

## Honest History's Alternative Guide to the Australian War Memorial



*One of many proposed designs for a War Memorial in the competition held in 1927 ([National Archives of Australia](#))*

First edition, Anzac Day 2016

## Contents

Introduction .....	4
Using the <i>Alternative Guide</i> .....	4
The themes of the <i>Alternative Guide</i> .....	4
Reading the Memorial .....	4
Complexity .....	5
Context.....	6
Honesty (and evidence) .....	6
Why is this important?.....	7
Section 1: Outside the Memorial .....	9
Simpson and his donkey .....	9
National Service memorial.....	9
‘Weary’ Dunlop statue .....	9
Section 2: Cloisters and courtyard .....	11
Roll of Honour cloisters.....	11
Gargoyles .....	11
The Tomb of the Unknown Australian Soldier.....	11
The windows .....	11
The speech .....	12
Section 3: Reception .....	13
Sponsors.....	13
What is that boat doing there?.....	13
Section 4: The World War I galleries.....	14
What do the galleries tell you about what the Memorial thinks is important? .....	14
The Home Front .....	14
Johnny Turk and Atatürk.....	15
Germans.....	16
Emotions and evidence.....	16
Should we object to objects? .....	17
Guns .....	18
Change in the wind .....	19
Dying: how and how many; casualties.....	19
How the war affected Australia and Australians .....	20

Passing the torch.....	21
Story or stories? .....	21
Section 5: The other galleries .....	23
World War II.....	23
Australia enters the war.....	23
Bombing .....	23
<i>G for George</i> .....	24
Len Siffleet .....	24
The Hall of Valour.....	24
Conflicts 1945 to today (downstairs).....	25
A very visual war .....	25
Agent Orange .....	25
Discovery Zone (downstairs).....	26
<i>Reality in Flames</i> (downstairs; World War II paintings).....	26
Pre-Federation (downstairs, past <i>Reality in Flames</i> ) .....	27
Frontier Wars .....	27
Indigenous service .....	28
Afghanistan exhibition (downstairs).....	28
Section 6: Endings .....	30
Ours and theirs.....	30
The long corridor and the bookshop .....	30
The corridor .....	30
The shop and the view .....	31
Section 7: Difficult questions .....	32
Language is important .....	32
Falling and dying .....	32
Landing and invading .....	32
Which dead are glorious? .....	32
What price freedom?.....	32
Lest we forget (or being forced to remember)? .....	33
Acknowledgements.....	35

## Introduction

Honest History often says the Australian War Memorial is the best in the world at what it does. Then we go on to say it could do so much more and do what it does differently. This *Alternative Guide* hints at what we mean by statements like that.

The *Guide* recognises the Memorial's aims – and comments occasionally on how well these aims have been met – but it is primarily intended to encourage critical thinking and questioning. Honest History vigorously advocates the 'contestability' of history. Contestability is a key concept in the [Australian Curriculum: History](#) for Years 7-10 and is at the core of the historiography issues tackled in senior years.

Asking questions is at the heart of historical research. The *Guide* asks a lot of questions and does not always provide answers. That is for readers to do; sometimes there are no easy answers.

## Using the *Alternative Guide*

The *Alternative Guide* can be read either before a visit or as the visitor looks at a particular display or exhibit. Each section of the *Guide* has links to suggestions for additional reading, most of them on the Honest History website. Sometimes readers may need to research further.

The *Guide* is organised in sections corresponding to parts of the Memorial. We will update the *Guide* regularly. We ask users to suggest improvements. In this first edition there is much more on World War I than on other conflicts; we will redress this balance in future editions. We have pitched the *Guide* at middle to upper level Secondary students, teachers and the general public. Users can print multiple copies; see the copyright note on page 36.

## The themes of the *Alternative Guide*

### Reading the Memorial

The Australian War Memorial is a complex 'site of memory' and it can be read in different ways, many of which may be legitimate or justifiable. The *Alternative Guide* recognises the 'readings' the Memorial offers but then offers alternative readings.

The Memorial is a national cultural institution, a creation of governments. It also has close links to Australia's defence establishment, both current (the Australian Defence Force, which is strongly represented on [the Memorial's Council](#)) and former (the Returned and Services League, the Memorial's volunteer guides and 'friends' groups). This has been so since the Memorial's foundation. Then, in more recent years the Memorial has sought and received large donations from the defence industry, the manufacturers of the tools and weapons of war, as well as from other benefactors.

These connections have influenced the 'style' of the Memorial. It is important, however, to recognise that the support of the public has helped to maintain this style basically unchanged for three-quarters of a century.

Who decides what the Memorial does? Look at sections 3 and 5 of [the Australian War Memorial Act 1980](#) and page 3 of the Memorial's [Corporate Plan 2015-2019](#). These official documents give the Memorial's work a focus, first, on commemorating people who have died on or as a result of active service and, secondly, on Australian military history.

This *Alternative Guide* wants to help change public expectations of the Memorial. Look, for example, at the definition of 'Australian military history' in section 3 of the Memorial's Act: 'the history of: (a) wars and warlike operations in which Australians have been on active service, including the events leading up to, and the aftermath of, such wars and warlike operations; and (b) the Defence Force'.

Reading this, you might think that 'the history of ... wars' would include something about why these wars occurred, the experience of the people Australians fought against (as well as of Australians), and the effects of war on Australia and other countries. Yet the Memorial's 'Mission', as set out in its Corporate Plan, is a lot narrower than the words in the Act. It says this: 'To assist Australians to remember, interpret, and understand *the Australian experience of war and its enduring impact on Australian society*' (emphasis added).

Does this emphasis on 'the Australian experience of war' and its 'impact on Australian society' allow the Memorial to take a parochial, Australia-centric view, ignoring the rest of the world? Should the Memorial focus more broadly? You could keep these key questions in mind during your visit. (None of them imply any disrespect to Australians who went to war.)

### Complexity

'Official' interpretations of history need to be challenged and corrected, not just because they are unduly dominant – due to their endorsement by powerful interests – but to offer alternative readings. The discipline of history is all about a contest between interpretations. History – 'what happened' – is not a single narrative. Nor is history, the discipline. The more interpretations that contest with each other, the more complex history becomes.

Official history does not always reflect the complexity of historical reality – museums simplify the story to fit the space available – or cover everything that an observer might expect. For example, the War Memorial used to show hardly any pictures of dead bodies; it now shows a few more, though you will have to look hard to find them. Why has this change happened, do you think?

