

# THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

## An Attempt by a Secular Culture to Acknowledge Its Spiritual Roots



The Australian War Memorial, Canberra, A.C.T.

*'The Land Down Under' has a Temple without a King  
and a religion without a Priest.  
It enshrines the nobility of the common man.*

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# **The Australian War Memorial**

## **An Attempt by a Secular Culture to Acknowledge Its Spiritual Roots**

### **I**

## **Australia as a Multi-Cultural, Pluralistic and Secular Society**

The Australian Aborigines have maintained a deeply spiritual relationship to their land even though there was little uniformity in language or beliefs among their hundreds of tribal groups (see Chapter 2). With the advent of British settlers, Australia developed into a collection of isolated colonial offspring. While British institutions were adopted, in the main, the emerging self-governing colonies never adopted the established religion of the mother country. When the colonies federated in 1901 there was little doubt that Church and State would be separated. During the first one hundred years as a Commonwealth, Australia moved away from its white-Australia policy to a more broadly based pluralistic and secular society.



*The War Memorial lies on the Axis which bisects the Parliamentary Triangle and links the Memorial and Parliament House*

## **Australia and World Religions**

Historical research will, no doubt, reveal that Australia has always had representatives of world religions. However, it was not until the 1970's that these religions gained visibility. Until that time Australia considered itself secular but Christian! Today, that ambivalence has

given way to a recognition that Australia is now host to visible numbers from Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Jewry, Mormonism and Bahaism.

### **Temples in Australia**

Apart from Islam, each of the world religions mentioned above, have erected temples of some eminence in Australia. The Nan Tien Buddhist temple outside Wollongong is probably the best known. The Bahai Temple at Mona Vale was one of the earliest built in Australia. Not so well known are the Mormon Temples located in Sydney, Adelaide and Brisbane. It is not generally known that the Latter-Day Saints Church (Mormon) is a temple building community as well as a church building one. In addition, there are a number of buildings known as temples which do not have specific temple functions.

### **A Museum and a Memorial**

The impulse to build a memorial sprang from two ideas of C.E.W. Bean, the official War Correspondent and War Historian of World War I. He wanted a War Museum to house the artefacts and relics of the Australian ex-servicemen. More importantly, he was conscious of the impracticality of parents and relatives of the 61,500 war dead visiting the graves and memorials in far away Europe and other remote burial places. Even if the relatives were able to afford and make the trip overseas there was no focal memorial to commemorate the 18,000 Australians who had no gravesite to honour them.



*George Lambert*  
C.E.W. Bean

## **The War Memorial as a Funerary Temple**

Most Australians would not recognise the Australian War Memorial as a temple in the accepted sense. Yet, in a strange way, it has become one. This has developed more by evolution than intention.



*The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier*

On the 11th November 1993, an unknown soldier, whose remains had been exhumed from a cemetery in France was re-interred under the floor of the Hall of Memory. His Tomb thus became an official war grave. It represented the gravesite of the 18,000 Australians who were never given a burial during World War I.

In another sense, The Unknown Soldier is the archetypal representative of all Australians whose service in the interest of their country, has passed without recognition.

The Australian War Memorial is a funerary temple, not of Kings or Emperors, but of the ordinary man. With the interment of the Unknown Soldier, Australia gave expression to its ennoblement of the common man.

### **Echoes of Greece With A Touch of Byzantine**

A competition was held to design a suitable memorial. Only two satisfactory entries were received and the two successful architects, John Crust and Emil Sodersteen, were asked to collaborate on a joint project. They agreed on a Byzantium-style of a building with an arresting dome-shaped Hall of Memory dominating the skyline.

At the foot of Mount Ainslie, in a dry-grassy sheep paddock, this touch of 'exotica' would give cause for comment. Monumental buildings of this nature, in an Australian landscape, had no home-grown architectural tradition on which to draw.

With its cloisters, its Latin Cross and its dome there is an expectation that its spiritual symbolism would be based on the Christian tradition. According to Guy Freeland, the Hall of Memory, however, reflects a civil religion rather than a personal religion.

