses houses the concept can be equally applied to other built objects such as war memorials. In this context war memorials accumulate their own biographies through their social lives and physical existence and contribute to the biography of ceremonies, histories of commemoration and offer didactic functions to succeeding generations. Consequently the life histories or biography of memorials may help reveal the linkages between communities and the memorials that they use.

The following sections of this paper will attempt to reveal some of these linkages through a biography of the Victoria Park War memorial.

War Memorials

The idea of a war memorial in the modern Anglo–Australian sense is essentially to provide a focus of reflection on the sacrifice of others – ostensibly a sacrifice for our own

benefit and well being. The purpose of a memorial is also to outlive the memory of whom it was for and the people who built it. 'Lest we forget', a common phrase on Australian war memorials, is an injunction to other generations to remember and reflect.⁶ Memorials are also an important part of the healing process after war – a way that people can comprehend the catastrophes of war and transcend them (Winter, 1995).

Community memorials to ordinary soldiers who had served or fallen were a phenomenon of the First World War. As Sarah Tarlow (1999) shows such memorials emerged out of a complex situation involving late Victorian mortuary practice and changed commemorative attitudes forced by the mass deaths of the Great War (Tarlow, 1999: 154). Before the war, commemorative practice usually memorialised members of the ruling elite, particular events and battles or perhaps families might commemorate individual soldiers. However the First World War introduced killing on a scale that was unprecedented and revealed the inadequacy of current mortuary and commemorative practice. Because of a policy prohibiting the return of British Empire forces soldiers remains to their homeland, bodies of dead soldiers were buried where they lay or gathered together in the nearest graveyards which a relative might never be able to visit. Often there was no body at all. This circumstance forced a class of memorial that "...combined local commemoration with the treatment of the war dead as a special category" (Tarlow, 1997:113) There was a democratisation of death forced by the enormity of the numbers killed and the manner in which they died. Such a situation encouraged stress on the individual soldier as worthy of commemorative recognition and not just their leaders. This attitude was particularly manifest in the policies of the Imperial War Graves Commission whose leader Sir Fabian Ware fiercely advocated a democratic approach to war cemeteries that was strongly reflected in their settings and architectural design (Longworth, 2003: 14) (Kenyon, 1918).

In Britain the practice of commemorative ceremony coupled with memorials became widespread as a means to honour the dead. This was intended to provide relief for mourning relatives but had a dual purpose of providing home front propaganda (King, 1998: 44). Similarly, the bereavement of the many Australians killed in the war and the absence of their bodies instigated a general mobilisation of commemoration with memorials as their focus and setting. Australian commemoration concentrated securely on Anzac Day rather than Armistice Day or Remembrance Day as a national day of war remembrance. The notion of the Anzac campaign as a defining moment of nationhood began very soon after 1915, capturing the nation's imagination as a point where the values and actions attributed to the Diggers converged with those that the nation wished to present to the world as their own. The celebration of Anzac Day not only provided remembrance of the sacrifice of those who served and embodied an emergent nation but - importantly - affirmed 'Australian' values. In essence the Anzac ceremony was performed within the spirit of consensus about what it was (and sometimes cost) to be Australian.

Ken Inglis (2005) observes there was also the war monument as recruiter. Placed at strategic locations and with patriotic inscriptions they admonished those that wavered in doing their duty (Inglis, 2005: 106). Moreover a majority of war memorials and honour boards in Western Australia recorded the service of all who had served and not just those who had fallen. Distinctively, Australian memorials "honoured those who volunteered" (Richards, 1995b: 273). This practice was uncommon in Europe and dominions of the British Empire including New Zealand (Inglis, 2005: 182). Inglis offers volunteerism and its effect upon communities in pointing out who had been patriotic and – ultimately - who had not as a possible motivation. However, other probable reasons include the converging

ideas of service, sacrifice and egalitarianism providing a ground for the practice.

The first AIF (Australian Imperial Force) was a volunteer army drawn from its citizens rather than a professional standing army, differentiating the Australian soldier from other Empire armies that fought in the Great War and giving it a particular outlook and flavour. Through its socialization, the AIF actively distinguished itself and developed a "...self consciously nationalistic military tradition" away from that of the British Army - primarily a rejection of British regularism for Australian civilianism (Ross, 1985: 44). A manifestation of this difference was its refusal to come under the British Army Act which proscribed harsh treatment to deserters and for cowardice. The fact that the AIF was a volunteer army and the memories of the seemingly unjust treatment of some Australian soldiers under British command during the Boer War helped to settle responsibility for the behaviour of its troops.

