

LIONS AND KANGAROOS: MOBILISING THE ANZAC LEGEND IN THE YPRES SALIENT

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In 2017, one hundred years after the third battle of Ypres (Passchendaele), Australia loaned two stone sculptures – the Menin Gate lions – to Ypres, the town that had originally offered them to the commonwealth in 1936. A few months later, with the departure of the originals imminent, the Australian government announced that it would offer the Belgians permanent replicas of the beasts. The rhetoric surrounding these acts of memorial diplomacy focused on how the lions were concrete symbols of a bond “formed of blood, mud and tears” between Australia and Belgium². However, if we examine the circumstances that led to the lions’ arrival in Australia in 1936, their temporary return to Belgium in 2017 and the time in between, this bond has neither been as straightforward nor as strong as we might assume.

This article considers the history of these silent sentinels as a prism through which to analyse official shared Australian and Belgian commemorative practices and memorial diplomacy related to the First World War and, more specifically, the third battle of Ypres over the last century. The history of these sculptures demonstrates that Australian officials had an initially indifferent relationship with the Belgians, focused as they were on fostering a particular narrative of the war within the commonwealth, and only belatedly have they taken a far more proactive, albeit somewhat circumscribed, stance towards commemorating third Ypres in Belgium itself. For its part, the Belgian Federal Government has ultimately done little to influence or encourage Australian remembrance initiatives related to the events of 1914–18. On the other hand, regional and especially local officials have actively sought to cultivate relations with Australians at various moments over the last one hundred years, most notably in the build-up to the First World War centenary. The Menin Gate lions' voyages reveal the divergent commemorative aims of those involved in their exchange, with the Australians keen to promote a distinctly national First World War narrative – the Anzac legend – in a distant country where the commemoration of 1914–18 is decentralised and local agents emphasise the multinational nature of the conflict.

1. Australia, Belgium and the First World War: A brief history

That thousands of Australians fought and died in Belgium during the First World War should come as no surprise to attentive locals in the Westhoek. Depending on the time of year, it is not uncommon to catch a glimpse of the striking green and gold apparel of one of the commonwealth's sport-

ing teams in Flanders fields or hear an Australian accent echo off the rebuilt, picturesque façades of the Grote Markt in Ieper. Nevertheless, the distant country's participation in the formerly "Great" War is hardly general knowledge throughout the rest of Belgium; Australia's contribution to the allied war effort – although substantial from an antipodean perspective – only accounted for a small portion of the hundreds of thousands of people mobilised within the British Empire between 1914 and 1918. It is, therefore, worthwhile providing a brief overview of Australia's First World War experience, paying particular attention to the young nation's relationship with Belgium during those turbulent years. After all, according to the rhetoric regularly espoused by Australian and Belgian officials nowadays, "many strong friendships and connections between the people and governments" of the two countries "have developed from the shared sacrifices of the First World War"³.

As a dominion within the British Empire, the Commonwealth of Australia's involvement in the world's first global conflict was a given once the Mother Country had declared war against Germany on 4 August 1914. However, the extent of Australia's commitment to the war effort was in the hands of antipodean politicians, many of whom – along with their constituents – firmly supported the British cause. Before London even had a chance to make any formal request for assistance from the dominion, the Australian government had offered to raise an expeditionary force of 20,000 men to be sent "to any destination desired by the home (British) Government"⁴. In addition to appeals for imperial solidarity, another key element that served to galvanise public support for the war in Australia were tales of Belgium's gallant, but ultimately doomed resistance in the face of German military might, which were well publicised in newspapers

1. I am grateful for the feedback provided by Delphine Lauwers and the anonymous reviewers on earlier drafts of this article. I would also like to warmly thank Dominiek Dendooven for sharing the notes and images he used to write the In Flanders Fields Museum's booklet on the Menin Gate Lions.

2. "Lions to Return to Menin Gates", SBS News, 26 September 2017, <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/lions-to-return-to-menin-gates>, accessed 30 May 2020.

3. Australian Embassy to Belgium, Luxembourg and Mission to the European Union and NATO, "Relations with Belgium", <https://belgium.embassy.gov.au/bsls/relbe.html>, accessed 13 May 2020.

4. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 August 1914, p. 9.

throughout the country. This was hardly surprising; press outlets in the commonwealth relied on British cable services for news and the German invasion of Belgium had quickly become the Empire's moral *casus belli*⁵. In the early weeks of the war, Australians read reports full of praise for the Belgians as their small army attempted to hold back the Teutonic flood; it was a contemporary David and Goliath story⁶. As the kingdom's defences buckled under the German onslaught, the Belgian David turned into a damsel in distress, helpless under the yoke of the beastly "Hun" and in need of saving⁷. British and Australian propagandists were to get significant mileage out of this latter image, with the metaphorical rape of Belgian sovereignty supported by some of the more extreme atrocity stories coming out of Europe⁸.

Portrayals of Belgium's violation by an immoral, even inhuman Germany army, clearly struck a chord with many in the early years of the war. Some were so inspired by the sufferings of the Belgians they composed songs and poems lauding their sacrifices, while others formed local committees that organised patriotic concerts and picnics to raise relief funds for the kingdom's stricken population⁹. Beyond individual or small community contributions, there were also federal and state-wide donations and initiatives. In mid-October 1914, soon after the fall of Antwerp, the Federal Government voted almost unanimously to offer £100,000 to Belgium with minimal debate¹⁰. On an even more visible and grandiose scale, motivated individuals with backing from the

New South Wales state government organised a "Belgium Day" to raise money "for the relief of the brave Belgians". Held on 14 May 1915, this event drew large crowds to parades and festivities across the state and was evidently a great success as, by the end of the day, citizens of New South Wales had parted with a total of £125,000¹¹.

The plight of Belgium also furnished young men with an altruistic justification for their enlistment in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). As one recruit noted in a letter to his mother:

"My first idea of enlistment was born of a spirit of adventure; but on hearing [...] the Bishop of Bathurst deliver an appealing address on the war and its causes, of the tragic fate of gallant Belgium crushed beneath the heel of Prussian militarism, of the grasp for world dominion by a power that respects not the right of small nations nor its own plighted word – then, unconvincing adventure gave way to an irresistible appeal of duty"¹².

However, the first contingent of 52,000 Australian soldiers and officers who set sail for war in November 1914, were not sent directly to the Western Front to deliver Belgium from her aggressors. Instead, they ended up fighting Ottoman forces in the Dardanelles.

Australia's involvement in the 1915 Gallipoli campaign – the country's first major engagement in the war – would have immense repercussions for how

5. ADRIAN GREGORY, "Britain and Ireland", in *Companion to World War I*, JOHN HORNE (ed.), Chichester, 2012, p. 404, SOPHIE DE SCHAEPPDRIVER, "Occupation, propaganda and the idea of Belgium", in *European culture in the Great War: The arts, entertainment, and propaganda, 1914-1918*, AVIEL ROSHWALD and RICHARD STITES (eds.), Cambridge, 1999, p. 268.

6. For example, *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 7 August 1914, p. 15; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 August 1914, p. 10; *Mercury* (Hobart), 29 August 1914, p. 5.

7. JUDITH SMART, "Poor Little Belgium and Australian Popular Support for the War 1914-1915", in *War & Society*, vol. 12 (1), 1994, 33–7.

8. See PETER FULLERTON (ed.), *Norman Lindsay War Cartoons, 1914-1918*, Melbourne, 1983, p. 760, 763–8.

9. JOAN BEAUMONT, "'Unitedly we have fought': imperial loyalty and the Australian war effort", in *International Affairs*, vol. 90 (2), 2014, p. 400; JOHN MCQUILTON, *Rural Australia and the Great War: From Tarrawingee to Tangambalanga*, Carlton South (Vic, Australia), 2001, p. 21–2; For examples of Belgium-inspired songs and poetry, see *The Flag of Belgium* (National Archives of Australia [hereafter NAA], A1336, 4199, April 1915); *Just a little scrap of paper and David* (Belgium) and *Goliath* (Germany) (NAA, A1336, 4234, June 1915).

10. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 October 1914, p. 10.

11. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 May 1915, p. 14; JUDITH SMART, "Poor Little Belgium", p. 40.

