

Forgetting, sacrifice and trauma in the Western Australian State War Memorial.

Biography

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Built in 1929, the Western Australian State War Memorial was not the grand structure that many wanted and its construction was hindered by the resounding failure of two appeals for funds from an apparently apathetic public. State government and city authorities refused to assist unless the memorial was utilitarian, a stance deeply opposed by a State War Memorial Committee committed to a monument and shrine. However, the familiar debate about utility versus monument in war commemoration not only underlined tensions about the visible public recognition due to returned soldiers and the way that the fallen should be honoured, it coalesced around the problem of how the concepts of sacrifice and trauma generated by the First World War might be memorialised and represented. This article pursues the argument that sacrifice and trauma are crucial to understand why the Committee rejected a utilitarian memorial and persisted with their monument scheme.

Keywords: war commemoration; sacrifice; trauma; forgetting; monumental memorial

Introduction

When the Western Australian State War Memorial was unveiled in November 1929 it had been five years since the first appeal for funds and the journey from idea to reality had been fraught with bitter argument and disappointment for those involved in its production. Perched in a prominent position on the edge of Mount Eliza in Kings Park, the muscular granite obelisk was clearly visible from the river and city of Perth below (see figure 1). Its position was chosen in part because, to some, the cliffs of Mount Eliza resembled the slopes of Ari Burnu at Gallipoli. The unveiling ceremony was conducted with due pomp and reverence and officials of the Returned Sailors Soldiers Imperial League of Australia (RSSILA) and the State War Memorial

Committee addressed seven thousand attendees.¹ Obliquely referring to the poor public response and funding for the monument, Lt General J.J. Talbot Hobbs, a former commander of Australian troops in France and well-regarded architect, claimed that while the memorial was not “of great beauty” it was still a fitting monument to the sacrifice of the men it honoured.² Alluding to the struggle by the RSSILA and the Committee to have a monument built, he said it was a testimony to the “patience and determination of those responsible for its erection”. Premier Philip Collier was also on the podium. Tellingly, he did not speak. Collier had vigorously opposed the monument, advocating a memorial hospital instead, a stance that had considerable public support.

Given the obstacles that the State War Memorial Committee and the RSSILA had faced, it was remarkable that the unveiling happened at all. The failure of a first appeal in 1923 due to public and government disinterest was painful for the RSSILA, reinforcing their belief that ex-servicemen’s sacrifices were being gradually forgotten as the war and its horrors receded. Growing unemployment, the bankruptcy of soldier settlement schemes and perceived unfairness in the repatriation scheme reinforced these anxieties. A second appeal for funding a state war memorial, begun in 1925, became mired in argument over whether the memorial should be a monument or a useful object and, as with first appeal, was hindered by public and government disinterest. Of course Western Australia was not alone among the states with problems of memorial production. Apathy towards state war memorials and the monumental versus utilitarian argument were common. For example, debates over whether Melbourne needed a memorial building or a Shrine of Remembrance surfaced in 1924 and the funding for its erection was hard won.³ Similarly, arguments that a new bridge over the Torrens River was a more fitting memorial for the fallen than a monument followed the campaign for the National Memorial in

Adelaide, and the New South Wales RSSILA plan for a memorial headquarters was thwarted by the Anzac Fellowship of Women⁴ What was different in Western Australia was the depth of the anti-memorial argument, which linked a strong public and government reluctance to fund a monument with doubts about the need for another at state level since so many local memorials had already been built.

While opposition to the obelisk might be seen as a typical contest between utilitarian and monumental commemoration, I argue that there are more profound issues dealing with sacrifice and trauma and in what emotional and material forms these could be (or needed to be) symbolically represented. What is interesting about the early history of this memorial is why there was so much apathy towards a state based memorial and hostility to a monument over a utilitarian structure. It was remarkable that the Committee and the RSSILA were able to prevail in the face of such massive rejection. The doggedness of the Committee was buoyed by its argument that only a monument had the power to represent soldiers' sacrifice. In contrast to other states' experience, funding for the Western Australian State Memorial was to be morally obtained, freely given and not tainted by gambling or lotteries. This ensured a profound and sacred meaning for the memorial and, in the committee's view; it precluded consideration of a 'profane' utilitarian memorial as a symbol of soldier sacrifice.

There has been little study of the Western Australian State War Memorial. Ken Inglis records the arguments about form and the state government opposition but does not dwell on the seriousness of the debate and the intensity of public feeling for a utilitarian memorial. He notes that Labor Premiers such as Collier had a tendency to opt for utilitarian memorials but does not elaborate why this might be the case or that there was strong reasoning on both sides of the utilitarian and monument argument. Inglis perpetuates the error that Talbot Hobbs had designed

the memorials for the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) Divisions in Europe, which were replicated in the Western Australian State War Memorial when funding would not cover a more extravagant design.⁵ The only other academic account of this memorial is a small section in John Taylor's unpublished doctoral thesis on Talbot Hobbs' architecture. Taylor is concerned with Hobbs' role in the memorial's production but does not offer a critique of the lack of funding or the utilitarian versus monument debate.⁶

To understand the debates surrounding this Western Australian memorial it is important to examine the broader commemorative context into which it emerged: an environment of intense memorial building by communities after the First World War and an era of bitterness for many ex-service people who felt that their war sacrifice was insufficiently recognised. Here I provide a necessarily compressed account of the State War Memorial outlining the commemorative politics that embroiled the memorial concept and the disappointing appeal for funds. I find that the importance of local memorials to communities was a core motive for the rejection of a state memorial and that a moral approach to the collection of funds signalled the unacceptability of a utilitarian memorial. Ultimately I argue that sacrifice and trauma are key concepts in understanding why a utilitarian memorial was objectionable to the Committee and the RSSILA and why it persisted with a monumental scheme.