The people who produce exhibitions for museums like the Memorial are highly knowledgeable experts. But they are constrained by the institutions for which they work. Visitors and critics need to be aware of these constraints but the Memorial needs to test the constraints and respond to changing public expectations if it is to maintain its relevance.

Museums like the Memorial offer history that is sanctioned, approved, and commissioned by institutional authorities. The result is mostly accurate within its own terms but it may not tell the whole story. Our job as visitors is to discover the gaps between what we see and hear and what we want to know – and to try to uncover the full complexity by asking questions.

## Context

A key theme of the *Alternative Guide* is 'context'. Are there 'silences' in the Memorial's galleries which need to be filled? We suggested above that the Memorial presents an Australia-centric or parochial view of the wars in which Australia has been involved. The *Guide* will point to where the Memorial could consider the impacts of war on people other than Australians.

We also saw that there are words in the Memorial's Act and Corporate Plan about 'events leading up to', 'aftermath' and 'enduring impact on Australian society'. The *Guide* will encourage you to look for places in the Memorial where these issues could be explored, to ask 'why it happened' and 'what happened next'.

The Memorial also emphasises the deeds of men and women in uniform. You could ask whether this emphasis is at the cost of describing what was happening on the home front, to women, children – and men. These people were the majority of the population, the ones who did not go to war. For example, [Joan Beaumont in Broken Nation](#) points out that, during World War I in Australia, '[a]mong men aged 18 to 60, nearly 70 per cent did not enlist'. So the *Guide* suggests where there is room to look at what was happening at home.

The Memorial is well-placed to focus more widely. It specialises in telling personal stories about the lives and deaths of individuals. It uses objects and photographs to do so. At present, its stories are mostly about service (people volunteering to serve in uniform), 'sacrifice' (people who died) and heroism. It tells these stories well enough (while pulling some punches) but the *Guide* suggests it needs to be more adventurous in the subjects it tackles. It could do so using personal stories.

The people who did not go to war included people who worked in factories or in charities supporting the war effort, people who declined to volunteer or who opposed the war or opposed conscription and, most of all, families, wives and children. Does the Memorial give these people a 'fair go? There is a difference between *military* history and *war* history; the personal, 'non-khaki' stories of these people are part of our war history.

## Honesty (and evidence)

The final key theme of the *Alternative Guide* is 'honesty'. The Honest History coalition deliberately included the word 'honest' in its title to emphasise the importance of honesty in the way all of us should approach history. All history is interpretation; 'honest history' is interpretation robustly supported by evidence.

But honest history is also about telling the full story, not holding evidence back, not sanitising. Look for places where the Memorial presents (or fails to present) evidence in a way that produces sanitised or misleading or partial stories. (Here we mean 'partial' in both senses – not telling the whole story *and* favouring just one side of the story.)

Honest History has criticised the Memorial's [programs for children](#) and [its educational publications](#). A [review of the Memorial's Afghanistan exhibition](#) is representative of criticisms of the Memorial for telling only part of the story of Australia's wars. The blogger

[James Rose goes further](#), suggesting that the Memorial assumes the necessity of war and imprints on children a view that war can even be fun.

Official institutions like the Memorial clearly have a civic education function. Civic education presents simple messages about community, duty, patriotism, selflessness. Myths, stories that have a narrow evidence base, or no evidence at all, or where the evidence has become garbled or confused, often serve civic education well.

Of course, there is a place for myth as well as for history, for civic education as well as for scholarship, but look for examples where the Memorial blurs the distinctions between these concepts, where it accepts myth as history, where it indoctrinates while pretending to educate. That should be unacceptable in a humane and sophisticated society; propaganda coated in sentiment and patriotism is still propaganda.

Civic education also thrives on emotion. Museums present stories, often through objects, which evoke strong emotions. Being aware of why certain objects have been selected for display and what emotions they are intended to arouse is important if we are to make up our own minds and not have our emotions manipulated.

What are you supposed to feel when visiting the Memorial, when looking at an object or a diorama or an exhibit? Do you feel you are being manipulated? Is an object or display offering you historical evidence or just giving you a warm and fuzzy feeling or making you feel sad or making you feel proud to be an Australian? Should the Memorial make you think as well as make you feel?

### Why is this important?

For many adult visitors – not all – the Memorial is just another stop on the tourist route. Perhaps there is a brief ‘connection’ with a relative who went off to war but the interest may not be intense or persist in the visitors’ minds long after they leave the Memorial. Even where family connections are lacking, the Memorial may give visitors a lump in the throat or tear in the eye but the effects may not last.

How the Memorial presents its exhibits is particularly important, however, for children. Honest History has argued frequently that the way the Memorial pitches to children and the way it involves children is not only dishonest (because it sanitises and sentimentalises war) but also dangerous to the health of children because it normalises war and makes it seem that taking up arms will be an inevitable part of the child’s future.

Writing in 2008, [Anna Clark was surprised](#) by the number of students (Year 9-12) she interviewed who assumed a ‘militarised national identity’ was ‘intrinsically Australian’. The Anzac centenary commemorations since 2014 may have reinforced such feelings. You could keep these claims and possibilities in mind as you visit the Memorial and you could see if you agree with them.

Honest History  
Anzac Day 2016



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

ART09852

*Inauguration of the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Anzac Day, 1929 ([AWM ART09852/Louis McCubbin](#))*

## Section 1: Outside the Memorial

### Simpson and his donkey

This bronze statue, by Peter Corlett, is just to the left of the main (southern) entrance to the Memorial. Read the plaque with its theme of 'self-sacrifice in war'.

Why do you think John Simpson Kirkpatrick enlisted as plain 'John Simpson'? See if you can find out more about why Simpson was at Gallipoli. There is some evidence that he enlisted in the hope of getting a free passage back home to England.

What sort of man was Simpson? Try to find the letter he wrote in 1912, where he expressed support for world revolution. If Simpson saw himself as a revolutionary is it a surprise to see him as a symbol of the defence of the Empire?

Was he the only 'man with a donkey'? Look up the story of the New Zealander who was mistaken for Simpson in photographs and a painting.

How did Simpson become famous? Did it happen straight away? Find out about Irving Benson's 1965 book. Can people from one war become symbols to encourage support for another war?

Sources: [Baker](#); [Cochrane](#); [Fitzgerald](#) (review of Wilson)

### National Service memorial

This memorial is to the right of the main entrance. It includes a water feature.

There have been two national service (conscription) schemes since World War I, one from 1951 to 1959, the other from 1964 to 1972.