12. Cited in DALE BLAIR, *Dinkum Diggers: An Australian Battalion at War*, Carlton South, (Vic, Australia), 2001, p. 17.

the conflict of 1914–1918 was later remembered and commemorated in the commonwealth.¹³ A matter of days after their dominion brothers-in-arms, the Canadians, had bravely resisted the first German gas attacks on the Western Front at Ypres, the Australians, as part of a larger multinational allied force, landed at the soon-to-be fabled shores of Gallipoli on 25 April 1915. The Australians fought desperately for a foothold in a dramatic landscape of steep cliffs and gullies, bravely resisting Ottoman attempts to throw them back into the sea, but also failing to make any decisive breakthrough of their own. Back home, the newspapers were soon full of glowing reports about the quality of the Australian fighting man. A national legend was taking shape even as the fighting in the Dardanelles settled into a stalemate¹⁴. By the time the Australians had received the order to evacuate the peninsula in December 1918, the Gallipoli campaign had cost some 8,000 Australian lives. It had also left an indelible mark on the young dominion's consciousness.

After the AIF's withdrawal from the Dardanelles, the bulk of the force was sent to the Western Front, where its divisions were engaged in the desperately bloody and ultimately unsuccessful battles of Fromelles (5th Australian Division) and Pozières (1st, 2nd and 4th Australian Divisions) as part of the British Expeditionary Force's wider Somme Offensive in 1916. The AIF was also heavily involved in the 1917 battles for Bullecourt, a French town that had been heavily fortified by the Germans as part of their strategic withdrawal to the "Hindenburg" line¹⁵. It was not until mid-1917, as part of British Commander-in-Chief Sir Douglas Haig's third Ypres offensive that the Australians finally fought

in a major campaign aimed at liberating swathes of Belgium from the crushing "heel of Prussian militarism". The first of their engagements in the Ypres salient was the battle of Messines Ridge (7 to 14 June), which is best known for its explosive beginning when the British detonated nineteen mines – two of which were the responsibility of the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company – buried beneath the German front lines. Messines was the first clear cut victory the Australians experienced on the Western Front. This preliminary assault, which straightened the British line to the south of Ypres, was followed several weeks later by the third battle of Ypres, now commonly known as Passchendaele. The popular memory of this infamous campaign centres on the terrible conditions in which it was fought, with summer and autumn rains turning the low-lying battlefield into a near impassable quagmire. While such imagery holds true for the offensive's earlier and later stages, the first battles in which the Australian infantry divisions played a major role – Menin Road (20 September), Polygon Wood (26 September) and Broodseinde (4 October) – were actually fought in generally favourable conditions. Supported by crushing artillery barrages, the advancing British units secured their main objectives during these carefully planned "step-by-step" battles. The Australians' luck, however, ran out with the return of the rain and the following battles of Poelcappelle (9 October) and first Passchendaele (12 October) were utter disasters¹⁶. When the exhausted Australians were finally withdrawn, the AIF had suffered 38,000 casualties including 10,000 dead, making third Ypres by far the bloodiest of all the engagements the Australians had fought or would fight in the First World War.

13. JENNY MACLEOD, *Reconsidering Gallipoli*, Manchester, 2004, p. 4–6.

14. K. S. INGLIS, "The Australians at Gallipoli—I", in *Historical Studies*, vol., 14 (54), 1970, p. 219–30.

15. There is a considerable body of work on the AIF's 1916 engagements in Australian military historiography and on Fromelles in particular, which holds the unsavoury record of having cost more Australian lives in a 24-hour period than any other military engagement. The battles of Bullecourt have not generated quite as much attention but are still the subject of at least one study. Apart from the C.E.W. Bean's *Official History*, key studies include: ROGER LEE, *The Battle of Fromelles: 1916*, Canberra, 2010; MELEAH HAMPTON, *Attack on the Somme: 1st Anzac Corps and the Battle of Pozières Ridge, 1916*, Solihull, West Midlands, 2016; CHRISTOPHER WRAY, *Pozières: Echoes of a Distant Battle*, Port Melbourne (Vic, Australia), 2016; DAVID COOMES, *A Greater Sum of Sorrow: The Battles of Bullecourt*, Newport (NSW, Australia), 2016.

16. With the exception of the Australian *Official History*, there is no study dedicated solely to the Australians 1917 engagements in Belgium. C.E.W. BEAN, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918*, 11th ed., Vol. 4, *The Australian Imperial Force in France in 1917*, Sydney, 1941.

The fighting in the Ypres salient was not the only experience many Australians had of Belgium while on active service. After the signature of the armistice, four out of the AIF's five divisions ended up in the Entre-Sambre-et-Meuse region awaiting their repatriation to the commonwealth. This wait to return home may have been painfully long, but the Australian soldiers found their Walloon hosts to be far warmer and more generous than the locals they met in the Westhoek during the war¹⁷. As the soldiers' attitudes towards the Belgians softened somewhat during this period, views back home were hardening. As the war had dragged on and Australians heard of their fellow countrymen being killed or wounded in foreign fields with no discernible end to the conflict in sight, rhetoric surrounding Belgium's distress gradually lost much of its potency. Belgian relief appeals still appeared in the papers, but donations began to drop off as Australians increasingly sought to support their own by contributing time and money to organisations with an antipodean scope¹⁸. By the end of 1918, the Australian government's Repatriation Commission even implemented a policy restricting collections for causes outside Australia, which directly affected the Belgian Relief Fund¹⁹. Moreover, as attention turned to the peace conferences, thorny issues such as Dominion representation at the negotiations and reparations saw Belgium's war record become a point of contention for Australians. Less than a week after the armistice had come into effect, Hughes' scathing critique of Woodrow Wilson's fourteen points also cast doubt on Belgium's (and France's) right to compensation ahead of Australia, claiming that "under President

Wilson's terms Belgium and France will get what they want, and Australia gets nothing for her sacrifices"²⁰. Some of Hughes' colleagues rebuked him for this comment, but this did not stop him from drawing comparisons between the two countries when fighting to ensure the commonwealth had a place at Versailles. After all, his country "had put and kept more men in the field than Belgium"²¹. Others, namely those to the left of the political spectrum who had opposed conscription²² and the British crackdown on Ireland, were more forthright in the unfavourable contrasts they drew between poor little Belgium and Australia. As Queensland's Labor Premier, T.J. Ryan, noted:

"It is somewhat startlingly to contemplate that with a population of about 5,000,000 we have more dead and disabled than Belgium herself with a population of 8,000,000 in the very centre of the war area [...] Why was Australia called upon to do more than her share in the struggle? Why should Australia have more than her share of sorrowing mothers, wives and sisters"²³?

So much for a "friendship" born one hundred years ago.

II. The Anzac legend

The narrative that came to dominate Australian memory of the First World War was known as the Anzac legend and it drew on a potent mix of sacrifice and martial triumphalism. The language of

17. MATTHEW HAULTAIN-GALL, "Soldier to civilian: the 1st Australian Division's transition from war to peace in Belgium, 1918-1919, in *History Australia*, vol. 16 (1), 2019, p. 20-37.

18. RAYMOND EVANS, *Loyalty and Disloyalty: Social Conflict on the Queensland Homefront, 1914-1918*, North Sydney, 1987, p. 40; JOHN MCQUILTON, *Rural Australia*, p. 100-3.

19. Belgian Relief Fund (NAA, A2483, B18/6074, Memorandum for Deputy Comptroller, 22 September 1918); Belgian Relief Fund Donald, Vic. wound up (NAA, A2483, B18/7297, Minute Paper, 5 December 1918).

20. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 November 1918, p. 13.

21. WILLIAM HUGHES, *The Splendid Adventure: A Review of Empire Relations within and without the Commonwealth of Britannic Nations*, London, 1929, p. 101; NEVILLE MEANEY, *Australia and World Crisis, 1914-1923*, Sydney, 2009, p. 305.

22. Australia two referenda on the issue of conscription and the anti-conscriptionists won on both occasions, but only by very fine margins. For an overview of the conscription campaigns in Australia, see JOAN BEAUMONT, *Broken Nation: Australians in the Great War*, Crows Nest (NSW, Australia), 2013, p. 219-48, 374-89.