Memorials and Commemoration

As early as 1916, war commemoration in Australia focused on Anzac Day and by 1929 there was a rough consensus on its meaning and form. This included a Dawn Service at sunrise on the morning of the 25th April, followed by a march by the military, veterans and other civilian groups to a significant place for an 11am ceremony. The form of ceremony usually involved

prayers or reflection, the fourth stanza of Robert Laurence Binyon's ode "For the Fallen", a minute silence, the last post and reveille and wreath laying. Western Australia was the first Australian state to declare Anzac Day an official holiday in 1919. From about 1919 the public march and 11 am Anzac Day ceremonies in Perth were conducted at the Esplanade, a large grassed recreation area on the banks of the Swan River. This remained the venue until 2012, after which the venue was dug up for the waterfront development of Elizabeth Quay. In 2013 these ceremonies were conducted in the Supreme Court Gardens adjacent to the new Quay. The State War Memorial has been the venue for the Dawn Service and the Remembrance Day ceremonies and its setting has been enlarged several times to cater to increasingly large attendances (see figure 2).

Figure 2. The Western Australian State War Memorial, Kings Park (source author).

Anzac Day developed as a national day to both mourn and commemorate the war dead. Memorials became the focus of Anzac ceremony in concert with the explosion of commemorative building after the First World War prompting Premier Philip Collier to complain that Western Australia had more war memorials than "the whole of England and Europe."⁷ The context of his exaggerated observation was that from the beginning of the war until 1930, 138 monumental memorials were constructed across a state that had a population of just 400,000. In the same period, 43 utilitarian memorials, 20 green memorials (such as honour avenues) and 176 honour boards were built.⁸ Besides honour boards, which were mostly erected because of embargos on expending money on war memorials during the war, monumental memorials were the preferred form for commemoration. These memorials were erected to honour and remember

the dead of a district, rather than of the state overall. In concert with these aims, memorials were also at a confluence of personal and public memory, loss, trauma, and issues of national identity.⁹ As with memorials across the nation, Western Australian memorials were mostly community affairs with funding from public appeals.

The study of war memorials and commemoration has tended to coalesce around two main streams of thought.¹⁰ The first conceives memorials primarily as places that have been the tool of nation building and political processes. Here memorials are firmly linked to national identity and mythmaking about war and in this context private grief becomes public property. George Mosse, for example, identifies war commemoration as justifying the nation. The memory of war is refashioned to mask its reality and to represent it as the centerpiece of nationalism.¹¹ Another view sees memorials as a popular response to mourning. For instance, Jay Winter writes of war memorials in terms of a search for meaning.¹² Memorials are primarily concerned with the narrative of the trauma of war and loss and are built to assuage grief and to eventually allow people to resume their normal life once grief is exhausted.¹³ This article shares Jenny Edkins' view that it is more helpful to treat the two streams together. It is not constructive to regard commemoration as a reflection of either national or personal aspects, rather, it is more a "question of how to negotiate the necessary relation between the two as commemoration reflects the way that personal and social existence are inseparable".¹⁴

State memorials across Australia were regarded as 'national memorials' and some states included this in their title – for example the Victorian National War Memorial and the South Australian National War Memorial. Inglis argues that these were directed at the nation as a whole and as part of a national movement – tributes from the whole population rather than more localised remembrances.¹⁵ Attempting to control the standard of design of war memorials across

Australia, the Council of the Australian Institutes of Architects produced a booklet in 1923 which showed good taste in memorial design and held that national memorials were distinct as “national in idea” and not of a “person or local event”. Such memorials might embody the same characteristics as a local memorial but stress the collective ideals of a nation such as “pride of race, freedom, justice, courage, honour, bravery, nobility of thought and action, unselfishness, beauty and sacrifice”.¹⁶

The path to a state war memorial, as Inglis points out, was often long and difficult with most built well after the war had ended.¹⁷ Tasmania was the first in 1925, followed by Western Australia (1929), South Australia (1931), Queensland (1932) and New South Wales and Victoria (1934). Only Tasmania and New South Wales quickly gathered public subscriptions for state war memorials in the early years after the First World War. Others had chequered histories before sufficient amounts were raised. For example, public subscriptions for the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance faltered in the late 1920s, partly due to impending economic depression and public fatigue with memorial appeals. It was only recovered by the vigorous efforts of General John Monash who harassed the business community for donations.¹⁸ In New South Wales an appeal was launched in 1916 and by 1919 the subscriptions stood at £60,000. However, argument about its form lasted until 1928. As previously discussed, The New South Wales RSSILA wanted headquarters for itself as a state memorial but finally settled on the Anzac Memorial design.¹⁹ Unlike other states, the South Australian Parliament (including both National and Labor members) promised full funding of a memorial in 1919. Attempts to decide between a bridge over the Torrens River and a monument see-sawed until 1926 when the RSSILA agitated for action and parliament allocated £25,000 for a memorial design by competition.²⁰ Only Queensland and Tasmania quickly resolved the utilitarian versus monument debate in favour of

monuments.²¹ Except for South Australia, no state fully funded a memorial. Most states suffered the same criticism of national memorial proposals – that there were already enough local memorials to cater to war commemoration and another at state level was excessive.²²

Efforts to build a state war memorial emerged at a difficult time for ex-servicemen and the RSSILA developed as a vigorous advocate of the returned serviceman and (a few) servicewomen and their rights. State unemployment and the difficulties of readjustment were the primary problems that were exacerbated by an inadequate repatriation system, damaged people, and the reception of large numbers of British migrants looking for work in a gradually failing economy.²³

The RSSILA was a major player in the efforts to build the memorial. As the largest of the ex-service groups, the WA branch of the RSSILA enjoyed great popularity in the early postwar years before declining in membership over the course of the 1920s, although it retained political influence.²⁴ As Martin Crotty points out, the RSSILA was more than just a political pressure group; it had considerable social and cultural influence. Its views were divergent and it was not necessarily a “prisoner of conservative and capitalist interests”.²⁵ In Crotty’s view the RSSILA was a “unique and powerful force, a distinct movement which defined, represented and promoted the interests and outlooks of a certain group of men – the returned soldiery”.²⁶ The RSSILA represented a particular type of citizen whose credentials for citizenship rendered them an elite. Generally, only those who had ‘returned’ from a field of battle were eligible to join. Members had actively defended democracy and freedom with their lives and that, in their view, placed them at the top of the citizenship ladder with high ideals and considerable moral power. There was a debt to be paid for their defence of ‘other’ citizens and as a moral and masculine elite, they sought to dictate the ways in which sacrifice should be commemorated by controlling the rituals

of Anzac and commemorative forms.²⁷ They campaigned for Anzac Day as a statutory national holiday – a day sacred to the memory of the fallen. RSSILA sub-branches were invariably concerned with local memorial building and, as Stephen Garton observes, the RSSILA was instrumental in establishing an “artistic tyranny of the Anzac myth” which lauded the classical and refused all modernist form, as it could not render noble sacrifice.²⁸