*“Clearly the religious pluralism of Australia, the absence of an established church, and a secular Constitution could all be seen as predisposing factors for the development of civil religion.”*  
(p. 76 ‘*Canberra Cosmos*’ by Guy Freeland).

### **The War Memorial is a Mediterranean Building**

The echoes of Delphi are enumerated by Freeland.

The Sacred Way	Anzac Parade
The Temenos	The ceremonial parade ground and grass amphitheatre
The Altar	The Stone of Remembrance
The Sacred Pool	The Pool of Reflection
The Commemorative Records	The Roll of Honour
The Spoils of War	The war relics and artefacts
The Horns of Consecration	The pylons framing the Hall of Memory and Mt Ainslie
The Sacred Tree	The Lone Pine
The Temple Proper	The Commemorative Area
The Cella or Sanctuary	The Hall of Memory
The Cult Image	
The Sacred Mount	Mount Ainslie

(ibid, p. 76).

The Foundation Stone was laid on Anzac Day 1919 but economic circumstances delayed the building of the new monument. The Memorial was opened on Anzac Day 1941.

## **Temple Characteristics of the War Memorial**

The War Memorial was not built as a temple. It has nevertheless, assumed and acquired several characteristics found in temples.

- **Two Guardians**

It has two Guardians standing watch at the entrance to the Memorial. In esoteric thought these two are known as the Lesser and Greater Guardian and they appear at the thresholds of various temples in different guises. The two lions which stand as guardians in the War Memorial are two carved lions in stone.



*One of Two Lion Guardians at Entrance*

Each of the lions holds a shield emblazoned with a double-barred cross. These statues were gifted to the Australian Government in 1936 by the Burgomaster of Ypres, Belgium. At the third battle of Ypres in 1917, 6,000 Australian troops were killed, and 32,000 were wounded or reported missing. The two lions were damaged. In a tribute to the 6,000 Australians who died at Ypres these treasured possessions now act as Guardians to the Australian 'Menin Gateway'.

- **Mausoleum**

The Bayon, Angkor Wat and Prambanam each held the bodies of their respective builders. In these instances the interred body was a King. In Australia the War Memorial now contains the body of a representative of the common man.



- **History of Battles**

Most temples depict on their walls a history of the wars fought by the King and his predecessors. The War Memorial has its brass plates which are Rolls of Honour listing the names of the dead from theatres of war. These theatres include the Sudan, China, the Boer War in South Africa and various localities of World War I and World WarII. Later theatres including Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam and Peacekeeping theatres have been added to keep the record current. The Memorial, itself, records the history of these engagements with dioramas, videos, paintings, artefacts, sculptures, displays etc.

- **Holy of Holies**

Temples have their holy of holies. The War Memorial is no different in this respect. Its commemorative area features a Hall of Memory which is a sacred place (see Part II below).

- **Venue for Rituals and Ceremonies**

Temples are places where annual ceremonies are enacted, pilgrimages held and offerings made. The War Memorial certainly qualifies on those accounts.

- **Oriented and Aligned**

Temples are built with particular attention given to their alignment with the sun, moon and stars, to their orientation to the cardinal directions of space and their location along a convenient traffic route. While the siting of the War Memorial in Canberra at the foot of Mount Ainslie does not fit all of these criteria, its siting at the national capital of Australia and its alignment on Canberra's central axis endows it with a significance of great meaning. This siting represented a great personal achievement for Charles Bean.