23. *West Australian*, 10 June 1919, p. 4. See also, *West Australian*, 27 June 1919, p. 6; *Daily Herald* (South Australia), 16 July 1919, p. 2; *National Advocate* (Bathurst, NSW), 6 November 1919, p. 2.

sacrifice employed in this narrative gave meaning to the losses of grieving families and tapped into the long-established idea that Australia had finally gone through “the one trial that [...] all humanity still recognises – the test of a great war” and had become a nation²⁴. Closely tied to this idea of national baptism was an emphasis on the martial exploits of Australian soldiers, who, despite being “raw colonial troops”, had proved at Gallipoli, and wherever else they fought, that they were “worthy to fight side by side with the [British] heroes of Mons, the Aisne, Ypres and Neuve Chapelle”²⁵. The war had tested Australian military manhood and it had not been found wanting. In fact, by the end of 1918, so the legend went, the Australians had proved themselves superior warriors who excelled in the art of war thanks to their upbringing on an untamed frontier of the British Empire.

Central to this narrative was the Gallipoli campaign and the date of the landing on that fatal Turkish shore, 25 April, became known as Anzac Day and was the most significant date in the memorial calendar of the nation. Thus, in stark contrast to the Belgians, the British or the French, the Australians commemorated and celebrated the beginning of their involvement in the war with more vim and vigour than the day the conflict “ended”, 11 November 1918. While Gallipoli best represented Australian sacrifice, the triumphalist thread of the Anzac legend drew heavily on the events of 1918. During this year of allied victory, the Australian forces were reported to have played crucial roles in the defence of Villers-Bretonneux – not far from the critical logistical hub of Amiens – during the German spring offensive and the Allies’ victorious hundred days offensive several months later. Unsurprisingly, the AIF’s battles in 1916 and

1917, which killed and maimed tens of thousands of Australians for little gain, fit uneasily within this narrative bookended by a glorious baptism of fire and the eventual triumph of the Australian warrior. This was particularly true of the third Ypres campaign, which was the object of comparatively less memory work than the AIF’s various battles in the Dardanelles and France both in the commonwealth and abroad.²⁶

III. The Australian “micro-geography” in Belgium

After the war, the bodies of the 12,000 or so Australians who had died in Belgium were not repatriated. Their remains were buried close to where they lay in cemeteries built and maintained by the Imperial War Graves Commission. The imperial scope of the commission’s project ensured that Australia’s dead on the Western Front and elsewhere were, in theory, treated no differently from the dead of other countries that made up the British Empire. Nevertheless, in an area where a quarter of a million British servicemen were buried, Australian graves were a minority in many cemeteries. Antipodean sacrifice was thus subsumed within a landscape of generalised British sacrifice. This is not to say that there was no Australian “micro-geography” – that is “sites [that] were often associated with particular nations” – in the salient. According to Mark Connelly and Stefan Goebel, such micro-geographies took shape during the war when “specific places ... were identified and referred to repeatedly, hammering them into the public consciousness”²⁷. In the Australian case, names closely associated with the AIF’s role in the third Ypres

24. C.E.W. BEAN, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918*, Vol. 6, *The Australian Imperial Force during the Allied Offensive, 1918*, Sydney, 1942, p. 1095; K.S. INGLIS, *Anzac Remembered: Selected Writings by K.S. Inglis*, Melbourne, 1998, p. 121; HENRY REYNOLDS, “Are Nations Really Made in War?”, in *What’s Wrong with Anzac?*, MARILYN LAKE, HENRY REYNOLDS, MARK MCKENNA and JOY DAMOUSI (eds.), Sydney, 2010, p. 30–6; PAT JALLAND, *Changing Ways of Death in Twentieth-Century Australia: War, Medicine and the Funeral Business*, Sydney, 2006, p. 53; JOY DAMOUSI, *The Labour of Loss: Mourning, Memory and Wartime Bereavement in Australia*, Cambridge, 1999, p. 49.

25. Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett quoted in K. S. INGLIS, “The Australians at Gallipoli—I”, in *Historical Studies*, vol. 14 (54), 1970, p. 221.

26. MATTHEW HAULTAIN-GALL, *The Battlefield of Imperishable Memory: Passchendaele and the Anzac Legend*, Clayton (Vic, Australia), 2021.

27. MARK CONNELLY and STEFAN GOEBEL, *Ypres: Great Battles*, Oxford, 2018, p. 21.

offensive featured regularly in the press and, after the war, four sites in particular – Ypres, Tyne Cot Cemetery (Zonnebeke), Polygon Wood and Hill 60 (Zillebeke) – had some form of memorial referencing the Australians. However, only the monuments at Polygon Wood and Hill 60 were dedicated uniquely to the antipodeans' exploits.

It was primarily a triumphalist interpretation of the war that dictated Australian officials' response to commemoration on the Western Front in the immediate aftermath of the conflict. Prime Minister Hughes recommended that memorials be raised for each of the AIF's infantry divisions at sites where they had "performed some outstanding feat of arms"²⁸. The 5th Australian Division's memorial was the only such monument erected in Belgium. Located at Polygon Wood, this stone obelisk celebrated the division's role in the eponymous battle, which Australia's official correspondent described as "one of the most famous of many terrible struggles which history will associate with that name"²⁹. Plans were also floated for another monument at the "Broodseinde Cross Roads". Unlike the 5th Division's memorial, it would be a *national* monument similar in scope to the Australian National Memorial proposed for Villers-Bretonneux, but smaller in size and commemorating Australians who had fought and died in Belgium, not France. Hughes opposed the idea citing its proximity to Polygon Wood, which was less than a mile away³⁰. This rejection ensured that the only Australian memorial of national significance on the Western Front would be the one erected at Villers-Bretonneux.

The second uniquely Australian memorial in the salient was even smaller in commemorative scale than the 5th Division's obelisk. Erected by the 1st Tunnelling Company at Hill 60 in memory of its members killed in the build-up to Messines, it ended up being replaced with another monument funded by the Australian government when it fell into disrepair in the 1920s³¹. In commemorating the sacrifices of a single company, it was hardly a site of clear-cut national significance. Yet, in attracting Australian travellers to Hill 60 for the last one hundred years, it has also ensured that the tunnellers' work in the depths of the Flemish earth has not faded into oblivion³².

As for the other two Australian-related sites in Belgium, one is easily overlooked while the other has become one of the best-known war memorials in the world. The former is a small plaque affixed to the central German blockhouse in Tyne Cot Cemetery. The plaque originally claimed that the 2nd Australian Division had captured it on 4 October 1917. It was actually the 3rd Division. That it took decades for this error to be rectified suggests that few people paid attention to this small memorial, which is easy to miss in what is still the world's largest Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery³³. The approximately 6,000 Australian names inscribed on the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing are harder to ignore, but these only make up a relatively small percentage of the close to 55,000 names of British soldiers covering this imperial memorial's seemingly endless panels. At first, the imperial nature of the Menin Gate held little appeal for Australian officials. Only when it

28. Australian Battle Memorials and Soldiers' Graves Committee – Minutes, (NAA, A2909, AGS1/2/1, 20 March 1919); Divisional memorials – General, (Australian War Memorial [hereafter AWM], AWM27, 623/2 Meeting of G.O.C.s Divisions and Brigades regarding Divisional Memorials, 14 March 1919).

29. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 September 1917, p. 7.

30. For more on the plans for and rejection of the Broodseinde crossroads monument, see MATTHEW HAULTAIN-GALL, "The Threshold of the British Empire": Accommodation, Coercion and the Commemoration of a National Australian Narrative of War at an Imperial Site of Memory" in *After the Armistice: Empire, Endgame, Aftermath*, MICHAEL WALSH and ANDREKOS VARNAVA (eds.), Routledge (forthcoming).

31. Papers regarding Australian war memorials in France and Belgium, and war cemeteries, (NAA, CP103/22 23A, Summary of Australian Memorials in France and Belgium).

32. *Brisbane Courier*, 15 November 1923, p. 14; *Advertiser*, 11 November 1927, p. 15; *Reveille*, June 1933, p. 15. A film entitled *Beneath Hill 60* (2010), which was based on the tunnellers' experiences in 1916 and 1917, was released in 2010.