The Shrine

The first but failed attempt to build a state war memorial emerged in 1923 when the State Premier, Sir James Mitchell, held talks with the Mayor of Perth Sir William Lathlain and the RSSILA representative, Lt. General Sir J. J. Talbot Hobbs. At this stage the government appears to have been willing to provide any shortfall in public subscription.²⁹ Unhappily, in April 1924 a less sympathetic Labor government replaced the Nationalist government. Concurrently the Perth mayoral baton passed to an, apparently, equally unsympathetic James T. Frankland. Public interest in this primary scheme was disappointing and only £20 was collected over a period of about two months. Its collapse attracted outraged criticism in the *Listening Post*, the official mouthpiece of the Western Australian RSSILA. Forcefully the *Post* laid blame at the door of the State Government and the Perth City Council, claiming an “unchristian lack of recognition” of soldiers sacrifice. It alleged that, alone among the states, WA would not acknowledge its debt, and that leaders had failed to honour promises to the maimed, crippled and soldiers generally, declaring “[b]etter far it would have been to have perished beneath the German yoke than to have lived to witness the callous indifference to an unpatriotic State!”³⁰ Here the RSSILA sought to firmly establish its credentials as a key advocate for the recognition of soldier sacrifice but was

clearly rattled by the failure of the appeal. It gave an unpleasant feeling that the public was forgetting that its freedom had been purchased with soldiers' lives.

Although anger was directed at politicians, it was the lack of public support that appears to have rankled the RSSILA the most.³¹ By January 1925 enough pressure had built for another attempt and a War Memorial Committee consisting of eminent and representative people including Talbot Hobbs, Anglican Archbishop Charles Riley and Rabbi David Freedman was appointed under the chair of Sir William Lathlain. The birth of this committee was accompanied by press criticisms of the Collier government pointing out that each state of the German Confederation had a memorial as an official tribute to the dead – “Why not WA?”³² Anxious about this new attempt, the RSSILA in Western Australia gauged the situation in other Australian states by asking each what money had been made available for their memorials.³³ Replies from the RSSILA in other states appeared to indicate that they enjoyed better public and government support. Adelaide replied that they had £25,000 available; Brisbane had collected £3000; and Melbourne had been promised £50,000 by the Victorian government.³⁴

As the new campaign evolved, so did rancorous arguments about the form the memorial should take. It was clear from the start that the RSSILA and its supporters, such as Lathlain and Talbot Hobbs, wanted a monument that would “typify everything that the memory holds dear in regard to what the soldiers did”.³⁵ At a public meeting on February 11 1925 the conditions under which the memorial idea would proceed were painfully hammered out with a vigorous opposition seeking a memorial that was utilitarian. Opponents included representatives of the Perth Hospital Board who, with the Soldiers Maimed and Limbless Association, argued for a new hospital wing for the Public Hospital. In his argument the Vice Chairman of the Board, Councillor L.R. Butt, insisted that there were already any amount of obelisks in Australia “and

they serve no useful purpose". Butt continued that there should be a casualty block with a suitable front as a memorial and that "the front could take the place of an obelisk". The Chair of the Hospital Board A.G. Wright reported that boys had been throwing stones at the Subiaco memorial and the Victoria Park memorial had been damaged, concluding, "memorials aroused no emotion, whereas a hospital was something tangible".³⁶ Others such as Eustace Cohen, the president of the Institute of Architects and a former army officer, agreed with Talbot Hobbs that a utilitarian memorial would not be appropriate, as a building would never serve to hallow "the memory of those who had made the great sacrifice".³⁷ The meeting eventually found in favour of a monument by an "overwhelming majority".³⁸ The meeting also decided (on the advice of Rabbi Freedman) that there would be no competition or design until enough funds were collected. This decision meant that Western Australia stood alone among the states in going to public appeal without a memorial design – an action that appears to have adversely affected the appeal. In October 1925 the State Congress of the RSSILA voted against a proposal for a utilitarian memorial and decided on "a monument to perpetuate the memory of our fallen comrades".³⁹ The Labor response to the defeat of a utilitarian memorial scheme was swift and Labor unions almost immediately withdrew their delegate from the War Memorial Committee.⁴⁰

The initial response to appeals for funds for the memorial were promising, but by May 1925 the secretary of the State War Memorial Committee reported that the appeal was slowing.⁴¹ The War Memorial Committee set up office in the Economic Stores on the corner of Hay and William Streets, commissioning a five feet high collection box with a glass front that was designed in the form of the Cenotaph in London. This was placed on the pavement outside the building in June amid posters and a lady attendant to collect donations over five shillings. In August the RSSILA reported with alarm that the collection box was the target of rubbish and

tram tickets. They advised the Committee “the difference of opinion among the public as to whether a State Memorial should be erected to the fallen does not warrant actions of disrespect to the dead and should it continue it would better the box be removed”.⁴² Difference of opinion had been fuelled by the refusal of Premier Collier to “subscribe a penny” to the soldiers’ memorial if it was going to be “a useless pile of stones”. This statement was provocative enough to be reported across the nation.⁴³ Collier qualified his opposition to a monument by saying that public reticence was not due to disrespect for soldiers sacrifice but that it did not want a monument.⁴⁴ Collier might have read the public mood correctly. A report to the War Memorial Committee in September canvassing firms targeted for subscriptions worryingly stated that people were disinterested in the appeal claiming it was already fatigued by memorial appeals and was “disaffected” by the project. Some clearly marked a preference for a “utilitarian object” and that the memorial should “benefit” returned soldiers. Workers at F.H. Faulding and Co complained they had already been “bled white” and that the money should be spent on a simple monument and the balance used for benevolent purposes.⁴⁵

