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The Great War of 1914-1918 was supposed to be the “war to end all wars”. Australia, too, played her part in this global conflict. Andrew Fisher, the newly elected Prime Minister of the new nation Australia, pledged that Australia would “stand beside the mother country to help and defend her to the last man and the last shilling.” Just exactly what that toll in human lives and “shillings” would be could not have been foreseen, yet men in their thousands took up arms.

At the time, this nation’s male population was a little less than three million. 416 000 men (or one in every seven) from all States, city and country, diverse backgrounds and experiences, volunteered for service. By the end of that conflict, 155 000 of them had suffered wounds, nearly 62 000 would die. Many would lie in unknown graves which would be impossible for grieving relatives to visit. The impact of the Great War on the Australian psyche cannot and should not be underestimated. Every community both great and small suffered some degree of loss. There was a need for closure, some process to grieve and honour those that would not return.

Right from the first significant action after the famous Gallipoli landings at ANZAC Cove on 25th April 1915, telegrams, bearing the unwelcome news no family wanted to hear, began being delivered across Australia. The sheer number of casualties (2 000 that first ANZAC Day) only highlighted the impossibility of repatriation of the war dead. After receiving the devastating news somehow the grieving needed to begin. But without a body, families were left attempting to grieve alone. The establishment of war memorials became a tangible way of focussing this grieving in the absence of remains and commemorating the fallen.

In the early 1900’s with the war still underway in Europe, each 25th April. survivors would gather at dawn (the most peaceful time of day and a time reflecting the landing at Gallipoli) to remember their fallen comrades. So

began a traditional event for commemorating lost mates, brothers, fathers, uncles and lovers. The movement for establishing 'sacred sites' gathered momentum, and the annual gathering became embedded into the psyche of our young nation. The monuments were expressed in many ways within a community – honour boards in shire offices, work places, or town halls, or more common, centrally located war memorials or cenotaph.

Charles Bean, Australia's official war historian began developing a more extravagant plan to commemorate the effects of war on a national level. This memorial, when finally opened in 1941 at its present site in Canberra became the national stage for commemorating the sacrifices and suffering each April, or for families to share and commemorate, celebrate and research on a more informal level throughout the year.

In Western Australia, returned service organisations developed a design based on the Tasmanian memorial and described as being 'less pretentious than those constructed in the east, but charming in its simplicity'. The site was chosen due to its resemblance to the cliffs of Gallipoli as remarked upon by a returned Western Australian soldier. The memorial at King's Park was inaugurated on 24th November 1929 in front of approximately 8,000 and took its place as a venue to commemorate the war heroes the following year.

In local communities, the need to mourn and commemorate was driven by local committees who gathered to decide how best to recognise the sacrifices of those within the community. In Tambellup Western Australia, a significant Doric pavilion became the venue for commemoration each 25th April and included the names of the local fallen. In Pinjarra, a small community south of Perth, a simple Celtic cross is regarded to embody 'strength, simplicity and ruggedness'. In Coolgardie, a large boulder was used as a site in the main street to gather and remember.

At the end of the 1980's, interest in Australian war films such as "Breaker Morant" and "Gallipoli" are attributed to a resurgence in commemoration crowds and a greater need to recognise and remember.

In more recent years, generations not touched by the intensity of world wars have continued to understand and connect with their ancestors. The war memorial has increased in popularity each April as the young have reignited the spirit of the ANZAC.

To this day, war memorials and their popularity continue to increase and the practice of gathering at a sacred place in the form of a cenotaph each 25th of April has become part of the Australian way of life. Long after their original purpose of providing closure for grieving families, the practice of honouring those who died on that fateful 25th day of April has evolved into a commemoration for this nation. Each year the war memorial sees a new brand of observer, usually younger, but just as aware of the heroic sacrifices made and with a desire to commemorate and pay respect. A chance to say “Lest we forget”.

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