

# Australians and their Anglo Boer War memorials

(This paper is dedicated to Steve Watt, who had been assisting me with a number of photographs that he had sourced in Australia and we had had a number of discussions about the memorials in Australia and Tasmania in the past couple of months).

## By Pam McFadden

Pam McFadden grew up in northern KwaZulu-Natal and her fascination with the military history and stories of the area began at an early age. She has done considerable research into the military conflicts fought in the vicinity of Dundee and as a registered tourist guide regularly conducts tours around these battlefields. Her activities in promoting the battlefields of the region and establishing the Battlefields Route in 1989, has resulted in greater public awareness of the historical importance of these sites, as have her presentations within South Africa and internationally. As Curator of Talana Museum since 1983 she has been responsible for the development of this unique museum and battlefield, which is acknowledged as being one of the finest in South Africa.

## Abstract

Since my first visit to Australia some years ago I have been fascinated by the interest I found in that country with the Anglo Boer War. This war was the first time that Australians served as a nation and to this day the interest in the Anglo Boer War is widespread and deep rooted. Museum exhibits and memorials abound in the country and specific events are commemorated annually. The main focus of this paper is on some of the memorials in Australia and Tasmania. Both original and new ones that have been added over the years, especially at the time of the centenary. The first public talk that I gave in Kalgoorlie on the Australian gold fields had the venue moved from the museum to the local town hall because of the response. Further visits led to meetings with members of the military history society in Western Australia, visits to museums and memorials in Perth, Albany, Sydney, Melbourne, Ballarat and lots of small villages, and connections with a number of historians, both amateur and professional, which continue to this day. I have elected to look at memorials that have a specific history, are unique or have an unusual reference to the war and events. There are very many more all over the country in churches, halls, schools, in town parks and other places.

## Paper / notes

Australia has defined its national identity by the wars in which Australian troops served and were identified as Australians. Thus war memorials are a very important part of a national identity for Australia. The National War Memorial in Canberra remembers Australia's involvement in all military conflicts including the Anglo-Boer War. The Menin Gate Lions at the main entrance were gifted to Australia in 1936. During the First World War commemorations, 62 000 red poppies were



*National War Museum Canberra*

fixed between the names, on the marble plaques, all along the corridors, to remember each Australian who lost their lives in this war. It looked as though the memorial was crying red tears.

## But what about the Anglo Boer War?

This was the first war in which Australian colonial soldiers fought and died for a united country. It was a pivotal moment in Australia's history, a time of growing national consciousness as Australia was declaring its own nationhood. In 1901 the 6 Australian colonies became the new Australian Commonwealth. For the first time volunteers from Australia and New Zealand fought together in an overseas war. Many Australians joined British or South African colonial units in South Africa: some were already in South Africa when the war broke out; others either made their own way out or joined local units after their enlistment in an Australian contingent ended. Recruiting was also done in Australia for units which already existed in South Africa

The construction of memorials was a focus for family members and regiments. As the Australian troops who fought in the Boer War were buried where they died, their immediate families in Australia had nowhere to grieve. These memorials also served as a demonstration of their loyalty to the British Empire. There were so many local war memorials scattered around Melbourne and its suburbs, frequently with a statue of a soldier on top of them, that a law was passed in 1916 to control their numbers.

## A brief look at Australia's involvement in the Anglo Boer War.

- More than 60 Australian nurses came to South Africa, either provided by government or by privately raised funds or even at their own expense. The



Nurses memorial tablet

nurses worked in General and Stationary hospitals, on hospital trains and on hospital ships transporting convalescent soldiers back to the UK. Later in the war some of these Australian nurses also nursed in the SA civilian concentration camps. There is a memorial, in Sydney, unveiled in 1980 to the nurses who served in South Africa. There is

also one in Albany. This remembers the nurses who served in the Great War and also the Anglo Boer War.

- Four states, NSW, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia sent what could be described as official contingents. Albany was the harbour from which all the ships set sail for South Africa and from which the troops sailed for Gallipoli in the Great War.

16,175 **Australians** served in South Africa and another estimated 10,000 enlisted as individuals in Imperial units

251 men were **killed** in action, 267 **died** of disease, 43 were missing in action and 735 were wounded

Approximately 16 000 horses were transported to South Africa from Australia. A memorial to the horses in Ballarat, was sculpted as a result of the losses of horses in the First World War, and also reflects the losses in the Anglo Boer War.

- Six Australian men were awarded the Victoria Cross, in all instances for rescuing wounded or dismounted companions under heavy fire.

Neville Reginald HOWSE. NSW Army Medical Corps. Vredefoord. 24 July 1900.