Collier’s opposition to a memorial was not a clear-cut case for Labor Premiers to opt for utilitarian memorials as argued by Inglis.⁴⁶ This tendency had its roots in the labour movement as a whole and its alliance with peace movements after the First World War. Labor’s preference for utilitarian memorials is discussed more fully in the next section but it appears that Labor ideology stressed that an inequitable system of wealth distribution created the climate for wars and that utilitarian memorials promoted peace.⁴⁷ Political and ideological tensions between the Labor government and the leadership of the war memorial committee and the RSSILA simmered. There appears to have been no love lost between the conservative Lathlain and socialist Collier. In 1922 Lathlain had declared that there was no genuine unemployment in

Western Australia, inferring that the unemployed were shirkers – a statement which earned him much criticism despite a later convoluted explanation of what he really meant by the remark.⁴⁸ When Lathlain entered parliament in 1927 Collier remarked that he was the “most reactionary Conservative to enter the Legislative Council”.⁴⁹ Freedman and Hobbs were also viewed with suspicion and were criticised for their opposition to Labor’s 1925 decree that only teachers (and not the RSSILA) were to address schoolchildren on Anzac Day. Both Talbot Hobbs and the RSSILA were labelled warmongers for championing “the pollution of education” with “the thundering oratory of impassioned partisans regarding the glories of war”.⁵⁰ In the view of the *Westralian Worker*, the RSSILA was profoundly “anti-Laborite”.⁵¹ As Bobbie Oliver observes – during and after the war – Western Australia was a “deeply divided society suffering from acute stresses and tensions”.⁵²

By October 1925 only £3000 had been collected from a target of £30,000 and a decision on the memorial form was held over until more money became available.⁵³ In “a final appeal” in the *West Australian* newspaper, Lathlain claimed that the soldiers were owed a “debt of honour” and that the government should help after its seemingly contradictory contribution to the establishment of honor avenues in Kings Park. Western Australia’s response to funding a state war memorial was “less enviable” than the efforts of other states.⁵⁴

Bitterly disappointed, the RSSILA made its feelings known by declaring that soldiers were promised many things when they left for war but were now forgotten. Counter to this, the manager of the Co-op run by the RSSILA said that he saw the distress of returned men close up and that stone and mortar was not the way to help them. He echoed Collier’s assertion that a monument was a “useless edifice”. A memorial “meets only with stony coldness” and a utilitarian memorial would solicit more funds.⁵⁵ Another deputation to the Premier for funding in

February 1926 failed, with Collier disingenuously saying he was “amazed” that they could not raise the money. However it was at that meeting that the deputation forcefully cemented the meaning that this memorial was to bear by pointing out that the money it had collected was “clean” and not the proceeds of raffles, bazaars or horse racing and had been given willingly by donors. This attitude was unusual in Australia, as funding was usually obtained in any way possible, but it was not unique. Mudgee in New South Wales, for instance, refused memorial funding from amusement or gambling, as they did not align with the sacredness of the memorial.⁵⁶ The deputation claimed that ninety percent of soldiers wanted a memorial. “It was the desire to erect a simple sacred shrine to which a mother might repair to remember her son who would not return again to her”. Reinforcing the moral superiority of a monument over a utilitarian building Talbot Hobbs said, “memorial halls had been erected in many parts of the state but a great majority of them were used as dancing halls”.⁵⁷ For the devout Hobbs, the role of a memorial as a moral space could be damaged by its proximity to insalubrious places.⁵⁸

From the outset the RSSILA wanted something permanent and “sacred to soldiers alone”.⁵⁹ The War Memorial Committee was intent on a subscription that was morally obtained. It was to be a shrine and not a profane utilitarian building. It was also something that was to be enduring and not transient. There is no documentation to say why this decision on moral subscriptions was taken, but it is possible that Talbot Hobbs, Archbishop Riley and Rabbi Freedman, as key committee members, may have been influential. Talbot Hobbs was a devout Anglican. Riley and Freedman were very well respected religious leaders and both had seen active service as chaplains in the AIF.

Two months later and disillusioned, the Committee and the RSSILA conceded that it was not able to shift public or government feeling and that it would erect a memorial with the £3000

it had collected. Hobbs suggested the Australian divisional memorials in Europe as a pattern and a design was prepared and accepted.⁶⁰ These had been government funded and built in 1919 to honour the dead of each of the five Australian Imperial Force (AIF) army divisions. However only four obelisks were built as the Second Division AIF funded and erected its own design – an Australian soldier bayoneting an eagle symbolising Germany. Hobbs has been popularly credited with the design of these obelisk memorials – and by insinuation the Western Australian State War Memorial – a fable perpetuated in a number of histories on Australian war memorials.⁶¹ It is not the intention here to outline the sometimes acrimonious debates about the authorship of these memorials but to confirm that Hobbs always publicly claimed that the design was not his own and it is uncertain who can claim this distinction (see figure 3).⁶²

Figure 3. Third Australian Division Memorial, Sailly-le-Sec, France (source author).

A site for the State War Memorial overlooking the Swan River in Kings Park was chosen by Hobbs jointly with the Chair of the Kings Park Board, architect George Temple Poole. It was fortuitous that the President of the Board, Lovekin, was not available at the time because his later reaction to the design and location was decidedly hostile. Opening up several rounds of criticism and letter writing Lovekin lashed out, saying that the monument and location was not suitable and that he was prepared to personally add £2000 to the collected sum to fund a dedicated archway at the entrance to the Park. This was to be part of a grand circus already proposed at the entrance. Keen to stymie the memorial work that was about to start, he instigated a number of delaying measures including restricting the access of the stone masons to the Park and having the memorial plans reviewed by the government Chief Engineer for safety. Stung by criticism of his

obstructive behavior by Archbishop Riley, Lovekin claimed that “the design is meaningless and does not harmonize with its surroundings”, that it was “an undesirable and meaningless structure in our beautiful park”, and that it was wrong for the returned man to have subscribed as it should have come from the people who ought to have decided its form. He declared that the memorial could never be a state memorial as it was a “shrine acceptable to Protestants but not to other creeds”.⁶³ Such a shrine might be acceptable in countries of one faith such as France and Belgium but not in multi faith Australia. This latter argument appears to be directed at the idea of a shrine rather than an obelisk form, to which he objected on aesthetic grounds.