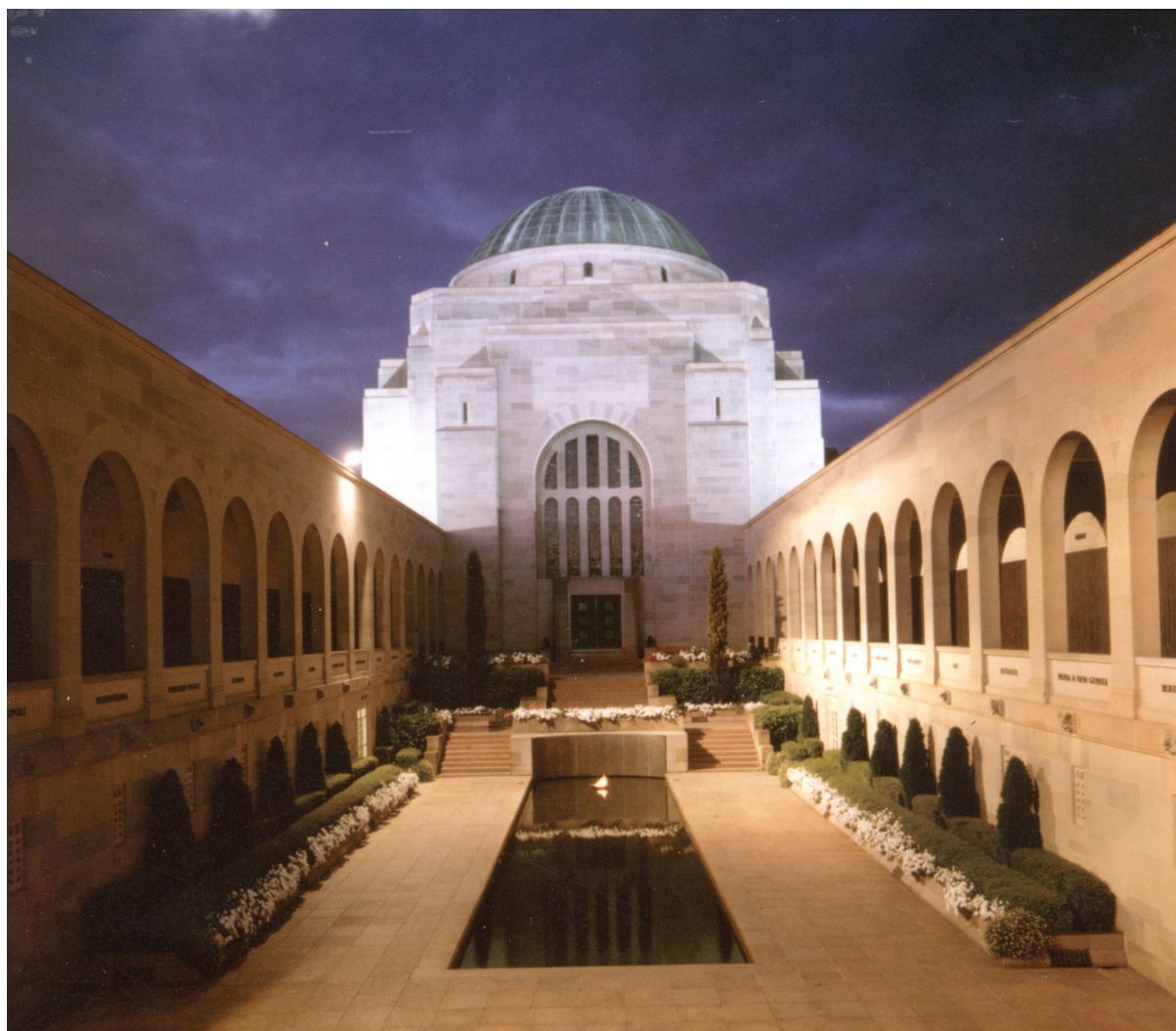
## II THE COMMEMORATIVE AREA

The Commemorative Area is the heart of the Memorial. It contains:

1. **The Hall of Memory** which now contains the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.
2. **The Cloisters** which are lined with bronze panels bearing the Roll of Honour.
3. **The Courtyard** which contains the Pool of Reflection and the Eternal Flame.

### 1. THE HALL OF MEMORY

The Hall of Memory is the focal point of the National War Memorial. The overall design of the building is in the Byzantine style and the side arched cloisters provide arcades which lead to a massive eighty feet high dome. This dome dominates the silhouette of the building. Inside, it provides an enclosing space which dwarfs the viewer and inspires reverential awe. The acoustical properties of the hall magnify the slightest sound. Silence within is at a premium.