33. ANDREW FETHERSTON (Commonwealth War Graves Commission archivist), email message to the author, 23 December 2015.

became clear that other solutions to commemorate the missing would be more costly did they agree to participate in the project. The government changed its mind again when it decided the names of all Australians listed missing on the Western Front would be inscribed on the national memorial at Villers-Bretonneux. This move threatened the Imperial War Graves Commission's "spirit of imperial co-operation" and the Commission's director, Fabian Ware, scrambled to convince Australian Prime Minister Stanley Bruce not to back out³⁴. Thankfully for Ware, the Australians flip-flopped once more. Curiously, in addition to emphasising that the commission would be "seriously embarrassed" by an Australian withdrawal, Ware also claimed that the Belgians would be "undoubtedly disappointed if these [Australian names] transferred to a monument in France"³⁵. There is no evidence to suggest that this would have been the case. In fact, none of the arrangements made for the Menin Gate or any of the aforementioned memorials necessitated direct contact between Australians and Belgians at all; this was all arranged through various imperial organisations³⁶.

IV. Acquiring the lions

If the physical markers of the Australian micro-geography in the salient were developed without direct Belgian input, this is not to say that there was no contact between Australians and Belgians throughout the interwar period. Undertak-

ing a long and prohibitively expensive voyage to the former battlefields in Europe was beyond the means of most Australians, but not all. In addition to well-off pilgrims and tourists, a number of officials, including every interwar prime minister bar Hughes, visited Ypres to see the battlefields and inspect the Imperial War Graves Commission's cemeteries. The Belgian Foreign Office was aware of these trips and saw in them an opportunity to engage in memorial diplomacy through the invocation of struggles and sacrifices shared during the war to push for more favourable trade relations between the two countries³⁷. The prospect of discussing Belgian industry and tariffs does not appear to have appealed all that much to Australian officials. As Foreign Minister Henri Jaspar noted when the Premier of Victoria, Harry Lawson, did not follow through on a visit to Belgium:

"The various measures taken by my department and my colleagues in National Defence and Economic Affairs were therefore irrelevant. I have the impression that Australian ministers, when they visit Europe periodically, make a point of avoiding meetings here that may be of an official nature. You will remember that in June 1921, Mr. Hughes, Prime Minister of the Commonwealth, after accepting our invitation, did not take the matter any further. As for last year, the Premier of South Australia went to Brussels, he was anxious that his visit should remain strictly private; he did not visit my department"³⁸.

34. PHILIP LONGWORTH, *The Unending Vigil: A History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission 1917-1967*, London, 1967, p. 92.

35. Memorials to the Missing - Tyne Cot & Menin Gate, (Commonwealth War Graves Commission, *Catalogue No. 559*, WG 219/2/1 Pt. 2, Ware to Bruce, 8 May 1924).

36. MATTHEW HAULTAIN-GALL, "The Threshold of the British Empire".

37. Visites Hughes, Storey, Fuller, Lawson, Young Australia League, Propagande (1914-21), Création musée de guerre australien 1918-23 (Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères de Belgique, *Série « classement B »*, dossier no. 114, Minute du Ministère des Affaires, ca. 1923).

38. Translated by the author. « Les dispositions de diverses natures prises par mon département et mes collègues de la Défense Nationale et des Affaires Économiques ont, par conséquent, été sans objet. J'ai l'impression que les ministres australiens, quand ils visitent périodiquement l'Europe, s'attachent à éviter ici les rencontres pouvant avoir un caractère officiel. Vous vous souviendrez, en effet que, en juin 1921, M. Hughes, premier ministre du Commonwealth, après avoir accepté notre invitation, n'est pas venu davantage. Quant à l'année dernière, le premier ministre de l'Australie du Sud s'est rendu à Bruxelles, il a tenu à ce que son voyage conservât un caractère strictement privé; il n'est pas venu à mon département ». Visites Hughes (Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères de Belgique, *Série « classement B »*, dossier no. 114, Jaspar to Pollet, Minute du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères 25 April 1923).

If Australian officials did happen to pass through Ypres, however, they were happy for local dignitaries to entertain them³⁹. Such accounts served as a reassuring corrective to occasional, but persistent reports suggesting that Belgians did not treat Australian (and British) bodies with due respect or were ungrateful profiteers “commercialising” the dead⁴⁰. Nevertheless, these one-off visits were too infrequent to establish an enduring link between the two peoples. The Australian War Memorial’s acquisition of the Menin Gate lions was meant to change this, or at least this was most likely the expectation of the Ypres town council when it agreed to offer the damaged sculptures to the commonwealth. The Australians viewed the transaction somewhat differently.

The first documented evidence of the Menin Gate lions in the Australian War Memorial’s extensive record collection dates back not to the war, but to 1935.⁴¹ In a letter addressed to the memorial’s director, John Treloar, an enterprising Australian officer with the Imperial War Graves Commission, Reginald Murphy, reported that he had spotted two objects in Ypres “which may be of interest” to the memorial. Accompanying the letter was a photo of a pile of “broken masonry” among which lay two damaged stone lions (illustrations 1 and 2). These statues, Murphy wrote, had once flanked the Menin Road entrance to Ypres and he felt

that “with luck” he would be able to “acquire the sculptured lions from the Ypres Town Authorities and send them ... as a gift” to the memorial⁴². Treloar, who had been the head of the Australian War Records Section during the war, was quick to note the lions’ apparent “historical value”⁴³. He clearly saw them in a similar light to the Shellal Mosaic which had been “discovered” by Australian soldiers during the second battle of Gaza and eventually found its way into the memorial’s collection. Just as the discovery mosaic added weight to the image of the Australian Light Horsemen as modern crusaders, the lions would serve as more than just reminders of a battlefield on which the Australians’ had fought⁴⁴. They were also symbols of a romantic past and their presence in the memorial would further reaffirm the classic tenants of the still young Anzac tradition⁴⁵. As one commentator noted, “the old lions will bring a tinge of antiquity as well as historic association with the land that sent its thousands to defend them”⁴⁶. Unsurprisingly, Treloar, who had a penchant for classical warrior imagery, agreed with Murphy’s suggestion and arrangements were made to have the Australian High Commissioner in London, Stanley Bruce, make an official approach to Jean Vanderghote, the burgomaster of Ypres.

After several weeks’ deliberation, the burgomaster replied that his administration was “touched

39. *Argus* (Melbourne), 1 January 1924, p. 7; *Mercury*, 21 June 1935, p. 9; Ypres Visitor Book, Dominiek Dendooven collection (In Flanders Fields Museum), 1923–36.

40. *West Australian* 10 October 1921, p. 7; *West Australian*, 16 November 1937, p. 21.

41. It is highly unlikely the lions were still in place by the time the AIF arrived in Belgium for the third battle of Ypres. Menin Gate Lions presented to AWM by the Belgian Government (AWM, AWM315, 748/022/001 01, Treloar to Murphy, 27 January 1937 and Murphy to Treloar, 12 February 1937); ELIZABETH BURNES, “The Menin Gate Lions”, *Sabretache*, vol. 29 (2), 1988, p. 12–3.

42. Menin Gate Lions (AWM, AWM315, 748/022/001 01, Murphy to Treloar, 8 October 1935).

43. Treloar’s responses to Murphy’s proposal appear to pre-date Murphy’s initial letter, but Treloar mentions that the Imperial War Graves Commission officer had raised the idea of acquiring Menin Gate lions with him “during the course of a conversation in Melbourne on the 6th September 1935”. Menin Gate Lions (AWM315, 748/022/001 01, Treloar, 13 September 1935 and Treloar to Murphy, 4 October 1935).

44. *Age*, 13 August 1919, p. 4; *Irwin Index*, 27 April 1940, p. 1.

45. For a similar argument concerning the Shellal Mosaic, see VICTORIA ROSS and SARAH MIFORD, “Uncovering the classics in the Sinai and Palestine campaign: the Australian First World War archaeological excavation of the Shellal Mosaic”, *History Australia*, vol. 17 (2), 2020, p. 308–27.

46. *Mercury*, 28 August 1936, p. 8. It should be noted that the lions were, in fact, not that old. They first appeared at the Ypres Cloth Hall in 1822, but this does not appear to have been common knowledge at the time. DOMINIEK DENDOOVEN, *The Menin Gate Lions* (exhibition booklet, Ypres: In Flanders Fields Museum, 2017), p. 4–5.