A determined War Memorial Committee eventually sidestepped Lovekin and his objections. Final impassioned pleas by Archbishop Riley obtained enough funds to complete the work, which included a crypt and portico housing inscribed tablets (see figure 4). However, the process had been frustrating for the RSSILA and others, reinforcing their view that recognition of returned soldiers was deficient. Lack of public support and the attempts to divert the funds to a utilitarian structure cut deep and were “a painful subject to touch upon”.⁶⁴ The *Westralian Worker* declared that the lack of public support for the memorial scheme was the shame of those who had made profits out of war industry and refused to honour those who had protected them. However it clarified its position by saying that war memorials would not be needed if wealth were conscripted and profits restricted, as under such a system “there would never be any wars”.⁶⁵

Figure 4 State War Memorial portico and crypt (source author).

Even after construction there were problems in getting the public to accept it as a sacred place

and a memorial to soldier sacrifice. In 1931 it was noted that people were lacking respect by using the memorial as a vantage point to view boat races on the river and that children were clambering all over it and interfering with the wreaths.⁶⁶ The RSSILA agreed to step up public education and for wardens to patrol the place and guard against damage. Wardens later reported that they had little trouble getting the public to remove their hats and refrain from smoking but that children were a real nuisance and recommended railings to keep them away from the obelisk. By 1932 visitors were becoming more respectful but it still needed to be guarded, especially on Anzac Day because of the large numbers of visitors. Access for wreath viewing had to be restricted because of the unruly behavior of youths after the Dawn Service.⁶⁷ Public behaviour underlined perceptual differences between the returned men of the RSSILA, and civilians about the meaning of the memorial. In order that the meanings of sacrifice and sacredness were preserved, behaviour at the memorial needed to be policed.

Remembrance

Two salient questions arise from the early history of the War Memorial and its development. Firstly, why did the appeal fail – were the public really so disinterested and had started to forget or did they simply see another memorial as unnecessary? Secondly, why did the War Memorial Committee and the RSSILA persist in their quest for a memorial in the face of such apparent disinterest and opposition? I argue that at the core of this question is the utilitarian versus monumental debate and the symbolic notion of sacrifice. For monumentalists, utilitarian memorials were ephemeral and could not be sacred to the memory of the fallen. The public and government rejection of a memorial was a trauma that paralleled wartime experience by discounting the sacredness of soldier sacrifice.

Rather than a lack of interest I argue that by 1925 many West Australians felt there were already enough memorials built at the local community level in Western Australia. These were funded locally and did not receive government subsidies. While interest in local memorials was often generated by elite groups such as RSSILA sub branches and local town councils, there was usually a high degree of community involvement in raising funds partly because there were often more personal and intimate reasons to be involved. Such memorials were closer to the families of the fallen. At a number of points during the appeal for funding the State War Memorial, there were signs that the public believed there were already enough memorials and it could not see the need for another at a state level.⁶⁸ This was a feature of most attempts in Australia to build state memorials and it was also a problem internationally. McLeod notes the same difficulty with the Edinburgh Cenotaph (1927) that was also designated a national memorial. Here there was an inability to distinguish between the roles of ‘national’ and ‘local’ leading to claims of duplication. Insistence on a national memorial in the face of a “hurricane” of local ones was labeled “insane” and there was anger that national memorials were diverting funds from local memorials.⁶⁹ Overall, local memorials were easier to conceive, build and were more likely to have successful appeals. They held more emotional attraction and were closer to the homes of the fallen.

The reticence of the Western Australia public to invest in a state memorial does not signal that the public had forgotten soldiers’ sacrifice as painted by the RSSILA and the committee through its constant haranguing of the public that the debt owed to soldiers could only be assuaged with a memorial. The attendances at Anzac Day ceremonies leading up to the completion of the memorial were healthy and in 1929 an estimated 40,000 people attended the Anzac Day service on the Esplanade, so it is unlikely that the public had forgotten or were

largely indifferent to war commemoration as such.⁷⁰ Also, community-based memorials were still being constructed in the years of the appeal so it appears that the public at large was still mourning and interested in monumental commemoration. From a close reading of the documentation available it is probable that the public was not necessarily enamored with utilitarian memorials, as a general preference, but that in this instance it could not see the necessity for another monument at the state level. Another likely factor is that Western Australia did not hold a competition for the memorial design (as other states did) and a site had not been selected. There was no illustrated design to inspire public feeling or for the public to help imagine a completed memorial. This was a key feature of the process in other states such as Victoria where the design for the Shrine of Remembrance evoked both revulsion and inspiration; whatever people thought of the design, it could clearly be imagined.⁷¹

At the heart of the problems faced by the RSSILA and War Memorial Committee was the utilitarian versus monument debate. One argument for a utilitarian memorial was that a useful memorial to the living was an appropriate way to honour the dead. There was reasoning that ‘living memorials’ celebrated the achievement of those who died for freedom though the benefit of the living.⁷² If democracy was living and working together fruitfully, then utilitarian memorials provided the places to bring people together and build peace after war. In this argument whole cities might be memorials to those that had sacrificed themselves to freedom.⁷³ This reasoning paralleled Labor attitudes to memorialisation, although its views were by no means homogeneous. As previously discussed, Labor saw itself aligned with the forces for peace and clearly stated that it alone (amongst the political parties, public groups such as the RSSLIA and the church) had “devoted itself to the problem of preserving peace”.⁷⁴ Cenotaphs and monuments were inadequate to memorialise those that had been sacrificed for peace. The only

true memorial was “the dedication of our lives in honest endeavor to keep faith with those who sleep where poppies grow in Flanders fields. They died for peace, therefore we ought to live and labour”.⁷⁵ In the Labor view, monuments were inadequate to memorialise those sacrificed for peace. Indeed monuments, tended by the RSSILA, cemented the rituals of Anzac and its conservative ideology. While the RSSILA clearly emphasised the cost of war in its Anzac Day speeches, the Labor movement tended to discount this as “camouflage” for the “truth that war is a hideous thing”.⁷⁶ The Labor preference for utilitarian memorials appears to be as much about denying any symbolic promotion of war as it was about providing a utility for peaceful endeavour.