The prevalent attitude was that the AIF was an army drawn from the citizenry who believed that "sacrifice was necessary for the cause of humanity and that as men they had no choice but to offer themselves" (Fox, 1936: p1-2). From this picture of the soldier citizen arose the notion that the Digger was not a regularized professional army soldier but a fighting citizen. Within this idea of the citizen soldier was the notion of service - which was a type of sacrifice - giving up the comforts of home to defend the nation's principles and the empire against the German hordes. Highlighting this attitude, the Canning Roads Board, a local authority south of Perth, were moved enough in 1916 to give a send-off party to local AIF volunteers as they were "...prepared to give all to keep our homes intact, and our womenfolk and children inviolate" (Flyer, 1916). In opening the Carlisle Memorial Hall in 1924 Colonel Collett, an influential President of the Western Australian branch of the RSL, noted the patriotism of the men who signed up and their admirable qualities of patience, endurance, courage, gentleness, friendship and self-sacrifice. "Because your men were patriots they volunteered to go aboard and risk their lives so that you and yours might live in peace and comfort." He emphasizes that the memorial hall was to "...also place on record the services of those who went and returned..." as well as to remind "...those that come after us of the many sacrifices by means of which we are enabled to remain in possession of our homes and fair land." (The Listening Post, January 1924: 8). Here, the idea of sacrifice extended to those who had served as well as those who had fallen. In Britain, similar views on the service and sacrifice of ex-service men were expressed by the British Legion who pleaded the case for public consideration of their service. (Remembrance Day-Poppy Day, 1921.) However, in Australia this consideration extended to placing their names on war memorials.

Australian society saw itself reflected in the notion of the Digger. The idea of the Digger representing what was "...best and most Australian in the Australian national character." (Ross, 1985: 27). With both Australian society and the AIF having relatively undifferentiated class systems the AIF was seen as unique and more egalitarian amongst the armies of the world. (Ross, 1985: 56). At least in the eyes of Australians their society was egalitarian and their citizen army reflected that view in many of its military practices.

The attitude of honouring all those who fought affirmed the ideas of egalitarianism as well as inscribing proof of service, the real cost of war, and acted as an affirmation of the qualities of self sacrifice and patriotism that Australian society projected onto the Digger. However not all who volunteered were guaranteed their name on a memorial. The Western

Australian Branch of the RSL sometimes insisted that memorials list only those that had 'served overseas' (The Listening Post, June 1924: 4)

Although there were overlays of the wider considerations of King and Empire that pervaded the Western Australian psyche at the time there was also growing feelings of national and regional identity of which memorials were a particular effect. Even though there were national agendas, memorials had a role other than engendering patriotic or nationalistic feeling. Sarah Tarlow (1997) claims, that in Britain, people were not the dupes of national agendas but the originators of monuments. National sentiment had a part to play but this was something that came from local and personal sponsorship. She indicates that the national forms of commemoration were supported by communities and were not imposed by national agendas (Tarlow, 1997:115). This was also the experience in Australia and New Zealand at the edges of empire. While there were large state memorials built in capital cities the majority were community memorials, often spontaneously instigated in the spirit of the time and circumstance and funded by the community. They materialised as honour boards, monumental memorials, gardens and utilitarian buildings. For instance, Mayor John Rushtons's speech cited previously mentions duty and empire but emphasises the local effects of the war. What is at stake here is the homogeneity of the war experience both in the war itself and the experience of the bereaved at home. Although there is an empire allegiance there is a local emphasis that implies the shared experience of bereavement. While there were broad aspects to the Anzac experience, which was, inextricably tied to a rising nationalism, the Anzac tradition was still rooted at community level.

In his book on Australian war memorials, "Sacred Places", Ken Inglis (2005) recognises that there was a complex layer of war memorial building at regional and community level. Each community negotiated their own understandings within the national story (Inglis, 2005: 9). Bart Ziino (2003) argues that this process went much deeper. Ziino seeks to intensify the notion of community and how "[i]n affirming their values, communities also helped define and mediate transmission of the developing national culture of Anzac". Many communities had "very particular loss and celebration" that undercut national values provoked by the war (Ziino, 2002: 145). Aspects of regional and community identity are aptly illustrated by Graham Seal through describing the history of Anzac Cottage in Mt Hawthorn, Western Australia. This community inspired and constructed memorial to the Anzac spirit reveals "...the grassroots power of Anzac and afford a glimpse of the connections between those local, personal emotions and the larger machinations of the state apparatus".