Reginald Murphy's photographs of the Menin Gate lions lying among piles of broken masonry in Ypres, 1935. Photographs by the author; Menin Gate Lions presented to AWM by the Belgian Government (AWM, AWM315, 748/022/001 01).

by the idea that these two souvenirs of pre-war Ypres would be placed near the Australian War Memorial” and the council had agreed to offer the lions “as a token of friendship and in homage of our recognition”⁴⁷. However, not all the citizens of Ypres were pleased with this decision. Some residents felt the town was losing a part of its heritage in the deal and, to add insult to injury, it was unclear what exactly would be gained in offering up the statues. One embittered commentator lambasted the council for giving away symbols that had stood as a proud testament to the town’s rich past for centuries as well as the recent war:

“Coldly, inexorably, our communal council voted for the lions’ exile to the antipodes [...] in Australia, where they will serve to decorate a monument to the victims of the war. We have already lost [...] precious archives and so many artistic riches. Should we uselessly get rid of these last relics by donating them to a nation that, in exchange, will offer official thanks and will certainly not send us loads of tourists”⁴⁸?

Another expressed disappointment at the town council’s inability to take the opportunity to organise a small, folkloric event for the lions’ departure, instead of having them “simply expedited” to Australia. They did draw some comfort from the idea that the lions would make “good ambassadors for their city [...] of birth carrying with them an abundant quantity of leaflets and posters about Ypres”⁴⁹. Whether any such marketing material was actually sent with the lions is doubtful; there

is no mention of any such publicity in the rather extensive records related to the lions in Australia. Nevertheless, this promise of greater recognition for Ypres and the tourism potential the deal might entail at least offered some minor consolation⁵⁰. Had the citizens of Ypres known that the lions would lie largely hidden from public view for approximately five decades, they would have probably been even more scathing of the council’s decision to give them away.

In return for the sculptures, the Australians decided to offer a bronze statuette to Ypres. Although much smaller than the lions, Murphy felt this reciprocal gift “would harmonize splendidly with the furnishings” of the Burgomaster’s Parlour, which was located near the Menin Gate and contained several other war-related artefacts⁵¹. Given the memorial’s tight budget, Treloar opted to have a replica cast from an existing statuette and he had three possibilities in mind: an infantryman standing at attention (*The Digger*⁵², illustration 3); an infantryman advancing (*On Guard*); and a man from a pioneer unit (*Pioneer*, illustration 4). Of these options, *On Guard* was dismissed immediately as being “rather a nuisance to place because of the dangerous bayonet”. *Pioneer*, although more evocative than the “stiff” Digger model, also posed a problem because, as he carried a shovel as well as a rifle, he was not aggressive enough. As Treloar noted, the presence of the digging tool “might create the impression that the Australians were employed in labour battalions” and this would undermine the image of the Aus-

47. Australian War Memorial Sculptured Lion from Ypres (NAA, A1, 1936/1567, Burgomaster of Ypres to High Commissioner, London, 22 June 1936).

48. Translated by author. « Froidement, inexorablement, notre conseil communal vota l’exil de nos lions aux antipodes [...] en Australie, où ils serviront à orner un monument aux victimes de la guerre. Nous avons déjà perdu [...] nos précieuses archives et tant de richesses artistiques. Devait-on se débarrasser inutilement de ces dernières reliques pour en faire don à une nation qui, en échange, adressera des remerciements officiels et ne ne nous expédiera certainement pas des cargaisons de touristes? » *Het Ypersche Nieuws*, 29 August 1936, p. 3.

49. Translated by author. “Simplement expédiés” and “(les lions sont partis en) bons ambassadeurs de leur ville [...] natale emportant avec eux une abondante documentation de tracts et d’affiches sur Ypres.” *Le Sud*, 9 August 1936, p. 6.

50. For more on Ypres and battlefield tourism during the interwar years, see DELPHINE LAUWERS, *Le Saillant d’Ypres entre reconstruction et construction d’un lieu de mémoire: Un long processus de négociations mémorielles, de 1914 à nos jours*, unpublished PhD thesis, Florence, Department of History and Civilization, European University Institute, 2014, p. 273–86, 299–305.

51. Menin Gate Lions (AWM315, 748/022/001 01, Murphy to Treloar, 30 June 1936).

52. “Digger” is an endearing term for an Australian (or New Zealand) soldier that has its origins in the First World War. *Jass* is the Belgian equivalent.



Charles Web Gilbert's The Digger statuette offered to Ypres in return for the Menin Gate lions at the In Flanders Fields Museum, 30 October 2015. Photograph by the author.



*Charles Web Gilbert, Leslie Bowles and E.J. Gregory, Pioneer, sculpture, 47.5 x 20.8 x 17.6 cm, 1920.
AWM, ART12428.*

tralian soldier as an elite warrior that the Australian War Memorial had projected throughout the interwar period⁵³. That left *The Digger* which, after various issues with the casting, was finally presented to the Burgomaster in May 1938, a year and a half after the lions had arrived in Australia.

The stone ambassadors' arrival in Australia was a low-key affair. They were sent straight to Canberra, where it quickly became apparent that the damage sustained during the war meant they would need to undergo some form of restoration before they could be put on display⁵⁴. Unfortunately, Treloar's priorities lay elsewhere and little progress was made in this endeavour before the outbreak of the Second World War. The memorial director even failed to satisfy the burgomaster of Ypres' simple request for a photo of the lions in their new environment. Unsuccessful the first time, burgomaster Vanderghote renewed his request in 1947 and Treloar once again failed to oblige his correspondent. Vanderghote's letter did briefly galvanise Treloar into action as he began to experiment with various installation options. Treloar was adamant that the lions should not be "treated as relics and placed in a gallery" because of their "considerable historical interest and [...] very close link with a battlefield where probably 15,000 Australians are buried"⁵⁵. Due to their sacred symbolism, he felt the lions' proper place was amongst the other hallowed elements of the memorial – the Roll of Honour, the Pool of Reflection and the Hall of Memory – rather than the museum exhibits. Leslie Bowles, one of the memorial's key sculptors, was not so convinced, noting:

"Aesthetically I don't think they go well in the approach in Garden of Memory and [...] would be incongruous with the other decora-

tive motives [...] As you know I have always had the opinion that the entrance – courtyard approach and the Hall of Memory should be an harmonious and perfectly artistic whole – 'a thing of beauty etc.' and everything in and on it original and appropriate to Australia in allegory and symbolism [...] they are more of a "museum piece" than complete works of art"⁵⁶.

Further discussions between the two revealed that neither man was inclined to budge from their respective positions. Eventually, the lesser-damaged lion was put on display among the memorial's other objects, although it is not clear when this happened, while the second was left mouldering in storage. It was not until the 1980s that anything would be done to have the pair displayed together.

V. A long hibernation

The period of the lions' neglect coincided more generally with fading interest in the First World War in Australia and throughout the world more generally. Initially, the waning significance of the years 1914–1918 was due to the memory of the more recent Second World War displacing that of the First. Yet, there was another, more fundamental shift taking place. The numbers of men and women who had experienced the conflict firsthand were in decline and their influence over the Anzac legend was moving inexorably out of their hands and into those of a generation who had not lived through 1914–18. It was a time when the war was shifting from "living" to "cultural memory" with increasing speed⁵⁷. Moreover, other issues, such as the rise of a "new nationalism" that sought to distance Australians from their British past and the commonwealth's increasingly

53. Menin Gate Lions (AWM315, 748/022/001 01 Treloar to Bowles, 16 July 1936); CRAIG MELROSE, "The Australian War Memorial and the 'Culture Wars': The Representation of Triumph and Sacrifice in Inter-War Commemoration", in *Australian Cultural History*, vol. 26, 2007, p. 212.