However a utilitarian object or place had to overcome objections that it did not have sacred meaning. It needed to have a moral purpose and overcome its profane nature. Arguments for a fountain memorial in New Zealand included the fact that pure water would quench the thirst of men who would otherwise gravitate to the pub.⁷⁷ Clock towers essentially combined the monumental with the imagery of time and remembrance. Swimming baths could claim to promote the virtue of cleanliness. Memorial libraries might promote learning as a moral pursuit. Parks and plantings fared better as there were direct associations with memory, regeneration (resurrection) and other alignments between nature and death. However, for many these associations were not strong enough and in the contest to symbolise higher spiritual feelings, the monumental held most sway.

There were also political reasons; a focus on utilitarian memorials such as halls, libraries and hospitals provided much-needed infrastructure for cash strapped regions. People who worked closely with damaged ex-service people could argue that hospitals dedicated to the health of ex-service people were a fitting memorial to the fallen, although the alternative argument was that

the government should be providing these facilities anyway. Counter to the utilitarian argument and germane to why the RSSILA and War Memorial Committee doggedly stuck to the monument line was the argument that utilitarian memorials were ephemeral and could not hold the symbolic notion of sacrifice.

Sacrifice

Sacrifice is a key element of war commemoration. The idea that the fallen died ‘for us’ is embedded in war remembrance ritual and parallel Christian ideals corresponding to the crucifixion of Christ where, through his sacrifice, the living are redeemed. Here the notion of sacrifice plays a significant part in countering the argument that lives were wasted. Rowlands uses an anthropological explanation of sacrifice to a god as similar to sacrifice to the nation where a life is given for the greater good. “Sacrifice justifies the taking of significant forms of life for an ulterior symbolic purpose”.⁷⁸ The dead – in this case the young of a nation – are cleansed of weakness and moral stains and their death is a dedication to the nation. “Society by surrendering its most valued quality expiates its sin and cleanses itself as an act of renewal”.⁷⁹ The salient point here is that a memorial and its accompanying rituals must justify slaughter for the greater good. While there is a ready amnesia about violent death in memorial design and narratives, it was unthinkable that the deaths were not valued. Grief can be assuaged if the deaths were meaningful. Here, the mythologies of the nation helped to cloak the sacrifice as worthy. For the monumentalists, utilitarian memorials – because of their profane everyday lives – could not hold the sacred symbolism necessary to embody sacrifice nor would it necessarily hold moral spaces suitable for commemorative ritual. The debt is to the dead and not the living who – through symbolic rituals and representations – must expiate their guilt. This goes some way to

explaining why the proponents of the monument were so insistent that the memorial come from the people (the nation) and not the soldiers themselves (the sacrificed) and why only the moral and sacred place of a memorial shrine would suffice.

The obelisk form of the State War Memorial was almost accidental, but it still embodied – through its ancient shape and the applied cross and crusader sword – the notions of longevity and sacrifice. The memorial was a moral thing, free from the corrupting influences of an appeal tainted with gambling and the profane use of an everyday utilitarian object. That the appeal failed despite sustained and frantic entreaties to public decency was a trauma that became embedded deep in the memorial itself.

Trauma

Since utilitarian memorials could, in time, be demolished or have their name changed, they could not hold memory over time and their purpose could be forgotten. As Paul Ricour observes, forgetting is a failure of memory, an attack on its reliability, “a weakness, a lacuna”.⁸⁰ A memorial might struggle against forgetting – but forgetting was a fatally inherent aspect of utilitarian memorials and their use could be seen as a neglect of remembrance and therefore a breach of trust to the sacrificed and the trauma of the living.

Margaret Iverson sees war memorials as fetishes that cannot articulate trauma but which are still haunted by the residual knowledge of their origins and as such can still “mark a site of deep psychic pain”.⁸¹ Here the question of the possible healing properties of memorials arises, especially in relation to loss and trauma. While some doubt the healing aspect of war memorials as espoused by Jay Winter, recent studies demonstrate the capacity of memorials to alleviate post-traumatic stress induced by war, even if the trauma cannot be physically represented as

Iverson suggests.⁸² Trauma as experienced by soldiers or others who have faced harrowing incidents remains unarticulated. It is outside the normal order of things because there is no language available to express their experience. Part of the trauma for those in battle is the breach of trust on the part of those who have placed them in danger in the first place – the betrayal by the social and political order.⁸³ Since there is no language available to articulate such trauma and since the social order is produced in symbolic terms through languages there is no place for trauma save being divorced from the social order in what is termed the ‘real’.⁸⁴ In such a situation “completeness and closure is impossible” because trauma cannot be symbolised. In this context there is little left to describe trauma in war memorials save the “language of the very social and political order that was responsible [for the trauma] in the first place.”⁸⁵ Edkins maintains that trauma is outside the capacity of war memorials to describe and that they therefore continually return to the traditional and established language of the prevailing political and social order. While she sees that memorials do not have the capacity to represent trauma, some do have the ability to “encircle” it. By this she means that some memorials are so devoid of political and ideological statement and become such popular places of reverence that they “encircle” the trauma allowing it to be – at the very least – recognised. Edwin Lutyen’s London Cenotaph (1920) and Maya Lin’s Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington (1988) are offered as examples of memorials that encircle by avoiding political comment and spaces that cannot be symbolised.⁸⁶ However, I would argue that traditional memorials, even if tainted by political and commemorative ideologies, might also have the capability to encircle trauma by their capacity to symbolise sacrifice and give it reason. The Western Australian State War memorial may be such an example where its building also served as a cover to the wounds of perceived traumas endured by its constructors through the apparent public rejection of soldiers’ sacrifice.