In Western Australia, local memory and commemoration overlaid the background of agendas for a national cohesion that ceremonies surrounding Anzac projected. Acts of remembrance in the public sphere of an Anzac ceremony were intensely personal, but as Jay Winter points out, they were enacted within a social framework. They were not only private matters, but situated between the extremes of personal grief and the controlling agency of national agendas in the "...palpable, messy activity which produces collective remembrance" (Winter, 2006:139).

Other than individual acts of memory-work such as home shrines, photographs and other memorabilia, personal commemoration at local war memorials were superimposed on the ideas and practice of Anzac - sometimes enriching the meaning of both. At least for some, personal grief could be somewhat assuaged by the idea that their dead relative had – like

Christ – sacrificed themselves for them and the nation. As previously discussed, the idea of sacrifice was a potent concept and although Australian remembrance ceremonies were generally not overtly religious, national discourses promoted the soldier as sacrificed to the freedom of British peoples and this reference was often allied squarely with the sacrifice of Christ on the cross of Cavalry.

Of course there were also many for whom no amount of platitudes on sacrifice could wipe clean the waste of war and their loss (Lukins, 2004) (Scates, 2006). Many women and fathers who had lost lovers or sons, initially appreciative of public and official acknowledgment of their sacrifice, soon felt ignored in commemoration. “Their pain had been denied in being renamed as glory and honour”. (Damousi, 1999: 27). Even amongst the RSL many felt that – in the face of unemployment and disablement – the sacrifice was not appreciated, adding much anger to their remembrance. (The Listening Post February 1922: 9)

Despite these rumblings, a dialogue existed between the memory and loss of loved ones, the grief this entailed and the notion that their deaths were a sacrifice for the freedoms that Australians and British Empire citizens believed they enjoyed. This freedom, which was endangered by the threat of German domination, was not just a function of national and empire propaganda but it was something that Australians felt earnestly. Australians were from British stock and, although there were now cultural differences - which the Australian soldier vigorously celebrated in their contact with other peoples - they were generally keen participants in the empire and their memorials reflected this – at times overtly with phrases like “For King and Country” or “For King and Empire”.

As a focus of community loss and grief, Australian war memorials hold a particular significance as objects in the landscape. They are in a sense de-facto places for the memory of distant places which the users may never see. Memorials are deliberate and evocative mnemonics in a present landscape that evokes and celebrates the past. ‘Empty tombs’ that substitute for the absent body. Above all, as Pierre Nora (1989) argues, places like war memorials are sites of memory (*lieux de mémoire*) whose purpose is to “stop time and block the work of forgetting ... to immortalise death, to materialise the immaterial...” (Nora, 1989: 19)



Fig 1 Victoria Park War Memorial c1918
Courtesy Battye Library of WA History.
53286P

The Victoria Park War Memorial

The Victoria Park memorial was opened with solemn dignity on the 4th August 1917. The date chosen was the third anniversary of the declaration of war between England and Germany. The King's representative, the Governor of Western Australia Sir William Ellision-McCartney, officiated. The ceremony was ordered with dedicatory prayers, poems such as "Sleep comrade, sleep and rest" and patriotic songs such as "Australia's Heroes" (Victoria Park Memorial Garden Souvenir Program, 1917). The marble tablets on the memorial listed the men of the district who had answered the call and a star was placed alongside those who had already died. There were already 482 men listed and the program printed for the occasion boasted that this represented a good enlistment from a total district population of approximately 5000. More were joining weekly. Those that had made the supreme sacrifice were a great inspiration (Victoria Park Memorial Garden Souvenir Program, 1917). Curiously these facts, figures and sentiment are posted under a large photograph showing a view of the district proudly labelled in large letters "Home". This offers interesting questions about local identity. Although there is some pride in membership of the British Empire and the duties that this entailed, it gives a clear impression that this small district at the edge of Empire had a distinct and emotional identity rooted in place.

To date little early documentary evidence has been uncovered on the Victoria Park memorial and since at this time memorial building in Western Australia was in its infancy there are very few memorials to provide a comparative context. The earliest First World War memorial in Western Australia, an obelisk to the fallen, was built in 1916 at Armadale, a town 20kms south of Perth. Documentary records of early Western Australian local First World War memorials are sparse but it is probable that the Victoria Park memorial was only the second monumental memorial completed in the state although there were many honour boards by this time. Most monumental war memorial building in Western Australia occurred between 1919 and 1928 and utilized a standard range of symbolic forms alluding to ancient times and derived from established funerary forms such as obelisks, pillars, tablets and crosses. The majority of local war memorials in Western Australia were obelisks in line with the rest of Australia (Inglis p160).