Young men were chosen for the 1964-72 scheme by pulling out of a barrel marbles marked with birthdates. Was this method fair? What other method could have been used?

Did you know there was compulsory military training for young men prior to World War I? Does this alter the perception that Australian soldiers in this war were 'natural soldiers' who needed little training?

Sources: [Caulfield](#); [Dapin](#); [Edwards](#); [Waugh](#)

### 'Weary' Dunlop statue

This is in the forecourt in front of Poppy's Café. Read the inscription. Why do we single out this one prisoner of war from many?

Is it dishonourable to become a prisoner of war? What do you think of the argument that paying compensation to POWs will make soldiers in future wars give up too easily?

Sources [2/20<sup>th</sup> Battalion website](#) (POW conference report); [Australian War Memorial](#); [Honest History](#) (POW conference report)



*Study, landscape treatment, Australian War Memorial, c. 1936 (AWM [ART92900/Emil Sodersten](#))*

## Section 2: Cloisters and courtyard

### Roll of Honour cloisters

Listen for the voices on the continuous loop, reading out the names and ages at death of the men and women on the Roll of Honour. How old do you think the readers are? Do you think they are old enough to be doing this? How well would they understand the nature of death in war?

The Roll of Honour is a list of dead people. Why do dead people have more prominence on the walls of the Memorial than those who enlisted? Where would you expect to find lists of people who served as well as people who died?

Sources: [ABC](#); [Australian War Memorial](#); [Noonan](#); [Stephens](#) (reference to Larsson); [Stephens](#)

### Gargoyles

On the walls on either side of the Pool of Reflection there are stone heads (gargoyles) of Australian birds and animals. At the end closest to the Tomb of the Unknown Australian Soldier there are gargoyles of an Indigenous man and woman (one on each side).

Leslie Bowles, the man who designed the gargoyles in the 1930s, is said to have regarded the Indigenous Australians as 'custodians' of the birds and animals; critics have said that including the Indigenous Australians implies there is no difference between them and the birds and animals.

Recently, it became time to repair the gargoyles – the repairs may still be under way when you visit – and there was a discussion about whether the gargoyles of Indigenous Australians should have been replaced. The people who supported replacement said we should respect the artist's intention and the attitudes of his time. Those for non-replacement said we have moved on and have different attitudes. What would you have done?

Source: [Barritt-Eyles](#)

### The Tomb of the Unknown Australian Soldier

#### The windows

Around the Tomb, high up, are what are known as the Napier Waller Windows after the man who designed them. The windows have a number of captions – comradeship,

patriotism, loyalty, and so on – which are meant to be ‘the quintessential qualities displayed by Australians in war’.

Are they just qualities of Australians in uniform? Or qualities of all soldiers and nurses in any country? Or are they just qualities of good citizens or good human beings?

Do you have to join the armed forces or become a nurse in the services to display these qualities?

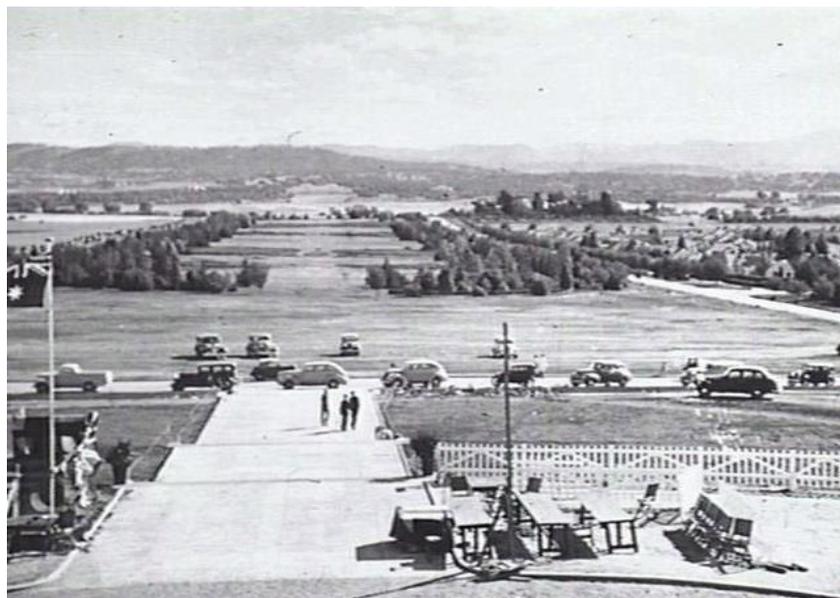
### The speech

The story of the Unknown Australian Soldier is told in the speech by the then prime minister, Paul Keating, in 1993. You can read the speech on the wall outside the Tomb or at one of the links below.

Twenty years later, Mr Keating made another speech about the Unknown Soldier. Compare the two speeches: did Mr Keating have more misgivings about war in 2013 than he did in 1993?

Would you have brought the body of the Unknown Australian Soldier back from his grave at Adelaide Cemetery, Villers Bretonneux, France, or left him where he was?

Sources: [Australian War Memorial](#); [Keating](#) (this is the 1993 speech; [an audio of it](#)) [Keating](#) (the 2013 speech); [Stephens](#)



*View from the Memorial steps, opening day, 11 November 1941 ([AWM 130300/RS Conrow](#))*

## Section 3: Reception

### Sponsors

Turn to the left once you enter the Memorial. Then, to the left of the door as you go in, and also on a screen to the left of the reception desk, there are names of sponsors or benefactors of the Memorial. Do you recognise some of the names?

Some of the benefactors are companies that make weapons of war such as guns, submarines, fighter planes and drones, as well as protective equipment for soldiers. How do you feel about such companies donating to the War Memorial?

Source: [Australian War Memorial sponsors](#); [Stephens](#) (the project referred to in the article has been cancelled but the general issues are still relevant)

### What is that boat doing there?

The very first item to be seen at the entrance to the gallery is a large white boat. It comes from the transport ship *Ascot* and it carried men of the 13th Battalion onto the beach at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915.

Did you realise the significance of the boat without reading the brief caption? Does the Memorial assume that visitors will know what the boat signifies and that they will be aware already that the invasion of the Ottoman Empire in 1915 was an important moment in Australia's history?

One of the aims of this *Alternative Guide* is to help you decide how important that moment was, compared with other moments in our history. The author Peter FitzSimons says in his book *Gallipoli* that Australians have 'a naturally bowed head' about Anzac Day, the day which commemorates the event this boat was involved in. Does that remark describe your attitude? Does having a naturally bowed head about something imply a lack of thinking about it or lots of thinking? When you leave the Memorial, check whether you have the same attitude to Anzac and war as you had when you arrived.