54. Menin Gate Lions (AWM315, 748/022/001 01, Treloar to Bowles, 23 September 1936, Treloar to Murphy, 9 October 1936).

55. Menin Gate Lions (AWM315, 748/022/001 01, Treloar to Bowles, 13 September 1947).

56. Menin Gate Lions (AWM315, 748/022/001 01, Bowles to Treloar, 8 October 1947).

57. JAN ASSMANN, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity", in *New German Critique*, no. 65, 1995, p. 129–31; ALEIDA ASSMANN, "Memory, Individual and Collective", in *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, ROBERT E. GOODIN and CHARLES TILLY (eds.), Oxford, 2006, p. 220–2.

unpopular entanglement in the Vietnam War, cast Anzac commemoration in an unappealing light. As a result of these developments, many observers felt the legend occupied an increasingly tenuous position within the nation's historical consciousness and there were predictions it would soon be forgotten altogether⁵⁸.

Curiously, while the memory of the Great War was going through a period of flux in Australia, the Menin Gate lions' original owners had not completely forgotten them. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Australian War Memorial received enquiries concerning the lions' whereabouts. In one case, a Belgian ex-servicemen's organisation sought coloured slides of each lion, which the memorial staff did provide this time round, although they were forced to point out that the statues had still not been allocated a permanent position within the memorial building⁵⁹. The Last Post Committee also made what appeared to be a relatively innocuous query, but this may have also been a belated attempt to mobilise the lions as ambassadors for Ypres. In the letter, sent to the memorial via a member of the 42nd Battalion Association who had visited the town, committee president Florian Vandevoorde noted that a diminishing number of townspeople were left who remembered "the story of the two stone lions". He had heard that they had been "presented to the 'diggers' who took them with them when returning to Australia, and that they now rest in the capital or some principal city of Australia as a lasting Anzac trophy". Vandevoorde hoped to "check the true story of these direct links between the Australian and Ypres people and revive it on the occasion of the millennium of our city [Ypres] in 1962"⁶⁰. If the president had been hoping for a hint of Australian interest in reviving the story of those direct

links, he must have been disappointed with the rather colourless response of the memorial's director at the time, James McGrath. McGrath simply noted that "the lions are safely held at the Memorial" which had acquired them as a gift resulting from "a request from the Australian High Commissioner in London" to Ypres' burgomaster⁶¹. Evidently, the people of Ypres were considerably more concerned about what had become of the lions than any Australian.

These requests for information about the lions did not originate in a vacuum. They were a reflection of a small but growing enthusiasm for First World War commemoration in Belgium – and Ypres more specifically – that would help lay the foundations of an Australian commemorative tradition in the kingdom. A key development in this respect was the opening of an Australian embassy in Brussels in 1960, although it did not appear to be so at the time. The guidance notes for the embassy's establishment made it clear that Australia's "close interest in [the] European Economic Community" was "among the principal reasons for the Government's decision to establish a post in Brussels". As for building a closer relationship with the small kingdom in which the European Economic Community's seat was located, that was only of secondary importance.⁶² Moreover, with the exception of a brief reference to Australia and Belgium's shared views on "major world political issues as has been demonstrated by their association as allies in two world wars", there was no mention of any strong relationship between the two countries based on a history of shared sacrifice in the First World War. Nevertheless, the presence of the embassy in Brussels ensured that Australian officials were on hand to respond to invitations to various federal and local war commemorations⁶³.

58. K.S. INGLIS, "Reflecting on a Retrospective", in *Anzac Day Then and Now*, T.R. FRAME (ed.), Sydney, 2016, p. 23;

GRAEME DAVISON, "The Habit of Commemoration and the Revival of Anzac Day", in *Australian Cultural History*, no. 23, 2003, p. 78.

59. Menin Gate Lions (AWM315, 748/022/001 01, Allan to Lancaster, 20 January 1970 and Lancaster to Allan, 28 January 1970).

60. Menin Gate Lions (AWM315, 748/022/001 01, Joseph to McGrath, 5 April 1962).

61. Menin Gate Lions (AWM315, 748/022/001 01, McGrath to Joseph, 6 April 1962).

62. Belgium - Relations with Australia. Briefing for Australian Embassy in Brussels (NAA, A1838, 7/1/3/4/1, Opening of Australian Embassy in Brussels – Guidance Notes, 3 March 1960).

63. Various invitations can be found in Belgium - Relations with Australia - General (NAA, A1838, 7/1/3 PART 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7).

Ultimately, federal ceremonies did little to create anything but a fleeting commemorative relationship between Australian and Belgian officials. Reports from the first three decades of the embassy's existence in Brussels only mention two such events: a ceremony arranged for the fiftieth anniversary of the First World War and a "Flame Ceremony" commemorating the 27th anniversary of the Second World War⁶⁴. Events at Ypres, on the other hand, saw the establishment of a more durable association between locals in the Westhoek and commonwealth officials. As discussed above, contact between Australian officials and local administrators during the interwar years had been sporadic and brief. This was largely due to the predominant role the British played in commemorating the BEF at Ypres between the wars, as well as the fact that Australians had attached more importance to other sites on the Western Front, notably Villers-Bretonneux. With the events of the Second World War overshadowing those of 1914-18 and Ypres no longer attracting as much British attention, local officials gradually began to take a more proactive stance towards commemorating the empire's sacrifice in Flanders. The efforts of Ypres' tourism department in promoting various fiftieth First World War anniversary events as well as burgomaster Albert Dehem's well-publicised call that all veterans who fought in the salient should return "to pray for the dead and strengthen peace" caught the attention of the Australian ambassador to Belgium, Ralph Harry⁶⁵. Supported by his counterpart from New Zealand, Harry suggested that a small Anzac Day ceremony be organised in Ypres. The Belgians responded positively to this overture and, on 25 April 1967, a party of eight officials from the Australian and New Zealand embassies joined the burgomaster

of Ypres, himself accompanied by a small number of local officials for a short program held entirely within Ypres. The event was highly local in nature – no Belgian state or provincial civil servants or ministers were invited – and it had a minimalist program. Nonetheless, the Australian and New Zealand embassy staffs were clearly satisfied with the hour and a half of ceremony and contacted the burgomaster the following year noting that they wished to make it "an annual event"⁶⁶. An Anzac Day tradition at Ypres was born. Symbolically, this was a significant development for Australian commemoration in Belgium, but the annual ceremony itself was hardly a grand event and, at this particular point in time, it achieved little in the face of general antipodean indifference.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Australian attitudes towards the First World War underwent a transformation thanks to a handful of powerful social histories and, more importantly, popular film and television productions, including Peter Weir's international blockbuster *Gallipoli* (1981). These new accounts did not reinvent the Anzac wheel, but subtly reworked with it. They still reaffirmed the claim that Australia's involvement in the conflict of 1914-1918 had defined the young nation and the well-worn themes of sacrifice, mateship, classlessness and larrikinism remained prominent. Their appeal for contemporaries lay in how they reframed Anzac's outdated, bellicose and romantic elements by accentuating the hardships endured and the trauma suffered by young, innocent men⁶⁷. In these new representations of Anzac, notions of triumphalism and imperialism were greatly toned down. As for the discourse surrounding the notion of sacrifice, this was no longer couched in high diction,

64. Belgium - Relations with Australia - General (NAA, A1838, 7/1/3 PART 2 and 3, External Affairs to Embassy, 19 September 1964 and Harry to External Affairs, 11 May 1967).

65. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 January 1964; Organisatie van activiteiten ihkv de herdenking van de Eerste Wereldoorlog (Stadsarchief Ieper [SI], TOE-336, City Administration, Annoot to Till, 16 October 1963).

66. Anzac Day 1967 (SI, TOE-404, City Administration, Dehem to Harry, 4 March 1967, Harry to Dehem, 23 March 1967 and Knight to Annoot, 11 April 1967); Anzac Day 1970, (SI, TOE-410, City Administration, Norrish to Dehem, 15 March 1968).