Trooper John Hutton BISDEE. 1<sup>st</sup> Tasmanian Imperial Bushmen. Warmbaths (north of Pretoria). 01 September 1900. (1<sup>st</sup> Australian born man to be awarded VC)

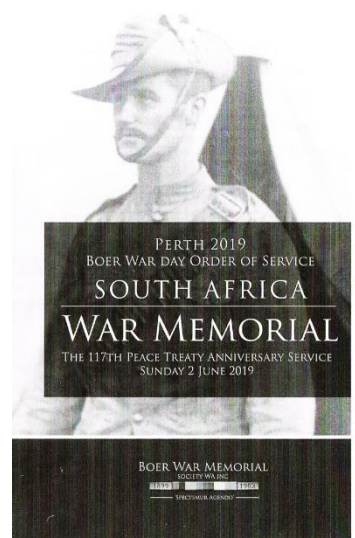
Lieutenant Guy WYLLY. 1<sup>st</sup> Tasmanian Imperial Bushmen. Same action as Bisdee.

Lieutenant Frederick William BELL. West Australian MI. Brakpan. 16 May 1901.

Lieutenant Leslie Cecil MAYGER. Victorian Mounted Rifles. Geelhoutboom. 23 November 1901.

James Rogers. South African Constabulary.

Australia has an annual commemorative day and memorial services are held in numerous centres in Australia and Tasmania at the end of May and in June each year. The **Boer War Day** 2019 commemorated all the Australians that served and this year, in particular, they paid tribute to the



doctors and nurses who treated the sick and wounded. These services were held in Brisbane, Sunday 26 May, Canberra Sunday 26 May, Melbourne Sunday 26 May, Hobart Sunday 2 June Perth Sunday 2 June, Launceston Sunday 16 June and Sydney Sunday 26 May. Why is there no official Anglo Boer War Memorial Day in South Africa? This was a war which had a significant impact on shaping our nation and which carried long memories and traditions into our social and political development.

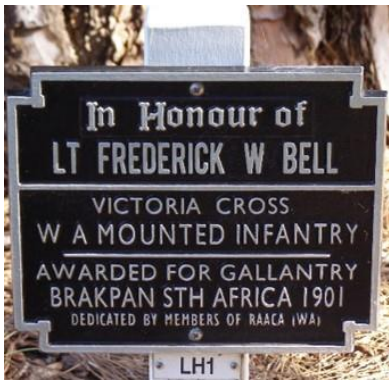
### **Kings Park, Perth.**

This memorial, the first to be erected in the park, commemorates Western Australian soldiers killed in the Anglo Boer War. The foundation stone for the memorial was laid by the Duke of Cornwall and York in July 1901, while in Australia to open the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia. The Krupp field gun, which forms part of the memorial, was captured at Bothaville and presented to Australia, by the British Government in 1906. The original life size bronze sculpture of an Australian soldier, on the memorial, deteriorated rapidly and was replaced. The new memorial statue was unveiled by the Governor of Western Australia on the 23rd May 1915. It is made of solid hammered copper and at the time cost £450. Half of the cost of the statue had been subscribed by public subscription and the rest by Government subsidy. The 6 bronze plaques, around the memorial, depict various engagements in South Africa in which the Australian forces were involved. The trees planted near this Memorial commemorate committee members of the Imperial Veteran's Association and were planted between 1933 and 1944.



At the annual memorial service this year John Sweetman, of the Western Australia Military History Society laid a wreath on behalf of "The Lalapanzi Heritage Trust and Boer War Museum, Louis Trichardt. On behalf of the Soutpansberg and Pietersburg district of the Limpopo Province South Africa. Erstwhile neighbours and friends, lay this wreath in remembrance and honour of those who died in the Pietersburg Concentration camp, during the Anglo Boer War of 1899-1902."





*One of the memorial plaques in the garden around the memorial.*

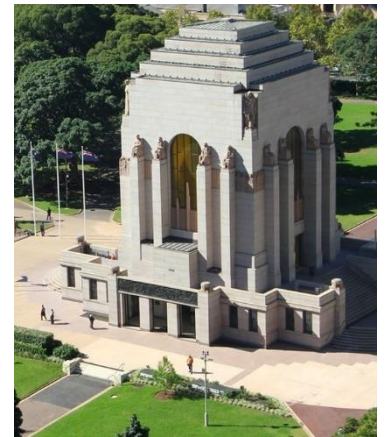


*Plaques on the Kings Park memorial.*

**Sydney** has a number of memorials in different parts of the city. The national ANZAC memorial in Hyde Park in the centre of Sydney has this line of plaques inserted into the floor. What I found fascinating about this memorial – at 11o'clock everyday there is a 1 minute silence around the memorial. It is extremely moving and creates awareness. For a couple of days I watched people stop in the park and observe that 1 minute silence.