Around this part of the Memorial look for an explanation of why Australia entered World War I. Could the Memorial devote more attention to this subject?

By the way, were you surprised we used the word 'invasion' above? What other word is often used about what happened on 25 April 1915? Which word works best for you?

## Section 4: The World War I galleries

What do the galleries tell you about what the Memorial thinks is important?

You will see lots of exhibits here about Australian soldiers doing brave things. There are plenty of photographs, pictures, dioramas, diaries, letters, relics and objects. There is more about Gallipoli than about other campaigns of the war in 1916, 1917 and 1918. Why do you think that is?

### The Home Front

There are letters that soldiers wrote home to their families. What were the concerns of the people the soldiers were writing to?

Look for exhibits about what Australia was like at home during the war. Remember that 70 per cent of eligible males did not go to the war, that very few women went, and hardly any children (though you will see stories about a few boys who put their ages up and enlisted).

What were all these Australians doing and thinking at home? Obviously, they were concerned about family members who were overseas in the armed forces. But what else was happening? How were people's daily lives affected by the war? Did people support the war? Did their attitudes change?

Look for something in the World War I galleries about the battles over conscription in 1916 and 1917. There were two referendums on conscription and both were defeated by a slim margin, with more than a million Australians each time voting against. Were these Australians unpatriotic?

Look for something about strikes and industrial action during the war. Are people who go on strike during a war unpatriotic, especially if the strike affects the war effort?

Look for something about the Australian economy during the war. Would people have accepted some inconveniences and shortages if they were caused by the war?

Look for something about the actions taken by the Commonwealth Government about what it saw as disloyalty or subversion. Research [the War Precautions Act](#). Look for something about what happened to Australians of German descent.

Has information about the 'home front' issues in the previous few paragraphs been difficult to find in the World War I galleries? What does that tell you about what the Memorial

regards as important enough to give lots of space to? Is there more to our war history than stories about the brave deeds and tragic deaths of men in uniform?

The ambition of the Memorial's main founder, Charles Bean, was to build 'the finest monument ever raised to any army'. Bean was talking about the soldiers of World War I. A century later, is it time to move on from Bean's ambition? What might 'moving on' involve?

Sources: [Abbott](#) (review of Connor, Stanley and Yule); [Spittel](#); [Stephens](#) (reviews of the World War I galleries)

### [Johnny Turk and Atatürk](#)

Since the Great War, Australia and Turkey, former enemies, have become great friends, especially since the arrival of large numbers of Turkish migrants in Australia from the late 1960s. This has influenced Australian attitudes in a number of ways.

Have you heard of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk? He was the leading figure in the transformation of Turkey from the old Ottoman Empire to a modern nation.

Look in the galleries for what many people believe to be Atatürk's words commencing 'Those heroes that shed their blood ...' You will find them on the wall and in a recording, with an actor speaking the words. The words are frequently quoted and they appear on many memorials and monuments.

Listen to the words on the recording and compare them with the words on the wall. Why do you think there are two different versions?

Honest History has done a lot of research on these words and we can find no strong evidence that Atatürk ever said or wrote them. The earliest evidence for the words dates from 1953. (Atatürk died in 1938.) One famous sentence in an English translation of the words was composed in Brisbane in 1978.

They are lovely words, a beautiful statement of reconciliation between former enemies, but the claim that the words are Atatürk's is almost certainly myth, not history. It is important to be able to tell the difference. (No-one can prove Atatürk *never* said or wrote the words but no-one has provided strong evidence that he *did* say or write them.)

The Memorial would work very hard to correct errors in a description of a military manoeuvre but the myth about these words persists. Why do you think myths persist regardless of evidence?

Atatürk also famously said in 1931, 'Peace at home, peace in the world', when he was setting out the principles of Turkish foreign policy. Which statement do you prefer – 'Those heroes ...' or 'Peace ...'?

Source: [Honest History collection](#) (the introductory material summarises the issues)

### Germans

A section near the start of the World War I galleries tells the story of two Australian encounters with imperial Germany in 1914: the seizure of the German colony in New Guinea in September; the destruction of the German warship *Emden* in November. Is this the whole story about close encounters with Germans in or near Australia?

Near the German New Guinea-*Emden* exhibits the Memorial acknowledges that German-Australians were persecuted, and that some were interned, but it has no artefacts about the story. Later in the gallery there is one item from an internment camp – a jacket bearing the defiant legend *Gott strafe England* ('God punish England') – but is this adequate recognition of this aspect of Australia's treatment of so many 'enemy aliens' and some German-Australians? (Australia interned 7000 people during World War I.)

Why is the internees' story not fully told in the Memorial? Is it because they were not Anglo-Celtic Australians or for some other reason?

Source: [Australian War Memorial](#); [Marrickville conference](#)

### Emotions and evidence

You will see lots of objects and relics in the galleries: helmets; uniforms; bits of shrapnel; tin plates; articles with bullet holes in them. Modern museums are big on encouraging visitors to connect emotionally with objects to try to help visitors 'connect' with the original user or wearer. How do the objects make you feel?

Some exhibits include diaries or letters written by men and women at war. How do these items make you feel? Do you connect more with objects or with the written word?

Look for General 'Pompey' Elliott's boot (with a bullet hole in it) or his hat. Find out what happened to him after the war.

[Should we object to objects?](#)

Museum staff like to think that 'real' objects tell 'the truth'; after all, a solid object cannot lie. Can it?

At the very end of the Gallipoli gallery an exhibit displays various artefacts representing the end of the campaign, when the invaders withdrew. There is a re-creation of the famous 'drip rifle' which is said to have been one of the tricks used to conceal the evacuation from the Ottomans.

This is pure myth. The idea was that the guns were set to fire as the Anzacs evacuated the peninsula, to fool the Turks into thinking that their trenches were still defended.