*The Hall of Memory flanked by the Western (L) and Eastern (R) Cloisters  
with their Rolls of Honour*

Charles Bean (1879-1968) controlled the theological concepts which governed the overall design of the War Memorial. It was not to be a building which glorified war nor was it to promote triumphalism or personal glory. The Hall of Memory was to be a sacred shrine to the fallen. It was not to be a Christian Chapel, though there was to be nothing in its new mythology to be offensive to Christian ideals.

The interior of the Hall of Memory was designed by a gifted mythologist. Napier Waller (1893-1972) had training as an artist. He lost his right arm of World War I and taught himself to draw and paint with his left hand. He exhibited wartime drawings and water colours throughout Australian cities and also developed skills in linocuts. In 1929-1930 he studied stained-glass making in England and mosaics in Italy. He had a particular interest in legendary and allegorical subjects. Napier Waller's windows were installed in 1950 but his mosaic was not completed until 1958.

The Hall contains the following features:

- The Mosaic
- The Cupola and the Cornice
- The Four Pillars
- The Three Stained Glass Windows and the Mosaic Panels beneath them
- The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

### **The Mosaic**

The walls and the giant cupola are unified by a continuous mosaic. This mosaic consists of more than six million tesserae which were imported from Italy. The tesserae were laid by a team of war widows under the direction of an Italian craftsman. The mosaic was designed by M. Napier Waller and was not completed until 1958.

The four angles of the Hall depict four figures in the uniforms of the fighting services of the 1939-45 war. These figures are: a sailor, a soldier, an airman and a woman who is a representative of all servicewomen. These four large figures have a background of design symbols. These symbols heighten the visual presentation. For example, the soldier is depicted with a half-raised left arm, gesturing heavenward. In the encircling light he glimpses the bird-like spirits of his dead comrades. He has gratitude in his heart because he has been spared to return to his loved ones. He makes a silent pledge, never to forget his comrades and to build a better world.

### **The Cupola**

The Cupola rises 26 metres above the Tomb of the Unknown Australian Soldier. Its magnificent mosaic provides a stellar canopy of blazing light that suggests its radiance shines from the spiritual centre of creation.

Guy Freeland believes that Charles Bean gave expression to the controlling ideas incorporated by Napier Waller into the design of this encrypted mosaic. Indeed, Freeland writes of Bean as a great theologian of an Anzac Cult which regards the Hall of Memory as its Holy of Holies. The mosaic, on this reckoning, contains the text of the new Gospel.

The decipherment of the hidden text must take into account not only the presence of a number of symbols but must understand that it is a mandala which takes its viewer into the core of the universe and into the core of his being!

- **Deciphering the Mosaic**

The Cupola has a Centre and a Circumference.

- **The Centre**

The centre blazes with incandescent light. This brightness makes it difficult to see that it also contains a vortex or spiral and *one of the 5 stars of the constellation Crux Australis* viz. Alpha Crucis (Acrux).

The other 4 stars of the Southern Cross:  $\gamma$  Crucis,  $\beta$ ,  $\delta$  and  $\epsilon$  can be found just outside the inner circle.

The Vortex or Spiral is also difficult to see. It is a symbol of cosmogenesis viz. a galactic spiral. Our own Sun lies some 30,000 light years from the centre of our spiral galaxy known as the Milky Way.

Superimposed on (say)  $\alpha$  Acrux, is *the 7 pointed Federation Star*. Thus, the centre has 3 elements:

- $\alpha$  Acrux
- The Spiral
- The Federation Star.

Collectively, this trinity is known as the Spiritual Sun.

- **The Circumference**

At the circumference of the wattle wreath there are *7 pairs of hands*. They are found midway between the 7 rays of the Spiritual Sun. These open hands are releasing tiers of winged sarcophagi. They symbolise the souls of the dead ascending to the cosmic centre point.

The ASCENDING WINGED SARCOPHAGI and the DESCENDING RAYS OF THE FEDERATION STAR stand as dyads. They are in a state of spiritual symbiosis and energise each other. The flow of spiritual energy is both radial and spheroidal, both inwards and outwards.

- **Geomantic Principle**

The number 7 features repeatedly in the design.