Trauma is derived from the Greek meaning ‘wound’, although in the context of this discussion it may mean a psychological wound as much as a physical one and sometimes the two may also be related. The wound of a traumatic memory “relates to the person’s initial unconscious response to the traumatic event”.⁸⁷ But the trauma rarely manifests itself or is even acknowledged at the time. In Michael Herr’s oft quoted and expressive perception on war trauma “the problem was that you didn’t always know what you were seeing until later, maybe years later, that a lot of it never made it in at all, it just stayed stored there in your eyes”.⁸⁸ For men (and some women) of the RSSILA there was not only the trauma of war experience but also the trauma of public and government rejection. While other states also endured problems of funding, conflict and apathy the mood in Western Australia was more pronounced through advertised government opposition and apparent community preference for a utilitarian memorial. The disparaging “a useless pile of stones” resonated with the unthinkable – that lives were wasted and the sacrifice worthless – a situation that rendered trauma insignificant. For the RSSILA and the Committee this would have been intolerable. Of course Collier and the public did not actually believe that sacrifices had been worthless, but in terms of the symbolic aspects of sacrifice and trauma only a monument could be a dedicated emblematic object with the power to give reason to sacrifice and to cover wounds.

Conclusion

An important question to ask at this juncture is was the Western Australian experience really any different from other states? As we have seen, most states experienced fatigue in their appeals and most saw various arguments about the form and siting of a memorial. However it is the high degree of opposition to the memorial and the strength of the pro-utilitarian memorial camp that is particular to Western Australia. In most states, objection to a monument in favour of a utilitarian

memorial was overcome with a modicum of agreement and substantial amounts of money were eventually raised for a memorial. In Western Australia the poor collection was partly due to the high number of local memorials already built, appeal fatigue and a preference for a hospital by both public and government. Collier – out of other Labor premiers – was very vocal and adamant about the uselessness of a monument. Not all Labor governments held this view. For example under Premier Lang, the New South Wales government paid for the Martin Place Cenotaph. There was a clear political hostility between the War Memorial Committee and Collier's government that probably did not help the memorial cause but it was made clear to the Committee that while the public did care about commemoration it was not going to match other states performance in an appeal for a monument. While individuals such as Lovekin actively tried to prevent the memorial being built, it was the moral aspects of the appeal that appear to stand well apart from the experience of other states.

At stake was the way in which the symbolic aspects of sacrifice could be represented. What would prevail – a mnemonic device, such as a monument, that symbolised sacrifice, or a useful structure that was emblematic of the freedoms won by those sacrifices?

The important thing here is that the State War Memorial 'had' to be a moral and sacred place. Funding eschewed any money tainted with gambling or other morally risky enterprises and, I would argue, it was this decision that firmly cemented the direction of the design of a shrine/monument and was a reason why a utilitarian memorial could not be countenanced. The rejection of a monument by both the government and the public was a trauma to the RSSILA and the War Memorial Committee but it cemented their resolve to provide a monument embodying the sacrifice of the fallen – something that utilitarian memorials were (in their assessment) incapable of symbolising. The rejection of a monument, signalled by the failure of the appeal,

was in itself a trauma and presented the unbearable notion that sacrifice was worthless. In this context, pressing ahead with a memorial countered that and made safe the meanings of sacrifice and bound the wounds of trauma.

Endnotes

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- 1 The RSSILA eventually became the Returned Services League of Australia (RSL) in 1965. It was sometimes referred to by the short title of 'RSL' before that time. In 1990 it change name to the Returned and Services League of Australia.
 2. *West Australian*, November 25, 1929, 19.
 3. Bruce Scates, *A Place to Remember: A History of the Shrine of Remembrance* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 30.
 - 4 Ken Inglis, *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001), 294 and 303.
 - 5 Inglis, *Sacred Places*, 288.
 - 6 John Taylor, "Joseph John Talbot Hobbs (1864-1938) and his Australian-English Architecture" (PhD Thesis, University of Western Australia, 2009), 269-274.
 7. *Register*, August 15, 1925, 15.
 8. John Stephens, Graham Seal, and Andrea Witcomb, "Remembering the Wars: Community Significance of Western Australian War Memorials", (Western Australia: Australia Research Council and the Returned and Services League WA Branch, 2006).
 9. Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 78-116; Alex King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain: Symbolism and Politics of Remembrance* (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 1-17; Nigel Hunt, *Memory War and Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 172-85; Inglis, *Sacred Places*, 258-69.
 10. Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 92; Jenny Macleod, "Memorials and Location: Local Versus National Identity and the Scottish National War Memorial," *Scottish Historical Review* 89.1 (2010): 73-95.
 11. George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 7 and 105.
 12. Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven USA: Yale University Press, 2006), 139.
 13. James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 13; Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, 92.
 14. Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, 94.
 15. Inglis, *Sacred Places*, 281.
 16. "National War Memorials," (Federal Council of Australian Institutes of Architects, 1923), 2.
 17. Inglis, *Sacred Places*, 280.
 18. Scates, *A Place to Remember*, 78.
 19. Inglis, *Sacred Places*, 303.
 20. Donald Richardson, *The National War Memorial Adelaide: A Historical Study* (Adelaide: D Richardson, 1998), 6.; Inglis, *Sacred Places*, 294.
 21. Inglis, *Sacred Places*, 285 and 290.
 22. Inglis, *Sacred Places*, 281.
 23. Bobbie Oliver, *War and Peace in Western Australia: The Social and Political Impact of the Great War 1914-1926* (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 1995), 19.
 24. Oliver, *War and Peace*, 281.
 25. Martin Crotty, "The Anzac Citizen: Towards a History of the RSL," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 53.2 (2007): 184.