A significant problem in erecting memorials in Western Australia during the war was the expense for cash strapped communities in a wartime economy. Also, permission needed to be sought from the State War Council to raise funds for a memorial under the *War Precautions Act 1914-1916*. This was to discourage funds needed for the war effort being diverted to non essential projects. It was remarkable that the Victoria Park community was able to construct such an ambitious memorial.

As previously mentioned the memorial was a soldier on top of a plinth. The funds for the construction had been raised by a memorial committee "without too much strain" on money that would have been used to alleviate the suffering of those on active duty. John Rushton - no longer mayor but chair of the fundraising committee - felt that the men would forgive forgoing a few comforts for a memorial erected to their 'glorious memory' (The West Australian, 1917:8). Records uncovered to date do not point to exactly how the funds were obtained although, as in other parts of Australia, New Zealand and Canada, it was women who were actively engaged in fundraising for memorials (Inglis 2005) (Maclean and Phillips, 1990) (Shipley, 1987).

The memorial was placed in a prominent position on land on the Albany Road which was the main route to the south west of the state. The pedestal and statue was sited in a large garden setting on the corner of the Albany and Surbiton Roads and was planned so that the statue was on a diagonal axis in line with the street corner. This facilitated a formal approach to the memorial from a gated corner entrance and also presented it to all traffic moving south along the Albany Road. At the time of its inauguration it was already the instrument of "...causing some to do their duty to their country", and would be "...an incentive to others to do likewise" (The West Australian, 1917:8). The choice of an ordinary soldier for an image was in line with the classlessness of Australian memorials generally but more importantly as an unblemished figure that masked the true horrors of war (Moriarty, 1995: 19). At the ceremony the sculptor Porcelli was congratulated on his fine work and it was considered one of his best works to date although this was probably a cheaper copy of a memorial he had already designed for the Boulder War Memorial in the Eastern Goldfields.⁷



Fig 2. Victoria Park War Memorial. n.d. but probably early 20th century.
Courtesy Victoria Park Library Local History Collection.

Despite all the good intentions of the day the seeds of eventual destruction of the memorial were already sown. Porcelli had used concrete to form the statue, a material that had not been used for sculpture in the state at that time. It was a material that would break down in the future and was the cause of much community angst over the years regarding the rapid weathering of the statue and the rust from the statue's steel reinforcement that emerged to stain and disfigure the names on the tablets below. A second issue also promised problems for the memorial. Six months after the ceremony the Victoria Park Town Council was dissolved and the district came under the control of the much larger Perth City Council. To a large extent this removed control of the memorial to an organisation that was often accused of not having much regard for the district seen by many as a 'cheaper suburb'. There was widespread resentment in the district over the loss of a locally based authority which appears to have simmered until the Town of Victoria Park was reinstated in 1994. Over the years since its unveiling there were reports of vandalism to the statue. Children particularly, were accused of a lack of respect and were blamed for breaking and fracturing parts of the statue and for digging out the lead filling to the names engraved on the tablets (Letter, 1928). Resentment about the inaction on repair and maintenance of the statue by the Perth City Council came to a head in 1940

when ‘the Diggers’ took action and cleaned away the rust stains that were obliterating some of the names on the tablets when the council had failed to do so (Sunday Times, 1940).⁸ Ownership of the memorial was an issue of great concern. The community clearly felt that the statue belonged to them but were unable to prevent vandalism from disaffected youth and did not have the resources or political power to have the memorial properly conserved.

There is no direct explanation for the vandalism to the statue. In the first half of the twentieth century Victoria Park was a working class suburb with a large transitory migrant population. It was often seen as a place for migrants to live before they moved on to a better suburb. The post war period coincided with the Great Depression - unemployment was rife in the suburb and there was Australia wide industrial unrest. The damage to the memorial does not appear to have been politically motivated and was probably the result of boredom and an apparent decline in interest by the public and politicians. This was despite the efforts of the RSL to maintain public concern for ex-servicemen and their efforts to get the Perth City Council to repair the memorial.