- The seven rays descending from the Federation Star of the Spiritual Centre.
- The seven columns rising from the seven pairs of open hands.
- The large circle is subdivided into multiples of seven. Apart from this initial segmentation into fourteen (2 x 7) there are thirty-five (5 x 7) sarcophagi around the Spiritual Sun and forty-two (6 x 7) sarcophagi around the lower rim of the cupola.



- **Birth of a National Consciousness**

Charles Bean and Napier Waller understood that the legislative establishment of a new nation did not automatically constitute the birth of a national consciousness. Such a consciousness could only be forged in the crucible of a shared destiny. It required a triumph over adversity and a sacrificial testing. The Anzac Legend had these necessary elements. It required the genius of Napier Waller to clothe this legend into the language of myth.

### **The Cornice**

‘The circular cornice incorporates such Australian motifs as wattle leaves, black swans, and an unbroken golden chain symbolising continuity.’ (A.W.M. Leaflet).

### **The Four Pillars**

The four pillars reiterate the vertical lines of the four mullions in each of the three stained glass windows. From a design point of view, they are meant to add to the unity of the overall design. However, from a viewer’s point of view, the four pillars are not as successful as the eighteen foot sculpture that was once in the apse. The four pillars symbolise water, earth, fire and air. These ‘elements’ were anciently thought to be the basic constituents of the natural world. Most visitors think that Janet Laurence’s sculptures are too abstract. The pillars are made of different materials:

ELEMENT	MATERIAL	QUALITIES SYMBOLISED
WATER	Glass	Change, Transfiguration of Souls
EARTH	Stone	Permanence, Endurance, Death
FIRE	Metal	Energy, Passion, Patriotism, Bravery
AIR	Wood	Disembodied spirits, souls of the dead

### **The Three Stained Glass Windows**

The three stained glass windows with the vertical mullions and horizontal transoms were also designed by M. Napier Waller. Each of these windows is subdivided into five panels. These fifteen panels depict a different service figure and symbols associated with their service designation. The portraits also designate ideal character attributes of the different service roles.