67. CAROLYN HOLBROOK, *Anzac: The Unauthorised Biography*, Sydney, 2014, p. 128-42; JENNY MACLEOD, *Reconsidering Gallipoli*, p. 221-5; CHRISTINA TWOMEY, "Trauma and the Reinvigoration of Anzac: An Argument", in *History Australia*, vol. 10 (3), 2013, p. 85-108.

which had originally served to comfort grieving relatives coming to grips with the loss of a loved one. Instead, sacrifice was now invoked through the language of suffering and victimhood. For instance, when describing the end of 1916 – that year of the infamous Somme battles – Bill Gammage, author of the aptly titled *The Broken Years*, noted that “they [the Australians] realised that they were assigning themselves to apparently useless agony, and were sacrificing their hopes and probably their lives to defend others. They had chained themselves to an odious necessity. They had come to Armageddon”⁶⁸. This was a far cry from how Australian sacrifice had been portrayed throughout the interwar years. Significantly, the creators of these reworked narratives did not have to look beyond the well-known failure of the Gallipoli campaign to cast a tragic, anti-imperialist pall over Anzac. The AIF’s battles in Belgium (and France), if mentioned at all, provided further evidence of Australians’ heroism in the face of futility, but they were not central to the reinvigorated legend.

In 1991, the Menin Gate lions suddenly appeared in public for the first time, located in prominent positions just inside the Australian War Memorial’s entrance. This was somewhat surprising as, although the timing of their installation coincided with a wave of official Anzac commemorative activity, Gallipoli had become the uncontested focal point of Australian First World War memory during the Anzac revival of the 1980s. Moreover, the statues’ installation was not met with any discernible fanfare, nor did it mark the beginning of a newfound interest in Australia’s links to Belgium during the First World War. In fact, while Belgium remained very much on the margins of the Anzac commemorative agenda; a number of notable and durable developments took (or would soon take) place in Turkey and France.

Arguably, the most important of these developments was Prime Minister Bob Hawke’s highly publicised pilgrimage to Gallipoli for the seventy-fifth anniversary of Anzac Day. This event not only further elevated the 1915 campaign’s already dominant position in the popular narrative of the Great War, it also inspired thousands of other Australians to undertake their own pilgrimage to the Dardanelles⁶⁹. Not quite so dramatic, but closer to the former salient, were commemorative stirrings in certain French villages as astute locals and even federal politicians began to take advantage of Australian officials’ rejuvenated interest in the First World War. A key example of this was how the French used the Australian bicentenary in 1988 to engage in commemorative diplomacy. On Anzac Day of the bicentennial year, French and Australian public servants, including embassy and Department of Veterans’ Affairs staff, put together a three-day commemorative program for a group of Australian officials, army officers and four First World War veterans. According to Romain Fathi, the considerable French investment in this event aimed to open up Villers-Bretonneux as “a channel through which to address state issues outside international institutions” after disagreements over issues such as New Caledonian independence and French nuclear testing in the Pacific had put a strain on Franco-Australian relations⁷⁰. Anzac Day 1988 at Villers-Bretonneux laid the groundwork for a renewal of Australian commemorative activity in France.

For their part, the Belgians showed no interest in linking their involvement in the bicentenary celebrations with Australian war commemoration. Rather, their contribution was limited to gestures such as sending representatives to Australia to participate in the International Mathematical Olympiad, the World Scout Jamboree and the Girl Guides International Bicentenary Camp⁷¹. Appar-

68. BILL GAMMAGE, *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War*, Carlton (Vic, Australia), 1974, p. 179.

69. CAROLYN HOLBROOK, *Anzac*, 178–9.

70. ROMAIN FATHI, *Our Corner of the Somme: Australia at Villers-Bretonneux*, Port Melbourne, 2019, p. 113.

71. Australian Bicentennial celebrations - International program participation by Belgium (NAA, A463, 1985/675 Belgium: Areas of Involvement in the Bicentenary, 16 July 1987).

ently, there were no pressing tensions or noteworthy shared interests between the countries that might have driven federal officials in Belgium to engage their Australian counterparts in memorial diplomacy as the French had done.

The lions' little-publicised appearance at the Australian War Memorial's entrance did not owe anything then to the (lack of) memory work between Belgian and Australian federal officials, but to the long memories and tenacity of Ypres locals who refused to let sleeping cats lie. During a trip to Europe in the mid-1980s, which included a brief visit to Belgium, Australian federal minister for Veterans' Affairs Arthur Gietzelt found himself on the receiving end of somewhat "pointed questions" posed by the burgomaster of Ypres, André Verstraete, concerning the wellbeing of his city's former guardians. While not the first time the Belgians had enquired after the lions, the key difference on this occasion was how the burgomaster cannily took advantage of the federal minister's presence in Belgium and put him on the spot. Now that there was "a possibility of the Minister being embarrassed by the situation", the Department of Veterans' Affairs was keen to resolve the issue and pressured the memorial to find out what had happened to the lions⁷². An investigation into the matter revealed the lesser-damaged sculpture was located in an "alcove off the Gallipoli gallery" and the second lion was still in storage, having never been displayed (illustration 5)⁷³. This was hardly in keeping with Bruce's claim in his official approach to the Ypres town council fifty years earlier that the statues would "be given a place of honour" among the memorial's collections⁷⁴. Of even more concern, however, was the discovery that Bruce had mistakenly informed the Belgians that both

lions had been installed at the entrance to the memorial back in 1938⁷⁵. As the memorial's current director, Jim Flemming, lamented,

"We are at fault in that we have advised the Belgium government in writing that the Lions had been repaired and mounted on display [...] It will be most embarrassing for the Memorial if it is known that we have been untruthful for 50 years. The [original Menin Gate lions] file makes very sad reading".

In order to make up for years of neglect, the memorial's director decided the lions needed urgent repairs to bring them up to "exhibition standard" so they might be put on display together⁷⁶.

The staff at the Australian War Memorial opted to restore the lions in a manner that ensured the original, damaged parts were easily visible from the reconstructed elements, but it took several years to complete the work⁷⁷. When the statues were finally ready to be put on permanent display, they did not find themselves in one of the memorial's First World War galleries. Instead, in a decision mirroring Treloar's belief that the lions should not be "treated as relics", the statues were installed at the entrance to the memorial, among the site's most sacred features (illustration 6)⁷⁸. They have now occupied this position for the better part of thirty years and they are among the first statues visitors see when they enter the memorial and yet their public display has ultimately done little to anchor Australia's First World War links to Belgium and, more specifically Ypres, in popular memory. While two identical and very brief plaques located near each lion have served to inform visitors of their significance, it would appear only

72. Lions presented to AWM by Belgium Government (AWM, AWM315, 748/022/001 PART 2, Department of Veterans' Affairs to McKernan and Flemming, 10 October 1985).

73. Lions presented to AWM (AWM315, 748/022/001 PART 2, McAuslan and Stanley to McKernan, 11 October 1985).

74. Australian War Memorial Sculptured Lion (A1, 1936/1567, Bruce to Bourgmaster of Ypres 31 January 1936).

75. Menin Gate Lions (AWM315, 748/022/001 01, Bruce to Bourgmaster of Ypres, 9 May 1938).

76. Lions presented to AWM (AWM315, 748/022/001 PART 2, Flemming to Burness, 16 October 1985).

77. Lions presented to AWM (AWM315, 748/022/001 PART 2, Contract for the Reconstruction of the Australian War Memorial's Menin Gate Lions).

78. Menin Gate Lions (AWM315, 748/022/001 01, Treloar to Bowles, 13 September 1947).



The badly damaged Menin Gate Lion in storage, ca 1985. Photograph by the author; Menin Gate Lions presented to AWM by the Belgian Government (AWM, AWM315, 748/022/001 01).



The Menin Gate lions at the entrance of the Australian War Memorial, ca 1991. AWM, ART12510.002.

the most observant or inquisitive pay them any heed⁷⁹. Indeed, even Brendan Nelson, the memorial's director from 2012 to 2019 and driving force behind the lions' return visit to Belgium, remarked that he had not made any connection between them and the fighting in Ypres before visiting the Flemish town⁸⁰. Subsumed within the memorial's monumental structure, the Menin Gate lions might be there for all to see, but they inspire few to look more closely.