While the RSL was a powerful voice, its influence had limits. For instance, the RSL felt that ex-servicemen should be privileged over other candidates for the dwindling pool of work but despite determined lobbying failed to convince the government of this. A few ex-servicemen took the bull by the horns and established small businesses, boldly advertising themselves as ‘returned soldiers’ enterprises to elicit support from their soldierly fraternity and public sympathy. The Western Australian branch of the RSL railed against local, state and commonwealth governments who, once the war was over, appeared to lose interest in returned soldiers and their contribution during the war years. The Perth City Council for instance was chastised severely by the RSL over their refusal to donate any funds towards the Perth War Memorial (completed 1929). This refusal was to the chagrin of many who saw more liberal support for national memorials in other states. (The Listening Post, May 1928: 3). Likewise the State Government came under fire in 1925 for supporting attempts by a section of the community to divert the collected subscriptions for the Perth War Memorial to fund a new hospital wing. (The Listening Post, August 1925: 20)

In spite of these issues there were those for whom the Victoria Park memorial was a direct and healing connection with the relatives they had lost. ‘Lamplighter’ a regular columnist in a local newspaper, while describing the well attended 1930 Anzac Day ceremony at the Victoria Park memorial, reflects on the first ceremonies at the place before Anzac Day was instituted by the Returned Services Association.

...one sorrowing mother conceived the idea of holding a ‘Wreath Day’, when a brief memorial service might be held, and she could lay a wreath at the foot of the monument in lieu of placing it on her dead son’s grave in France. The thought was a beautiful one and the various clergy were of the same mind. On a quiet Sunday afternoon, therefore, without ostentation, but in the true spirit of reverence, the gathering took place, and the mourners present - and their sorrow was then very acute: time has since helped dull the edge of it – went from the service comforted to some extent” (sic) (Swan Leader, 1930:1).

Lamplighter observes that despite the many attending the Anzac Day ceremonies the older residents would not easily forget the more personal significance of Wreath Day and he

notes with sadness the desecration of the memorial flowers and Battalion colours by adolescents who frequented the Park after dark.

Despite the vicissitudes of the memorials physical condition there were direct ritual connections that the community had to the monument. Anzac Days at the memorial appear to have been well attended. Ceremonies were preceded by a march to the gardens by ex-servicemen, widows, scouts, cubs and brownies led by a brass band. A film of the event in 1937 shows a large turnout with the crowd spilling into the streets (Dunn, 1937). The object of the memorial as a mnemonic device does not appear to have suffered from the fading of collective remembrance that Jay Winter and E Sivan say may be an inevitable problem facing memory of wars (Winter and Sivan, 1999). It is clear then, that at a community level the memorial was still a viable focus for remembrance and commemoration despite the community conflicts it represented through its treatment by sections of the community, and its deterioration.

The significance of the memorial to the community is also strongly represented by the Diggers frustration at names being obliterated by rust stains and their action in cleaning it. The symbolism contained in the inscribed names is potent. The grieving widow who suggested 'Wreath Day' previously mentioned was one of many whose only connection with the physical remains of her son may have been the name inscribed on the memorial tablets. "Naming and the evocation of names" was an important part of commemoration after the Great War (Gough, 2004: 436) (Laqueur, 1994) People would (and still do) trace or touch the names with their fingers as if invoking the memory of their lost relatives and as a substitute for the material existence of a body. Susan Stewart (1999) provides possible connections between the physicality of memorials, inscribed names and their commemorative significance.

Stewart explains that touch adds a particular dimension to our experience of objects. "To be in contact with an object means to be moved by it - to have the pressure of its existence bought into a relation with the pressure of our own bodily existence. And this pressure perceived by touch involves an actual change; we are changed and so is the object" In other words, the act of touching is an adjunct to our visual experience of objects. When we look at objects we see 'what it is' and organise our perception of it in a visual way Stewart explains this as a sort of visual touching where the eye 'falls upon' or is 'placed upon' an object. Tactile perception involves 'spatial immediacy' or the perception of an object through the experience of the physical position, texture, temperature and moistness of the object and where we take time to move the object or move around it. There is a temporal aspect to our tactile experience - against the usual immediacy of visual perception. Visual experience might be differentiated from tactile experience by acts of seeing and doing. However there are connections between our visual and tactile impressions of an object through our experience of both. She makes the point that tactile perception involves a particular type of 'remembering' as we touch with sensitive parts of our body, like fingers, so that there is not only a perception of the object but also of the contact itself. She aligns this with myths of animation - bringing to life statues like Pygmalion for instance. Touch, through a complex perceptual transitive process, brings life to objects (Stewart, 1999: 32-33). Thus there can be an intimate connection between a physical object such as a war memorial, the inscribed names it holds and the triggering of the memory or affection of those who experience it. In this regard, also, ordinary objects may be transfigured into significant or sacred objects.