#### **Summary**

##### **South Window**

###### **Service Figure**

Aircraftsman  
Signaller  
Nurse  
Trench-mortar man  
Naval Captain

###### **Personal Attribute**

Resource  
Candour  
Devotion  
Curiosity  
Independence

##### **West Window**

###### **Service Figure**

Lewis Gunner  
Naval Gunner  
Infantryman  
Airman  
Artilleryman

###### **Social Attribute**

Comradeship  
Ancestry  
Patriotism  
Chivalry  
Loyalty

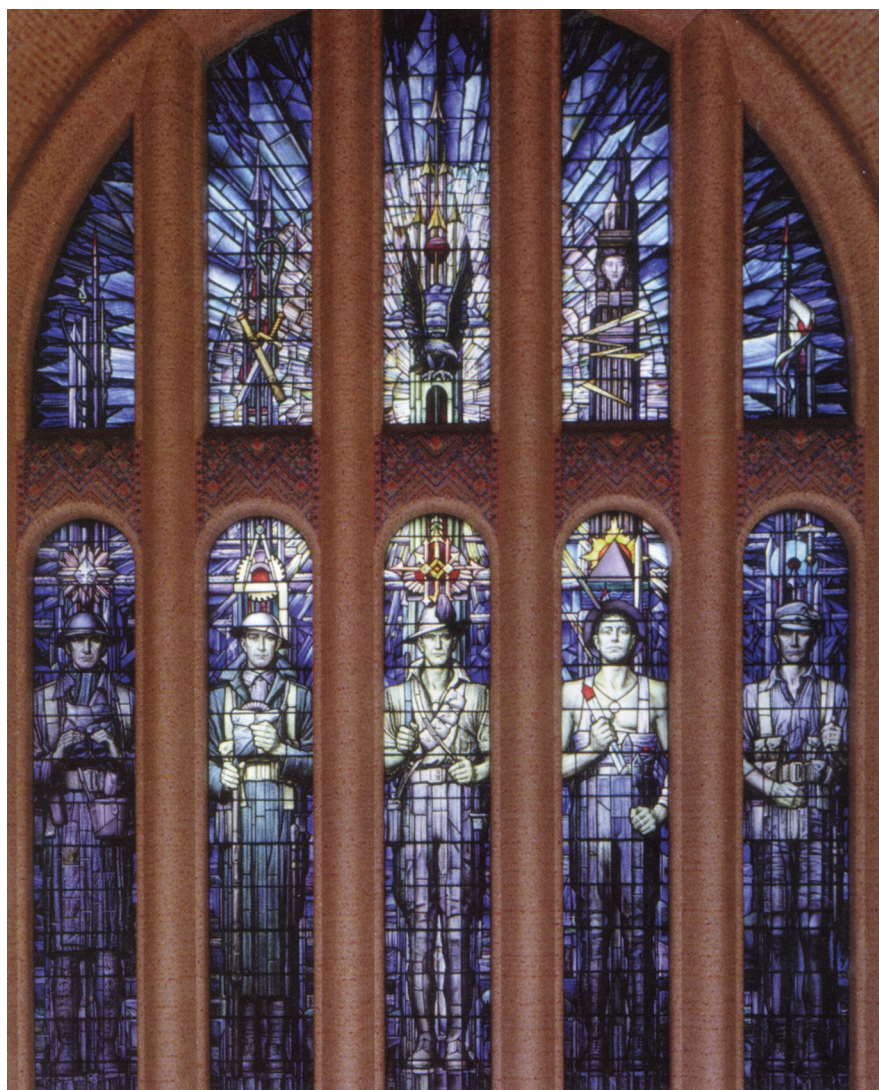
##### **East Window**

###### **Service Figure**

Infantry Officer  
Infantryman  
Lighthorseman  
Wounded Soldier  
Australian Soldier

###### **Fighting Attribute**

Coolness  
Control  
Audacity  
Endurance  
Decision



*Napier Waller's East Window*

Each of the fifteen figures is portrayed in the uniforms of the A.I.F. and R.A.N. in the 1914-18 war. 'The prevailing deep blue toning of the windows produces a quiet atmosphere and contrasts with the light-toned mosaic of the walls.' (A.W.M. book by Peter Stanley).

### **The Mosaics Beneath the Windows**

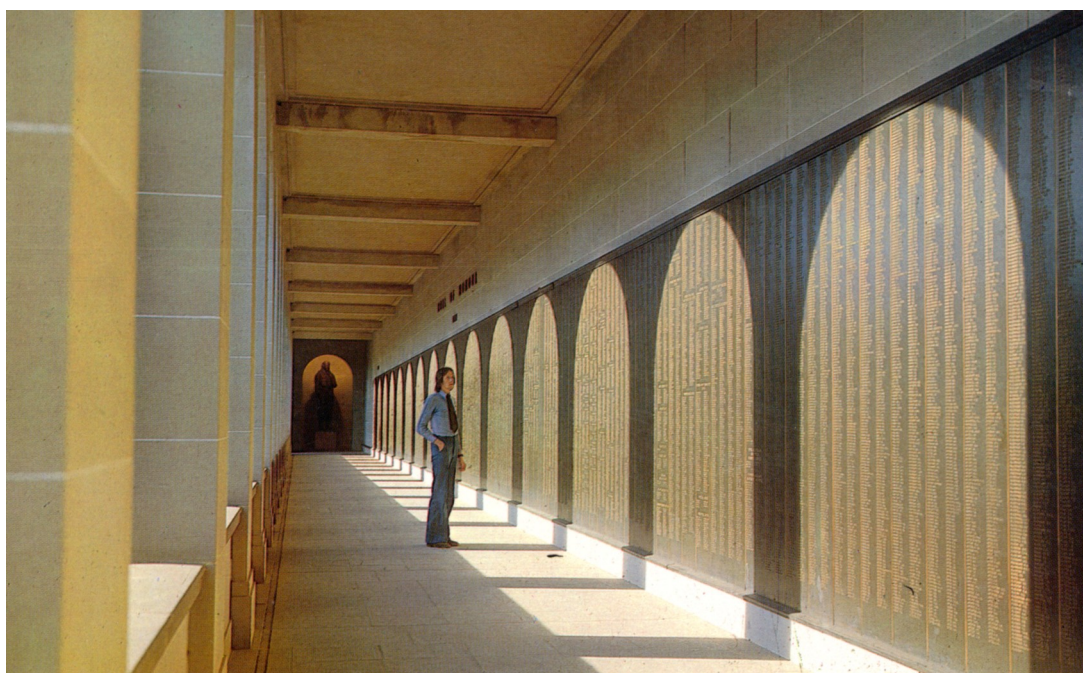
The mosaics beneath each of the three stained glass windows have panels which are patterned in combinations of blue and red ensigns of the crosses of St. George, St. Andrew and St. Patrick.