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26. Crotty, "The Anzac Citizen," 186.
 27. Stephen Garton, *The Cost of War: Australians Return* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1996), 53–55.
 28. Garton, *The Cost of War*, 45.
 29. Oliver, *War and Peace*, 281.
 30. *Listening Post*, April 20, 1923, 1.
 31. *Listening Post*, April 20, 1923, 1.
 32. *Western Mail*, February 5, 1925, 17.
 33. Telegrams to Mena/ Brisbane, Mena/ Adelaide, Mona/ Sydney and Helles/Melbourne. February 9, 1925, *State War Memorial 1924-1932*, RSL Archive, Perth.
 34. Telegrams received from Adelaide, February 10, 1925; Brisbane, February 10, 1925; Melbourne, February 10, 1925, *State War Memorial 1924-1932*, RSL Archive, Perth.
 35. *West Australian*, February 12, 1925, 7.
 36. *West Australian*, February 12, 1925, 7.
 37. *West Australian*, February 12, 1925, 7.
 38. *West Australian*, February 12, 1925, 7.
 39. *Listening Post*, October 3, 1925, 20.
 40. *West Australian*, August 15, 1925, 16.
 41. "Secretary's Report", May 22, 1925, *State War Memorial 1924-1932*, RSL Archive, Perth.
 42. Letter from RSL Perth to State Branch, August 21, 1925, *State War Memorial 1924-1932*, RSL Archive, Perth.
 43. *West Australian*, August 15, 1925, 16; *The Register*, August 15, 1925, 15; *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 1 1925, 7. *The Brisbane Courier*, August 18, 1925, 6.
 44. *West Australian*, August 15, 1925, 16.
 45. "Report of Canvas of Business Houses Previously Addressed", September 15, 1925, *State War Memorial 1924-1932*, RSL Archive, Perth.
 46. Inglis, *Sacred Places*, 282.
 47. Oliver, *War and Peace*, 139.
 48. *Daily News*, February 3, 1922, 8.
 49. *Westralian Worker*, March 20, 1925, 3.
 50. *Westralian Worker*, March 20, 1925, 5.
 51. *Westralian Worker*, March 20, 1925, 5.
 52. Oliver, *War and Peace*, 295.
 53. "State War Memorial Committee Minutes", October 23, 1925, *State War Memorial Committee Minutes*, RSL Archive, Perth.
 54. *West Australian*, December 23, 1925, 9.
 55. *Sunday Times*, September 6, 1925, in *State War Memorial 1924-1932*, RSL Archive, Perth.
 56. Inglis, *Sacred Places*, 130.
 57. *West Australian*, February 6, 1926, 12.
 58. For instance, in 1920, there were moral objections to the placement of the Bassendean War Memorial adjacent to "...dances, picture shows and other entertainments" see *The Swan Express*, July, 1920.
 59. *West Australian*, February 6, 1926, 12.
 60. "Final report from the State War memorial Committee", November 14, 1932, *State War Memorial 1924-1932*. RSL Archive, Perth.
 61. Oline Richards, "The Empty Tomb: Memorials to World War II in Western Australia" in *On the Homefront: Western Australia and World War Two*, ed. Jenny Gregory (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1995), 278; Ken Inglis, *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001), 299.
 62. *British-Australasian*, October 16, 1919, 14; *West Australian*, November 8, 1922, 9.
 63. Letter from Arthur Lovekin to Archbishop Charles Riley, October 2, 1927, *State War Memorial 1924-1932*, RSL Archive, Perth.
 64. "Presidents Report", *Returned Soldiers' League WA Branch (Incorporated) Tenth Annual Congress*, 1926.
 65. *Westralian Worker*, February 12, 1926, 4.
 66. Colonel Herbert Collett, "Report on the State War Memorial", February 17, 1931, *State War Memorial 1924-1932*, RSL Archive, Perth.
 67. Letter from Talbot Hobbs to State RSL, September 23, 1932, *State War Memorial 1924-1932*. RSL Archive, Perth.

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68. *Sunday Times*, September 6, 1925, 5; "Report of Canvas of Business Houses Previously Addressed", September 15 1925, *State War Memorial 1924-1932*, RSL Archive, Perth; "Secretary State War Memorial Committee Report", September 25, 1925, *State War Memorial 1924-1932*, RSL Archive, Perth.
69. Macleod, "Memorials and Location", 87.
70. *The Register*, April 26 1929, 15. The population of Perth at the time was 200,000 and the state 400,000 (Secession 1929-1939, Identity 1929, Library Service of Western Australia http://www.slwa.wa.gov.au/federation/sec/116_iden.htm accessed April 29, 2013). The attendance figure of 40,000 appears high but 1929 was also the centenary of Western Australia with many attracting celebratory events. 40,000 was also reported for the 1933 Anzac Day commemorations in Perth, *Western Mail*, May 4, 1933, 37.
71. Scates, *A Place to Remember*, 22-35.
72. Kenneth Reid, "Memorials? Yes - but No Monuments", *Pencil Points*, 25 (1944): 35.
73. Grant Hastings, "War Memorials", *The American City*, 58 (1944): 35-36.
74. *Westralian Worker*, April 24, 1925, 3.
75. *Westralian Worker*, April 29, 1927, 6.
76. *Westralian Worker*, March 20 1925, 5.
77. Chris Maclean and Jock Phillips, *The Sorrow and the Pride: New Zealand War Memorials* (Wellington: Historical Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1990), 63.
78. Michael Rowlands, "Remembering to Forget: Sublimation as Sacrifice in War Memorials", in *The Art of Forgetting*, eds. Adrian Forty and Susanne Kuchler, (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 131.
79. Rowlands, "Remembering to Forget", 134.
80. Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 413.
81. Margaret Inversen, *Beyond Pleasure; Freud, Lacan, Bathes* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 95.
82. Both Inglis and Jalland doubt the healing potential of war memorials (Inglis, *Sacred Places*, 223; Pat Jalland, *Changing Ways of Death in Twentieth Century Australia: War, Medicine and the Funeral Business* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2006), 96). However, recent studies on the Vietnam Veterans War Memorial in Washington show that this memorial has beneficial effects. Nicholas Watkins, Frances Cole, and Sue Weidemann, "The War Memorial as Healing Environment: The Psychological Effect of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on Vietnam War Combat Veterans' Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Symptoms", *Environment and Behaviour*, 42.1 (2010): 351-375.
83. Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, 8.
84. Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, 12.
85. Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, 8.
86. Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, 15-17.
87. Nigel C Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 7.
88. Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1978), 20.