*In the floor of this National ANZAC Memorial is this insert with names of the battles in South Africa in which Australians were involved.*





The memorial in Parramatta suburb of Sydney, was erected to commemorate the Volunteer Lancers who were the first Australian troops to arrive in South Africa in 1899. It was erected in 1904 using 4 Doric columns and other parts of the original Parramatta Courthouse from 1837. In the centre the broken column signifies “life broken short” “To remember the lives lost in the war.”

The newest memorial was unveiled in **Canberra** in 2017 - it pays tribute to both the men and the horses that suffered the privations of war. It recognises that all Australian troops in the Boer War were mounted men, were dependent on horses to tow their ambulances, artillery and supply wagons, and to match the movement of the highly mobile Boers. It recalls their endurance and sacrifice. The walls grow out of the natural landscape to frame the action and to tell the Australian stories: an outline of Australians' part in the war, a verse from Banjo Paterson, and extracts from a soldier's letters home. The front wall allows space for wreath and poppy tributes. Its six parts are a reminder of the Federation which united the six colonies into the Australian nation during the Boer War.



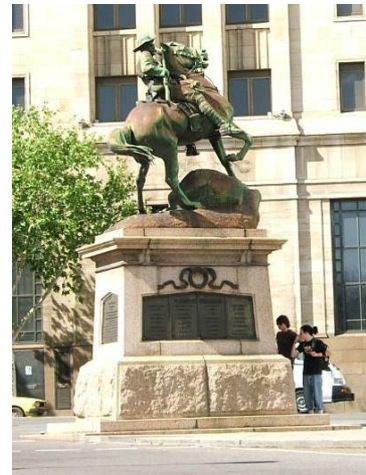
The Australian nation's first war is a significant event. Engraved unit lists, including the nurses serving for the first time in Australia's military history are included in the memorial. The cost of this memorial was borne by public subscription. Fund raising started in 2008 and cost 4 million Australian dollars to construct. The government contribution was 1.7 million dollars to make up the final shortfall.

I was and still am amazed that so many of these memorials have been built and are maintained by public subscription – and that it continues. It is not left to be part of history but plays an important role in the Australian consciousness.



## Some of the other fascinating memorials.

**Adelaide** - The South African War Memorial unveiled in June 1904, was dedicated to the South Australians who served in the Anglo Boer War and served as the National War Memorial. It is located in front of the main entrance to Government House and was constructed with a budget of £2,500 raised through public donations. In 1919 the State Government decided that South Australia needed a memorial to commemorate the Great War 1914-1918, and in April 1931, before a crowd of almost 75,000 people, a new memorial was unveiled. From the opening speech in 1931

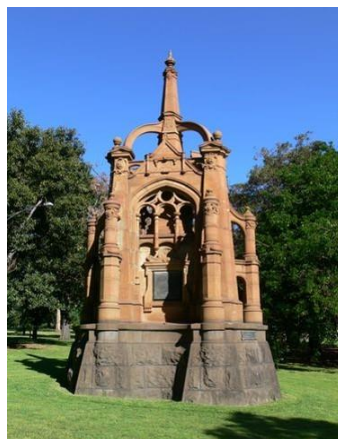


*“It is not only for ourselves that we have erected this visible remembrance of great deeds, but rather that those who come after us and have not experienced the horrors of war, or realised the wanton destruction and utter futility of it all, may be inspired to devise some better means to settle international disputes other than by international slaughter. This memorial is the seal of South Australia’s homage to her sons, who in the ranks of brave company from all parts of the Empire, gave their lives during the Great War.”*

This new memorial became the National War Memorial, but the South African War memorial remains a focal point for the Anzac day marches.



**Ballarat** - this is one of 28 memorials, statues and memorial bandstands down Sturt Street. It consists of a bronze statue featuring two soldiers mounted on horseback, on a stone pedestal and lists the names of the 238 fallen “Victorians Who Died for the Empire” during the Boer War. It reflects bravery and mateship.