### **The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier**

On the 11th November 1993 an unknown soldier, whose remains had been exhumed from a cemetery in France, was re-interred under the floor of the Hall of Memory. His Tomb is an official war grave. It represents the grave site of the 18,000 Australians who have no grave site as a result of World War I battles.

## 2. THE CLOISTERS AND THE ROLL OF HONOUR

There are two cloisters which provide access to the Hall of Memory. They are the *Western and Eastern Cloisters*. These arcaded walkways are lined with bronze panels bearing the *Roll of Honour*. This contains the names of all those Australians who died in, or as a result of, war. The names are listed without distinction of rank or decoration but in the units in which they served. The Western Cloister begins its listing with the names of the dead of the colonial wars in the Sudan, in China and in the war in South Africa. The names of the 60,000 dead of the 1914-18 World War follow. The Eastern Cloister continues the sombre record into the 1939-45 World War and the subsequent conflicts including Korea, Malaysia and Vietnam. A total of 100,000 names are now listed.



*The Roll of Honour and Cloisters*

## 3. THE COURTYARD

The Courtyard contains the *Pool of Reflection* with a formal garden framing the edges. The garden contains Rosemary, the plant of remembrance since Roman times. *The Eternal Flame* surmounts the Pool of Reflection. It is a constant reminder to all Australians to remember the sacrifices of the war dead, LEST WE FORGET.

### III Kings and Priests

#### Politics and Religion

The fundamental task of every culture is to define its own position in relation to sovereignty. This means, ultimately, that a culture must make provision for the resolution of tension between political authority and religious authority. In Judaic-based cultures this dual allegiance is imaged in the twin pillars of Jachin and Boaz. In more recent political theory it is understood as the struggle between Church and State. The tension between the two arises



because Kings finance and build temples and sometimes they want to have more authority than the priests who design and administer them. Occasionally, Priests want to be Kings.

### **Relationships Between Kings and Priests**

Logically, there are a number of possibilities between the claims to authority of Kings and Priests.

1. The KING is greater than the Priest.
2. The King is less than the PRIEST.
3. The KING and the PRIEST have equal authority.

However, over millenia a number of other possible relationships have been tried:

4. The King and the Priest are the one person; OR
5. There is no King and no Priest.

### **The Sovereignty of Australia**

Australia's position on sovereignty is a peculiar variant of No. 5 above. Australia has an Absentee King/Queen and no Priest. The Absentee King/Queen resides in England and is the Defender of the Established Church of England in Great Britain. This church is also known as the Anglican Church in Australia. The English Queen, however, is not the Defender of an Established Church of Australia. Australia has an Absentee King/Queen.

### **A Temple Without a King or Priest**

The most important annual service celebrated at the Australian War Memorial is held on the 25th April each year. This service commemorates Australia's most humiliating loss in its history of warfare. The commemoration of a defeat rather than a victory is a characteristic Australian gesture.

On Anzac Day the absentee sovereign's representative, the Governor-General, is usually in attendance. Prayers and sacred hymns are led by military chaplains on a rotational basis.

The 'land down under' not only has its National Parliament encased in a hill over which citizens may walk, it has a Temple without a King and a religion without a Priest! It enshrines the nobility of the common man!



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## Brochures

Commemorative Area (A.W.M.)

Guide (A.W.M.)

Anzac Parade Walking Tours (N.C.A.)