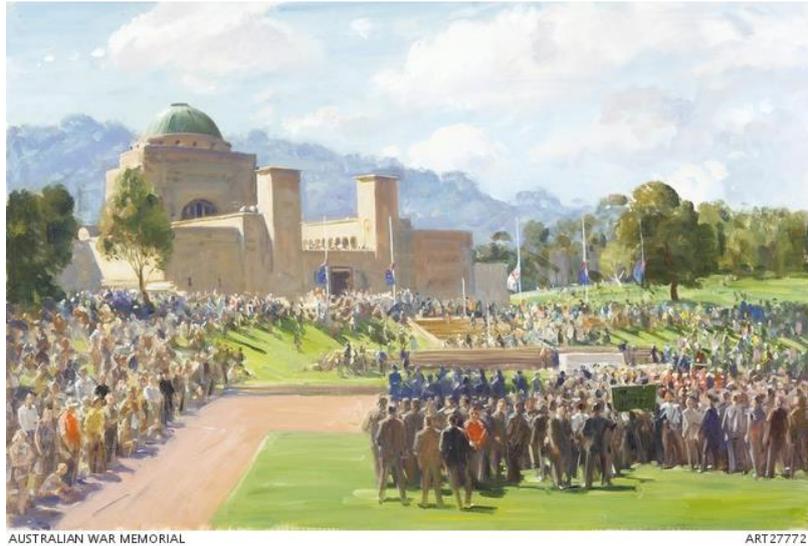
The drip guns certainly worked but how they contributed to the success of the evacuation is a mystery. By the time the drip guns fired, the last of the Anzacs were on the evacuation piers, if not already in the boats; the evacuation was already a success.

The object is real, but the story is false, or at least misleading. But many volunteer guides at the Museum will tell the story. Myths are perpetuated by repetition.

Museums also use objects to convey attitudes. The Memorial's exhibit on nursing and medical care on the Western Front has some grim and realistic objects of medical treatment – an amputation saw and an electric device used to treat 'nerve cases'. But the exhibit also displays a nurse's medals.

The glittering, colourful medals provide a counter-point to the clinical items (and they remind us that women as well as men win medals) but what do they tell us about the reality of nursing? They show that nurses' service was valued but they do not show the horrors nurses faced or the wonderful work they did.

Sources: [Honest History media release](#) (referring to booklet *Audacity*); [Stephens](#) (review of book *Anzac Treasures*)



*Anzac Day ceremony, Australian War Memorial, 1971 ([AWM ART27772/William Dargie](#))*

## Guns

You will see some guns inside the Memorial and some outside. There are big guns and small guns and many of them are highly polished. The Memorial is rightly proud of its collection of guns. You will not see much in the Memorial's galleries, however, about what guns do to people.

Charles Bean was one of the most important figures in the setting up of the Memorial. He was a war correspondent during World War I and then the official war historian, writing much of the history himself. You will have seen a famous quote from Bean as you entered the Memorial.

Less well-known is what Bean wrote during the battle of Pozieres in 1916. He said it was like the men were in 'some ghastly giant mincing machine'.

They have to stay there while shell after huge shell descends with a shriek close beside them ... each shrieking tearing crash bringing a promise to each man ... I will tear you into ghastly wounds – I will rend your flesh and pulp an arm or a leg – fling you half a gaping quivering man (like these that you see smashed around you one by one) to lie there rotting and blackening ...

Why do you think statements like this are not displayed prominently next to, for example, the paintings of charges at Gallipoli or the dioramas of men charging guns? Can you find pictures in the galleries of the effects that Bean describes?

Sources: [Australian War Memorial](#); [Honest History](#) (resources on Bean and other war correspondents)

#### Change in the wind

The refurbished World War I galleries acknowledge aspects of Australia's experience in the Great War that the Memorial previously ignored. For example, we see that Australian soldiers in Cairo from 1914 visited brothels and caught venereal disease, there is some mention of the small but vocal 'peace movement' at home, there are a couple of depictions of facial wounds, here and there are corpses (including decaying Australian dead at Lone Pine), there is some of the propaganda used by both sides of the conscription debates in 1916 and 1917.

These changes are a reminder that museums are created by people who respond to the way history is developing and to new books and articles, as well as being institutions which tend to be cautious in the interpretations they offer. How do you think ordinary Australians – people like you – could influence change in the way the Memorial presents our war history?

What proportion of Australians go to the Memorial each year, do you think? Is it becoming more or less popular? Are virtual visits to the Memorial's website the same as real visits to the Memorial?

Source: [Beaumont](#); [Neale](#); [Stanley](#); [Stephens](#)

#### Dying: how and how many; casualties

Sometimes soldiers killed or wounded in war are not doing particularly heroic things. At Gallipoli, for example, men were killed swimming in Anzac Cove, using the latrine, eating a meal, playing cards or sleeping. By one count, of 8159 Australians who died at Gallipoli, 5482 were killed in action, 2012 died of wounds and 665 died of disease.

Source: [Australian War Memorial](#)

Should we make distinctions according to how someone dies? Is it more heroic to be killed charging a machine gun, picked off by a sniper, blown up by artillery fire or just minding your own business?

The numbers of deaths in war are notoriously difficult to get right, too. That 8159 above is an early estimate of Australian deaths at Gallipoli. The revised estimate (and the one usually quoted) is 8709.

Then there is the difference between 'casualties' and deaths. Commanders in the field tend to focus on casualties, because that is a figure of how many soldiers are not available to shoot or be shot at the next time round. Deaths, of course, are those who are not coming back at all. (If you watch Russell Crowe's movie *The Water Diviner*, you will hear the number of deaths at Lone Pine confused with the number of casualties.)

It is important to keep the deaths-casualties distinction in mind. Towards the end of the Gallipoli section of the World War I galleries, there is a panel headed 'The Price'. It gives the numbers of dead for each of the countries involved in the Gallipoli campaign. (Remember that there were other people at Gallipoli besides Australians, New Zealanders and Turks; this is something you can tend to forget while touring the Memorial's galleries.)

Unfortunately, the tally of dead on this panel has no heading, so people unfamiliar with the story do not know whether the figures are for dead or casualties (dead plus wounded and sick). Do you think this is just a careless mistake or is there some other reason?

By the way, knowing that these figures are for deaths, are you surprised at how relatively few of the Dardanelles campaign dead are Australians? What proportion of the dead are Australians?

Do some more research to find out what proportion of the *total number* of men who served on both sides in the Dardanelles campaign were Australian. (*Wikipedia* is a good reference on this, as it takes figures from authoritative sources.) We will come back later to the question of Australian deaths in all wars, compared with non-Australian deaths.

Source: [Stanley](#) (review of *The Water Diviner*)

[How the war affected Australia and Australians](#)

Look for something in the World War I galleries about what Australia was like *before* the war. People who have studied this period say Australia in 1913, the year before the war, was an open, confident society, which led the world in many areas of social policy.