While commemorations continued over the years, by 1943 there were signs that the statue and its pedestal were in great distress and by 1949 it was clear that the statue was dangerous. At this point the Perth City Council adding to the confusion of ownership by asking the local sub-branch of the Returned Services League to remove the memorial (Daily News, 1949). A Victoria Park Progress Association meeting agreed that the memorial was dangerous but quibbled over who was ultimately responsible for the welfare of the memorial. There was resentment that the Council had taken over the memorial in 1918, had failed to maintain it and then had thrust its future back on the local community. The Local Returned and Services League were not in favour of removal of the whole memorial and suggested that the Council might replace the statue with an obelisk on the pedestal. After protracted argument and consultation the council finally agreed to replace the pedestal and statue with a 10 foot high (3.04 metres) cross of sacrifice on the same spot with a plaque dedicating the memorial to those that had died in both wars.⁹ The reasons for the choice of a cross of sacrifice are unknown at this stage but it is obvious that the symbolism employed might have been appropriate only for those that had fallen and as a direct connection to the idea of sacrifice. Crosses as war memorials were not a popular choice in Western Australia, although the crucifix appears applied to other symbolic forms such as cenotaphs or obelisks. Generally such overt religious symbolism was avoided although the ceremonies surrounding them were often religious in tone. Communities tended to find symbolism that did not openly reflect political or religious sensibilities as when they did, there was community conflict (Jeans, 1988: 262) (King, 1998: 206, 262)



Fig 3. Victoria Park War Memorial Cross of Sacrifice - 2006

The tablets containing the names of those that had served and died in the First World War from the first memorial were handed over to the local sub-branch of the Returned and Services League. These tablets were stored until recovered in 1993 from the house of the then President of the Victoria Park RSL sub-branch by the members of the now amalgamated Victoria Park and Queens Park RSL sub-branch who renovated and installed the tablets in a new memorial outside the sub-branch centre in Wharf Street Cannington.¹⁰ The new Victoria Park memorial was used for Anzac and Remembrance Day celebrations but the old problem of ownership returned with its attendant difficulty of proper maintenance and inappropriate use of the gardens. When the Victoria Park Town Council was reinstated in 1994 one of the first actions was to renovate the memorial and gardens and remove the inappropriate presence of an adjacent and aesthetically insalubrious block of toilets that had been installed in the intervening years.

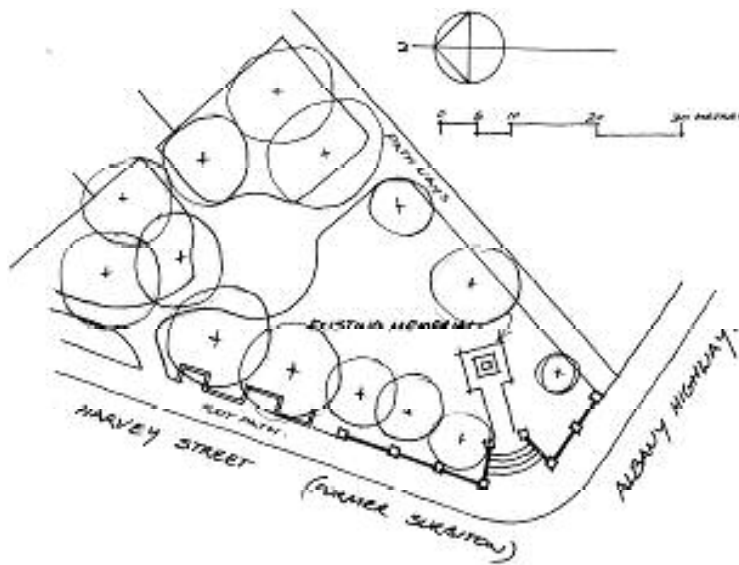


Fig 4. Victoria Park War Memorial Current Site Plan.