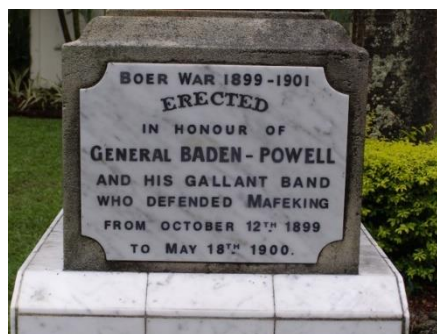


**Melbourne** – Victorian Mounted Rifles Memorial. It was impossible to erect suitable monuments over the graves of those who fell in South Africa, as they were scattered over different parts of the country. It was a unanimous wish of the contingent that some memorial should be raised, thus this Gothic style memorial was erected in a public park. Erected in 1903 and officially unveiled on 29 May 1904, this remembers the large numbers of men from Victoria who fought and died in South Africa. The 5th Victorian Contingent was the largest of eight sent by the state. 228 Victorians were killed during the war. The South African War Memorial Committee was formed at a public meeting in 1911 to raise funds for a memorial to honour the soldiers who fought and died in the Boer War. The subsequent memorial built in Victoria commemorates all Australians who took part in the war, rather than just local soldiers.

**Brisbane** memorial. “The legacy and sacrifices, made by our descendants, need to be remembered and remain with us forever.” Boer War Memorial Day 2019.



**Allora** - This memorial was restored in April 2011. The monument commemorates those from the district who served in the South African (Boer) War. This was the first Boer War memorial in Queensland and was unveiled by Brevet-Lieutenant Colonel Harry Chauvel. His Queenslanders had been the first Australian unit to be in action in the war. The Boer war remains Australia's third-worst conflict in terms of casualties.





In **Mackay**, the relief of Mafeking was greeted with an enthusiastic outburst of patriotic feeling. Bells were ringing, crowds were cheering and singing the National Anthem and guns were fired. A public holiday was declared and it was intended that proceeds would go towards a fund to erect some lasting memorial to General Baden-Powell. The *Brisbane Courier*, 22nd May 1900. The fascination with Baden Powell and the siege and relief of Mafeking in certain areas of Australia is startling.



This memorial to the Siege of Ladysmith has been carved from a tree stump. I saw this in many places in Australia. When the tree had reached the end of its life span it was cut down and the stump left about 1,5 – 2m high and this was then carved into a memorial. At some villages a whole avenue of trees has been treated in this way.



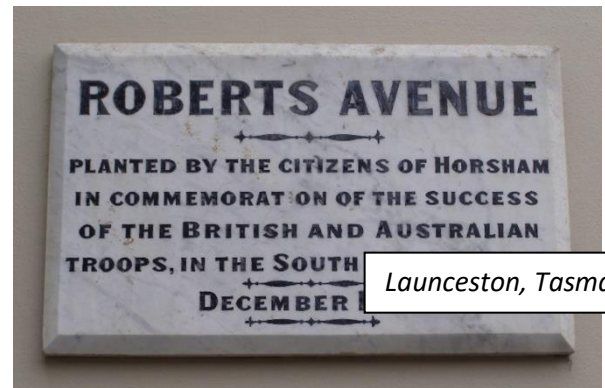
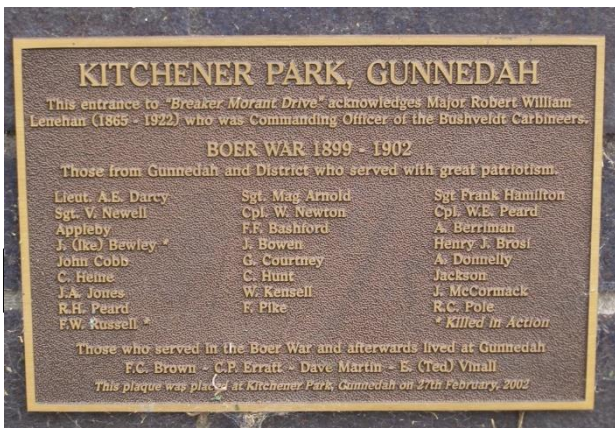
The siege of Ladysmith was a key battle of the Boer War. Soldiers of the Australian colonies and after 1900, the newly federated Australian nation, fought as part of the British Imperial forces.

The Short Family planted trees here in 1902 to commemorate the local men who volunteered for service in the war and to commemorate the lifting of the siege of Ladysmith.

One hundred years later, at the end of the safe life of the trees, figures were sculptured from the stumps of the trees to maintain the historic link.

A memorial bridge to Private Victor Stanley Jones, a paymaster with the Mount Morgan gold mine, who was the first Australian to be killed in South Africa.

Across the country there are a variety of interesting memorials and unusual and different ways of remembering the war. These are just a very few of them.



Over 500 Australians lie buried in our country and in Zimbabwe.

**Let us not forget - the Australians certainly have not.**