Look for something in the galleries about what Australia was like *after* the war. There is some material on this subject in the second-last room of the galleries (near the *Winged Victory* statue). It sounds reasonably positive about the aftermath of the war but compare it with other sources, such as Joan Beaumont's book.

Near the Winged Victory also is a caption 'The Glory in the Grief'. What do you think this means?

Sources: [Beaumont](#); [Hetherington](#); [Lake](#)

### Passing the torch

The World War I galleries end with photographs of a World War I veteran and his grandson. The audio is a song composed and sung by a 16-year-old girl about 'My hero' (her grandfather, who served in the Great War). Another audio is 'Waltzing Matilda', sung slowly by country singer, Lee Kernaghan. There is also a 'thank you' from the British Government to Australian Victoria Cross winners.

What emotions do you think this conjunction of objects and sounds is supposed to evoke among visitors? What do you think the Memorial wants visitors to think or feel? What does it *not* want visitors to think or feel? Does it encourage patriotic ideas, or does it encourage them to think of the war as futile or wasteful? (It could do both, of course.)

In particular, do you think the linking of grandfathers and grandchildren implies a passing of the torch across the generations? Do today's young people have a responsibility to be prepared to shed blood in the defence of their country?

What motivates entertainers like Lee Kernaghan to involve themselves in Anzac commemoration?

Source: [Honest History](#); [Stephens](#) on the speeches of former Anzac centenary Minister Ronaldson

### Story or stories?

The final words in the World War I galleries are 'Every nation has its story. This is ours.' What do you think of this claim? Is it just a marketing slogan which no-one is expected to take seriously or does the Memorial really believe there is a single national story built around war?

Why would the Memorial make such a claim? Who or what might it be excluding by making such a statement? Is there more to Australia's story than the exploits of Australians in wars, including World War I? Can the Memorial make statements like this one because we have become so familiar with the Anzac story to the exclusion of other stories?

Source: [Honest History review](#) of *Defining Moments* exhibition at the National Museum of Australia



*60th anniversary of opening of the Australian War Memorial, Remembrance Day, 2001 ([AWM ART91794/Bob Marchant](#))*

## Section 5: The other galleries

### World War II

#### Australia enters the war

Listen to the broadcast by Prime Minister Menzies in 1939. He says 'Great Britain has declared war upon her [Germany] and that, as a result, Australia is also at war'. Australia did not itself declare war.

Is Menzies' statement a complete answer to the question 'Why did Australia go to war in 1939?' Would you like to know more?

How do you reconcile Menzies' speech with the idea that Australia was said to have been 'born' as a nation at Gallipoli in 1915? What about Federation in 1901?

Use *Trove* at the National Library of Australia (online newspapers database) to find a speech by then former prime minister Hughes, reported on 31 May 1926, where he said that 'in the dominions [including Australia] the people were more British than the British in the old land'.

Research the history of the *Statute of Westminster Adoption Act 1942* and read Prime Minister Curtin's remarks in December 1941 about how Australia turned to America.

Is it possible for Australia to be independent when it comes to fighting wars? How might this come about? As a small nation on the edge of Asia do we have to rely on larger allies?

Sources: [Statute of Westminster](#); [John Curtin speech](#)

#### Bombing

World War II saw massive bombing by all sides, leading to tremendous civilian casualties. Look for the exhibit about the bombing of Darwin and other northern Australian towns in early 1942. How many people were killed there?

Then look for information in the World War II galleries about the bombing of London (The Blitz and later) and other English cities, about the bombing of German cities, then Tokyo and Yokohama and other Japanese cities, then Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Do we pay more attention to the deaths of a few people on our own soil than to the deaths of tens of thousands in other countries? Why?

Source: [Honest History note on bombing](#); [Hiroshima medical effects](#); [Wilfred Burchett in Hiroshima](#)

*G for George*

*G for George* is an Avro Lancaster bomber in Anzac Hall at the Memorial. It is also the title of a short movie about the exploits of *G for George* and crew bombing Germany. Watch the movie.

Look for the statistics at the end of the movie. For example, there were 125 000 personnel in the Royal Air Force's Bomber Command, of whom 55 000 were killed. There were 10 000 Australians, of whom 3488 were killed. Bomber Command was probably the most dangerous place Australians served in World War II.

There is some footage in the movie of German anti-aircraft guns and German civilians taking refuge but there is nothing in the commentary or in the statistics at the end about German casualties. Why do you think this is? Do enemy civilians deserve what they get? How did the movie make you feel?

Sources: [Stephens](#) on how the Memorial presents bombing to children; [bombing of Dresden](#); [bombing of Hamburg](#); [bombing of Hamburg](#)

Len Siffleet

Find the photograph of Australian soldier, Len Siffleet. He is about to be beheaded by a Japanese soldier in Papua New Guinea in 1943. How do you think Siffleet's family would feel, looking at this photograph?

How would a Japanese tourist feel? Is it acceptable to offend or embarrass former enemies?

There were two Ambonese (H. Pattiwal and M. Reharing) beheaded at the same time as Siffleet. Can you find a photograph of them in this display?

Source: [Len Siffleet](#)

The Hall of Valour

Why do people receive the Victoria Cross? The wording on the medal is 'For Valour' but it has been said that everyone who gets a VC is a hero but not every hero gets a VC.

Proportionately more officers than men receive the Victoria Cross. Why do you think this is?

Does our admiration for Victoria Cross winners contradict our Australian egalitarian values? Should we award Victoria Crosses to groups of soldiers rather than to individuals?

What do you think of this argument?

Cowardice and courage become merely arbitrary names we give to physiological reactions to environmental conditions. One recent sociological study of violence has even gone so far as to call group aggression a “forward panic” in which the physiological symptoms are the same as for panicked flight. (Walsh, reference below)

Under this argument, whether a soldier is awarded a decoration or is court-martialled for cowardice might depend on which way he or she is facing when the adrenalin flows. What do you think?

Sources: [Herald Sun article](#); [Stanley](#); [Walsh](#)

[Conflicts 1945 to today \(downstairs\)](#)

We will be doing more on this part of the Memorial in later editions of the *Alternative Guide* but here are a couple of questions about the Vietnam War.

[A very visual war](#)

The Vietnam War 1962-75 is said to have been the first televised war. Nightly television news in the United States and Australia brought pictures of the war into family homes. Look at the pictures of the war shown in the Memorial. For a comparison, Google, say, ‘Vietnam War dead’ or ‘Australian Vietnam War dead’. What differences do you notice between these resources and what the Memorial shows? Now that these pictures are widely available should the Memorial show more of them?