Conclusion

The original Victoria Park war memorial had a dual and dichotomous purpose. Its design was meant to recruit and extol on one hand and on the other to mourn the loss of those that had answered this call. The memorial as a call to arms was not a feature of the original speech by Mayor Rushton which emphasised the roll of commemoration. However the memorial conveyed the idea that there are particular duties that are attached to the idea of citizenship. The demeanour of the statue was not only 'on guard' in defence of the empire it was a soldier in action and a call to arms; symbolic of a resoluteness to defend the country and Empire. A close reading of the monument reveals that this resolve is symbolically supported by those names on the pillar under the statue. This recruitment function ended when the war concluded and its purpose then became more concerned with commemoration and healing. As the life of each person listed on the memorial and their memory faded the purpose of the memorial as an object for individual focus lessened and became more communal.



Fig 5. 2005 Anzac Day Ceremony at Victoria Park War Memorial

There was also a didactic meaning to the memorial. It was meant as a sign to future

generations of what it required to be a citizen. The men named on the memorial were an example. Catherine Moriarty (1997) advances this as an important aspect of memorialisation. Children, as the most impressionable members, were often asked to approach the memorial and read the names of the dead at opening ceremonies (Moriarty, 1997: 135). This is echoed in present day local Anzac Day ceremonies at Victoria Park where local school children are asked to address the participants on the meaning of Anzac.

The memorial's meaning as a focus for grieving is signified most aptly by "Wreath Day". As a substitute tomb it had a reciprocal relationship with those that approached it as a focus of grieving. Over its life the memorial was not just a stage setting but integral with people's memory and lives. For example, Wreath Day had great meaning to the mothers of Victoria Park as the later Anzac Day appears to have been to the wider community. A physical and psychological relationship is formed between the memorial and the person laying the wreath against the memorial where the wreath is an offering in return for the sacrifice of the soldier as well as a symbol of renewal and resurrection. Memory is also evoked through the bodily experience of the ceremony and its formal rituals which is shared with others (Hayden, 1999: 145). Commemorative meaning at this level is quite personal but it is also shared (locally and nationally) through the consensus of a ceremony. The form of the memorial as a recognisable memorial object promotes consolation beyond the physicality of the memorial – partly through the experience of ceremony. Commemoration and consolation is made easier by the use of familiar metaphoric forms – in this case a soldier on a pedestal replaced later by a large sculptured cross. These forms are expressive of particular emotions and overlaying commemorative agendas but have the effect of transcending these into a separate and individual consolatory understanding. Both forms used at Victoria Park also act to mask to the real experience of war. The aspect of a flawless soldier or a simple symbolic cross form is important in the healing process. The portrayal of pain and injury was mostly avoided by sculptors. As Catherine Moriarty (1995) points out memorials played a vital role in the omission of pain in representations of war, a necessary aspect if a memorial was to act as a focus of healing (Moriarty 1995: 19). While commentators such as George Mosse (1990) claim that the masking of the reality of war experience by memorials was to justify the nation, the purpose of war and a centrepiece of nationalism, it can be counter claimed that such a view is far too simplistic when applied to local memorials (Mosse, 1990: 7). Memorials and forms were chosen at community level and were not imposed by national agendas nor were such communities the dupes of such strategies as Sarah Tarlow argues (Tarlow, 1999). The experience of community war memorials is common to Australia and New Zealand as well as Great Britain (Inglis 2005) (Maclean and Phillips, 1990). Forms showing the actual reality of war could not have provided relatives with the necessary focus for grieving and would have obstructed intimate connections with their memorials and the memory of loved ones.

Meanings at the Victoria Park memorial also changed when Wreath Day was overtaken by Anzac Day as the main ritual of commemoration. As the columnist 'Lamplighter' cited above observes, Wreath Day emphasised the need for grieving mothers to approach the memorial as a focus of 'their' memory. Anzac Day was focussed more on the returned soldiers and their experiences. The few records available of RSL meetings at Victoria Park show the Victoria Park branch as mostly a male affair with concentration on the soldiers and their welfare. However women were not excluded and were active participants in the branch as auxiliary members. Women were sometimes active in Anzac ceremonies during the 1920s, not merely passive observers or as wreath layers. Women were well aware of their role as 'mourners of the war dead and Anzac Day as a substitute funeral' (Luckins,

2004: 87). But, as Damousi notes, there was an Australia wide tendency for women to be at the forefront of ceremonies as grieving widows in the early 1920s only to be gradually pushed into the background as memory faded and war mythologies grew. (Damousi, 1999: 27).

The setting for the memorial is an important factor in its relationship with the residents of Victoria Park. The memorial was situated in a park which, besides the space for quiet contemplation that Mayor Rushton envisaged, held symbols of regeneration and renewal. Pastoral symbolism was a common feature of First World War memorial settings and it is a practice that remains in the maintenance of established memorials and the design of new ones in Western Australia. This symbolism helps to de-emphasise the circumstances of death but also imparts humanity and the promise of regeneration.

The garden also presents a dramaturgical setting in which mourning and commemorative practices may be supported and played out (Gough, 2002). But the potential of this dramaturgical setting was probably compromised by the original need for recruitment. The form of ritual now used for many Anzac Day ceremonies with its long reverential approach to the memorial with wreaths, was probably not a design consideration for the Victoria Park memorial. It has a very short distance between the entry gates and the base of the statue. This was probably to make sure that the statue was in a prominent position – further back into the garden would have meant that its ability to be seen from the Albany Road and hence its work as a mnemonic of the duties of citizenship would have been reduced. However, this also means that the ceremony of wreath laying has to be carried out in a very short distance. Ceremonies at Victoria Park (past and current) usually mean that dignitaries are seated on the opposite side of the memorial to the wreath laying ceremony as there is little room on the approach side.

As discussed previously, the community's relationship with the soldier memorial was fraught with problems through dispute over responsibility for its maintenance and through vandalism and the statue's gradual deterioration. However despite its poor condition over the years it appears to have never lost its focus as an object of commemoration. Change came after the Second World War when through advanced decay and the pressure to commemorate a new generation of soldiers the soldier statue and his pedestal were replaced by a cross of sacrifice. The new memorial was placed in the exact position of the old one but supported by the same garden landscape. The new memorial overtly referred to the idea of sacrifice and indeed seems to have been patterned on architect Reginald Blomfield's design for a cross of sacrifice for the Imperial War Grave sites throughout the world. It is curious that the old tablets with the names of the First World War servicemen were not included in the new memorial. There are few records of the correspondence between the community and the Perth City Council on the new form of memorial and why it was re-dedicated only to the fallen. There is a distinct tone in surviving records that cost might have been a prime consideration. However once the decision had been made to commemorate the fallen of both wars only, in the available imagery the cross would have emerged as a reasonable choice. As previously mentioned the choice of such overt Christian symbolism is curious but it represents a sharp break in meaning at this place in that individual names were replaced by a generic population of 'fallen'. While the symbolic meaning of the memorial form changed, the use of it as a focus of commemoration did not and the physical arrangement of Anzac Day ceremony remained essentially the same - possibly enhanced by the fact that both sides of the memorial were now the same. Regardless of metaphors, such places trigger memories for people who

have a shared common past and help citizens define their public pasts (Hayden, 1999; 144)

The role of cultural biography in this paper has been to unpack the life of successive war memorials at Victoria Park and show how they can be understood in the context of a their life cycles, entangled with the people who used and abused them. What I have also hoped to show is that, as Marius Quint claims, objects such as memorials, can be read as records that are analogous to memory itself which has "...undergone a mutual evolution with the objects that inform it" (Kwint, 1999: 2)

Notes

¹ The Town Clerk Letter Books and Council Minutes of the time make reference to this hardship, Battye Library of Western Australian History, Acc2912, AN 72..

² This is "Remembering the Wars: Community Meaning Of Western Australia War Memorials" in partnership with the Returned and Services League and the Australian Research Council.

³ Australian and New Zealand Army Corps – coined as ANZAC during the Gallipoli campaign and now known as Anzac.

⁴ Turkey also regards Gallipoli as a great national trial which ultimately led to the emergence of their modern nation.

⁵ Relatively recent events such as the Vietnam War, in which Australia was involved, have ensured that the focus of some Australian memorials for grieving has been maintained.

⁶ A phrase originally offered by Rudyard Kipling.

⁷ Porcelli had been approached to design the Boulder Memorial in 1916 which was unveiled in 1920. This statue would have to be sent to Italy to be cast so would have taken some time to return. In the meantime it appears Porcelli probably re-used the design for the lesser cement statue at Victoria Park.

⁸ 'Digger' is an Australian colloquial term for ex-servicemen – refers particularly to those from the Army.

⁹ The plaque currently reads - "In Remembrance of Victoria Park Citizens who gave their lives in the cause of freedom 1914-1918 – 1939-1945. We will remember them"

¹⁰ Interview with Col. Bob Hill and Manuel Jiminez, 6th February 2005 at the Victoria Park and Queens Park RSL Sub-branch, Wharf St Cannington. This place has also become a 'sacred site' through the burial of the ashes of 14 ex-servicemen in the lawns and garden surrounding the memorial which is located in the sub branch grounds.

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