Obviously, many of the pictures we can Google now were not shown on television at the time. Should they have been? How do you strike the right balance between telling ‘the truth’ about war and not turning people off by showing gruesome images?

[Agent Orange](#)

Agent Orange is a short-hand term for a number of chemicals that were used in the Vietnam War to defoliate trees. Find the panel that refers to the effects of Agent Orange on

Australian service personnel. What information can you find (at the Memorial or elsewhere) about the effects of Agent Orange on the Vietnamese people?

Sources: [Bach](#); [Bird](#)

[Discovery Zone \(downstairs\)](#)

Check out the Iroquois helicopter from the Vietnam War. The helicopters were used to lift soldiers (Australian and American) out of battle, under fire.

Here's a quote from one of the American helicopter pilots:

They had all turned into animals. They were stepping on each other and the wounded. They fought to get inside the ... [helicopter]. We had dozens of men inside and more hanging onto the landing skids.

More kept coming at us, until we were completely engulfed with bodies of panicked men ... The pilots were shouting on the intercom to shoot these guys or do whatever it took to get them out of the aircraft ... so we began kicking them and pushing them off the helicopter as the ship struggled to rise off the ground.

Why do you think evidence like this is not presented alongside the Iroquois?

Do you think it is inappropriate to have this sort of evidence in an area of the Memorial intended for young children?

If you cannot present this sort of evidence do you turn the Discovery Zone into little more than a fun park? Were there lots of young children in the Discovery Zone when you were there? Were they having fun?

Source: [Underwood](#)

[Reality in Flames \(downstairs; World War II paintings\)](#)

Look at the paintings in this display (it concludes September 2016). Compare the sorts of things the paintings show with the ones you have seen in the World War II galleries upstairs. Do the paintings here show a wider range of subjects than the paintings upstairs? Do they show the experience of people other than Australians?

Compare the *Reality in Flames* paintings with the ones in the World War I galleries as well. There is also a large painting by official war artist, Ben Quilty, in the Afghanistan exhibition. What type of war paintings do you prefer?

Why does Australia have official war artists?

Sources: [Australian War Memorial](#); [reviews of \*Reality in Flames\*](#)

[Pre-Federation \(downstairs, past \*Reality in Flames\*\)](#)

Frontier Wars

There is an exhibition here called 'Soldiers of the queen'. It is about military exploits before Federation.

See if you can find a mention of 'the Frontier War' in this part of the Memorial. Henry Reynolds has suggested this is Australia's most important war.

Here's a quote from New South Wales Governor Macquarie in 1816 (in his orders to his soldiers).

On any occasion of seeing or falling in with the Natives ... they are to be called on ... to surrender themselves to you as Prisoners of War. If they refuse to do so, make the least show of resistance, or attempt to run away from you, you will fire upon and compell them to surrender ... Such Natives as happen to be killed ... if grown up men, are to be hanged up on trees in conspicuous situations, to strike the Survivors with the greater terror.

The Frontier War (or Wars) is the generic name for the conflicts between white settlers and Indigenous Australians from 1788. At least 20 000 Indigenous Australians (men, women and children) died in these wars and perhaps 2000 settlers.

Recent research on Queensland suggests, however, that 65 000 Indigenous men, women and children may have died in the Frontier Wars *in Queensland alone* and perhaps 100 000 throughout Australia. (These two figures are roughly equivalent to the numbers of Australian servicemen and women killed in World War I and in all Australia's overseas wars.)

From the Hall of Valour upstairs you may recall the names Mark Donaldson, Albert Jacka and Ben Roberts-Smith. Who were Jandamarra, Pemulwuy and Windradyne?

Some people have suggested the history of Australia can be told in two invasions: the invasion of Australia by settlers in 1788; the invasion of the Ottoman Empire by Australians and others in 1915? Do you agree?

Should the Frontier Wars be given more space in the Memorial or should they be commemorated somewhere else?

Sources: [Daley](#); [Honest History](#) (item on 'Indigenous service in and out of uniform'); [Organ](#); [Ørsted-Jensen](#); [Reynolds](#)



*Inter-racial massacres since 1788: [Judith Monticone, Healing the Land: A Closer Look at Needs of the Australian \(Re\)conciliation movement \(1999\)](#); courtesy of [treatyrepublic.org](#)*

### Indigenous service

While the Memorial is reluctant to set up an exhibition commemorating the Frontier Wars, it is doing a lot to commemorate Indigenous Australians who served in the Australian armed forces since the Boer War 1899-1902. This research has shown that many more Indigenous Australians served than had previously been thought. Why do you think it is only now that we are getting a proper idea of the numbers of Indigenous soldiers?

Sources: [ABC](#); [Australian War Memorial](#); [Daley](#)

### Afghanistan exhibition (downstairs)

The Memorial made special (and worthy) efforts to establish this exhibition while there were still Australian troops in Afghanistan. The Memorial's director has said the exhibition is very 'emotional'. How does it make you feel?

Could you find any information in the exhibition about *why* Australian forces were sent to Afghanistan? Or about what difference their presence made to the people of Afghanistan?

How many Australian soldiers died in Afghanistan? How many soldiers who served in Afghanistan have suffered post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) since?

The world's second largest arms manufacturer, Boeing, donated \$500 000 to the Memorial to set up the exhibition? Why do you think Boeing did this? What do you think about this?

Sources: [Alan Stephens](#) (review of Afghanistan exhibition); [Soldier On](#); [Sydney Morning Herald](#)

## Section 6: Endings

### Ours and theirs

Australians tend to know a lot more about Australian deaths in war than about the deaths of people from other countries. We are not unique in the world in commemorating our own more than others but we are very good at it.

An American professor has carefully calculated the numbers of deaths in all wars and conflicts around the world in the twentieth century. He came up with the figure of 231 million, although it is difficult to be exact. Other analysts have put the figure lower, at perhaps 170 or 180 million.

Regardless of the correct figure the great majority of these dead (probably more than 80 per cent) were not soldiers; they were civilians, women, children and old men.

What percentage of these dead were Australians? Work it out: assume 200 million dead; assume 100 000 Australians killed (including perhaps 500 civilians).

If you lived in a country which had wars fought on its soil do you think you would be more inclined or less inclined to commemorate war?<sup>1</sup>

Source: [Leitenberg](#); *Wikipedia* (usually reliable on this but check sources used)

### The long corridor and the bookshop

#### The corridor

Most people leave the Memorial through the long corridor down towards the bookshop. At the beginning of the corridor there is a picture of a soldier and the caption, 'At last I feel like an Anzac'. What do you think is meant by this?

Opposite this soldier there are a number of pictures of members of the Royal Family visiting the Memorial. In the old days, soldiers were said to fight 'For King (or Queen) and Country'. Do you think we would be less enthusiastic about commemorating past wars if we became a republic? Does the connection between King/Queen and Country make it more difficult for us to become a republic?

Further on there is an artwork called 'As of today' by Alex Seton. It comprises sculptures of folded flags, one for each of the 42 Australians killed in Afghanistan. There are poppies

---

<sup>1</sup> Did you think about the Frontier Wars when you answered this question?

scattered across the flags. The poppies were not part of Seton's original work but have been added by visitors to the Memorial. What do you think about this? Should art works be left as the artist intended or should visitors be allowed to make a gesture like this?

Source: [Australian War Memorial](#)

The shop and the view

What do you think of the merchandise in the shop? Will you buy any of it?

Are you surprised by how many war books are on sale? Have you read any of them?

As you leave the Memorial, look down the front steps towards Parliament House. Do you think that politicians looking out the windows of Parliament House and considering questions of war and peace will act any differently because they see the Memorial?



*Aboriginal War Memorial on Mount Ainslie, behind the Australian War Memorial:  
'Remembering the Aboriginal people who served in the Australian forces' ([David Reid](#))*

## Section 7: Difficult questions

### Language is important

#### Falling and dying

Why do you think some people use the terms ‘the fallen’ (about men and women who die in war) instead of simply saying ‘the dead’? Are these men and women any less dead because we use such euphemisms about them?

Similarly, why do some people, when talking about soldiers who die in wars, use the expression ‘they made the supreme sacrifice’. Do you think soldiers under orders have much choice about whether they kill or are killed? Would it be better to say ‘they were sacrificed’? Are some sacrifices worth it?

#### Landing and invading

You will see references to the ‘landing’ at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915. Do you think the waiting Ottoman Turks would have used this word about what was happening? Look up some dictionary definitions of the words ‘invasion’ and ‘landing’. Why does the Memorial use the term ‘landing’?

#### Which dead are glorious?

While we’re thinking about words, what do you think about words like ‘glory’, ‘heroes’, ‘honour’, ‘pride’ and ‘respect’ in relation to war service. For example, the then prime minister Tony Abbott referred in 2015 to ‘the glorious dead’ (which is a term that has been used for at least a century).

Source: [Abbott](#)

#### What price freedom?

The picture at the end of this *Alternative Guide* is of a medallion known as the King’s Penny or the Dead Man’s Penny, which King George V gave to the families of soldiers killed in World War I. Do you think the words on the medallion would have brought comfort to those families?

Do you think the ‘freedom’ that these soldiers are said to have fought for is our freedom today or just the freedom of people at the time the soldier died?

Younger children visiting the Memorial are encouraged to write messages on little plywood crosses which are then placed on the graves of Australian soldiers overseas; many of the messages refer to the freedom the soldiers' deaths are said to have won for later generations. Do you think these children thought up these words for themselves or were they coached?

Source: [Australian War Memorial](#)

Do you think the freedom referred to on the medal – or on the little plywood crosses – includes the freedom to question the common view of the role of war and the Anzac legend in Australian history?

[Lest we forget \(or being forced to remember\)?](#)

On a wall in the Memorial there are these words: 'As long as we remember, they did not die in vain'. What do you think that means?

If we are sentimental or emotional ('I teared up, thinking what they went through') in the way we think about past wars does this prevent us asking difficult questions ('did they die in vain?' 'was that war worth it?') because we are afraid of disrespecting the men and women who died?

Is it possible to oppose a war (or all wars) while respecting the soldiers who are ordered to fight?

If we avoid asking (and answering) difficult questions about past wars does it make it more likely that we will fight wars in the future?

'More and more', said American musician (REM) and commentator, Michael Stipe, 'what we "feel" about collective history seems like something manufactured, and kind of pumped into us, rather than a real emotion'. Does this sound like your experience?

Then there is twenty-something Sydney journalist, Kate Aibusson, who asked why the 'plucky irreverence' that Australians learn turns 'to quivering submission when it comes to Australia's remembrance of WWI? Why does it feel so wrong to question Anzac?' She described the distorted view of war she received as a child and the nagging feeling that there 'had to be more to WWI than these cardboard heroes'. Is this how you remember it or has your experience been different from Kate's?

ABC radio presenter, James Valentine, became exasperated on the eve of Anzac Day 2015:

Every media outlet [Valentine said], every gallery, every concert, every surf lifesaving club, every park, every council, every artist, every institution is marking this centenary. Individually, they probably all should. Collectively, it's smothering me and any actual emotion I might feel ... I'm being told repeatedly what I should feel. Exactly how solemn I should be ...

Another American commentator, David Rieff, has gone further and made the case for forgetting as well as remembering. Rieff wondered whether, in modern times,

people no longer knew what needed to be remembered and what could safely be forgotten. But if ... any real continuity between past, present and future has been replaced by collective memories of the past that are no more real than the invented traditions, then surely the time has come to scrutinise our inherited pieties about both remembrance and forgetting.

Lest we forget or Best we forget?

Sources: [Aubusson](#); [Rieff](#); [Samet](#); [Stipe](#); [Valentine](#)



*(Stephens family)*

## Acknowledgements

Honest History acknowledges the assistance of a number of teachers, who read the *Alternative Guide* in draft and made many useful suggestions.

## **HONEST HISTORY**

*Neither rosy glow nor black armband... just honest*

Twitter: follow Honest History @honesthistory1

Honest History is on [Facebook](#)

Honest History (<http://honesthistory.net.au>) is a coalition of historians and others supporting the balanced and honest presentation and use of Australian history. It is incorporated under the *Associations Incorporation Act (A.C.T.) 1991*. President: Professor Peter Stanley; Secretary and Public Officer: Dr David Stephens [admin@honesthistory.net.au](mailto:admin@honesthistory.net.au); 61 2 6251 5842; 0413 867 972. David Stephens is a member of [MEAA](#), the union and industry advocate for Australia's journalists.

© Honest History 2016. This work is copyright. Permission is given by Honest History for this work to be copied royalty free within Australia for educational and information purposes. Apart from any use as permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968* no part may be reproduced for commercial purposes.