VI. The lions return

During the First World War centenary, the lions were temporarily liberated from their ornamental positions at the Australian War Memorial to serve as ambassadors for their host country. In 2014, they were shipped off to the Canadian War Museum and then, after a brief stopover back in Canberra, they returned to Ypres where they were installed in their pre-war positions flanking the Menin Road. This second voyage was timed to coincide with Anzac Day 2017 and was one of the most high-profile and popular commemorative initiatives Australian officials have organised in the former salient region. It also neatly encapsulates the trajectory of the commonwealth's approach to memorial diplomacy on the Western Front since the 1980s. The Australian government has spent millions over the last three decades on projects at various First World War battlefields in France. Among the most visible of these are memorial parks, two of which have large "digger"

statues, and extensive, Anzac-centric museum displays at Fromelles, Bullecourt and Le Hamel as well as the \$100 million (AUD) Sir John Monash Centre at Villers-Bretonneux, which was unveiled in 2018⁸¹. Commemoration of the Australians' Belgian battles, on the other hand, has generally lagged – both in terms of expenditure and timing – well behind these sites in France.

Notably, while memorial parks at Bullecourt, Fromelles and Le Hamel were opened in the 1990s, very little was done to further develop Australia's micro-geography in the former salient region. One exception was the installation of three memorial plaques at the Menin Gate, Passchendaele and Messines in 1993. Although the plaques themselves were a private initiative, Australian authorities supported their production and installation. Moreover, the Menin Gate and Passchendaele plaques were unveiled during the official "Return to the Western Front Mission" tour which, unlike the Bicentenary events in France, included Belgium in the itinerary⁸². The aim of these plaques, which include information in both English and Dutch, is to inform viewers of the AIF's exploits and sacrifices during the third Ypres campaign. They are also part of a larger series of thirteen commemorative markers on the Western Front that were inaugurated that same year with the remaining ten located in France. Their appearance in the Westhoek was the result of Australia's intensifying commemorative activity in the Somme and French Flanders spilling across the border.

79. Anecdotally, the author has witnessed many visitors to the Australian War Memorial pass between the lions and only on very rare occasions have they stopped to read the associated plaques.

80. *Canberra Times*, 3 September 2014, <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/war-memorials-menin-gate-lions-to-return-to-ypres-for-passchendaele-centenary-20140903-10bt4n.html>, accessed 20 May 2020.

81. Fromelles, Bullecourt and Villers-Bretonneux received \$1 million, \$540,000 and \$2.1 million (AUD) respectively in Department of Veterans' Affairs funding for the First World War centenary *alone*. This figure does not include the money already spent on building the memorial parks that appeared in the 1990s. 'Australians on the Western Front 1914-1918', Department of Veterans' Affairs, archived by National Library of Australia, 19 July 2008, <https://webarchive.nla.gov.au/awa/20080718164527/http://www.westernfront.gov.au/>, accessed 12 October 2020; BRUCE SCATES, "Remembering and Forgetting the First World War at the Sir John Monash Centre", in *The Great War: Aftermath and Commemoration*, CAROLYN HOLBROOK and KEIR REEVES (eds.), Sydney, 2019, p. 193.

82. 'Australian Bronze Commemorative Plaques', <http://www.plaques.satlink.com.au/misc/supporters.htm>, accessed 27 May 2020; *Australians on the Western Front: August 29–September 3 1993: Order of Service* (program, Canberra: Department of Veterans' Affairs), 1993.

There were no further Australian commemorative events of note in Belgium nor any tangible signs of a strengthening of relationships between commonwealth officials and various Belgian actors until the 2000s. In 2002, John Howard became the first Australian Prime Minister to visit Ypres since 1935. However, like the battlefield tours of his interwar predecessors, it had no noteworthy long-term consequences for Australian commemoration in the salient. For a start, its significance was somewhat undermined by the fact that the Flemish town was not the first, nor even the second, Great War site Howard visited during his prime ministership. Those honours went to Gallipoli and Villers-Bretonneux. Howard had also been to important Australian Second World War sites in Thailand, Greece and Crete before travelling to the “holy ground” of Ypres, which says much about the salient’s place within the hierarchy of Australian collective memory⁸³. The visit also failed to inspire any of his successors to follow in his footsteps. This is in stark contrast to Bob Hawke’s expeditions to Villers-Bretonneux in 1989 and Gallipoli in 1990. With the exception of Paul Keating, every Australian prime minister who has served a full term since Hawke has visited the Dardanelles and most of them, Keating included, have been to the Somme. Howard is the only one to have set foot in Flanders fields⁸⁴.

Other symbolic acts include the signing of agreements between Department of Veterans’ Affairs officials and the Government of Flanders and the Belgian Federal Government in 2009 and 2012

respectively. In these agreements, the signatories declared a “commitment” to honouring the sacrifice of Australians in Belgium and educating younger generations about a “shared war history”⁸⁵. Unsurprisingly, these declarations were rather belated when compared to the one Australia had signed with France back in 2003. That two such agreements exist is indicative of the fractured nature of First World War commemoration in Belgium. For the Flemish nationalists who dominate the Flanders regional government, the centenary of the First World War provided “a unique opportunity to put Flanders on the international map” and drive increasing numbers of tourists to the region. The Westhoek, in which peoples from fifty countries had fought and died, was the epicentre of their commemorative focus⁸⁶. As for the Belgian State, it has long been “consistently weak in developing a central politics of memory” and only belatedly mobilised modest resources for the centenary⁸⁷. The gulf separating these approaches is reflected in how there have been no discernible developments arising from the agreement signed between Australia and the Belgian Federal Government, whereas the Flemish regional government has clearly made an effort to ensure its agreement with Australia is not just a scrap of paper.

The 2009 bilateral agreement between the regional and commonwealth governments was not unique but part of a wider strategy to increase Flanders’ visibility on the global stage⁸⁸. This assertive approach to memorial diplomacy has not been without missteps. The Flemish government over-

83. *Australian*, 12 July 2002, p. 5.

84. For more on Paul Keating’s relationship with the First World War, see JAMES CURRAN, ‘The “Thin Dividing Line”: Prime Ministers and the Problem of Australian Nationalism, 1972–1996’, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 48 (4), 2002, 482–4; CAROLYN HOLBROOK, ‘Commemorators in Chief’, in *Anzac Day Then and Now*, ed. TOM FRAME (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2016), 223–4.

85. ALAN GRIFFIN, Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, ‘Historic Agreement between Flanders and Australia Recognises Shared War History’, press release, 22 April 2009; WARREN SNOWDON, Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, ‘Shared History Helps Forge Stronger Ties with Belgium’, press release, 23 November 2012.

86. Translated by author. « [E]en unieke kans om Vlaanderen internationaal op de kaart te zetten ». SIGFRID VAN DER AUWERA, *De herdenking van de Grote Oorlog en Flanders Fields: een beknopt overzicht in 25 staten*, Antwerpen, 2008, p. 13; DELPHINE LAUWERS, *Le Saillant d’Ypres*, p. 461–7.

87. NICO WOUTERS, ‘The Centenary Commemorations of the Great War in Belgium: History and the Politics of Memory’, in *Low Countries Historical Review*, vol. 131–3, 2016, p. 78.

88. A similar agreement was signed with New Zealand in the same year. WOUTERS, ‘“Poor little Belgium”? De Vlaamse en Franstalige herdenkingspolitiek (2014–2018)’, *Journal of Belgian History*, no. XLII, 2012, p. 199.

played its hand with the “In Flanders Fields Declaration”, which was circulated to all the nations involved in the fighting around Ypres, except Belgium. Australian officials were among those who consequently refused to sign the declaration noting that their soldiers had fought for Belgium, not Flanders⁸⁹. Other Flemish initiatives, however, have played directly to Australian sensibilities by focusing on antipodean sacrifice and these have evidently met with official approbation. Notably, Brendan Nelson – who was director of the Australian War Memorial at the time – starred in a short YouTube video for *Toerisme Vlaanderen* to spruik Flanders Fields to his compatriots. Dubbed over a shot of him walking under the Menin Gate, Nelson declared that “there is no more special place on earth outside Australia than here”, a tall claim given the importance Australians assign to Gallipoli and Villers-Bretonneux and one that utterly ignored the imperial dimension of the monument⁹⁰. The Flemish government also sponsored the construction of a Flanders Fields Memorial Garden on the grounds of the Australian War Memorial. Unveiled in 2017 and containing “sacred soil” collected from the Westhoek and “significant military heritage sites” around Australia, it is the second such garden of its kind in the world (illustration 7)⁹¹. Undoubtedly, the establishment of a durable and visible presence at the war memorial was quite a coup for Flanders, but neither the garden, nor Nelson’s turn as spokesman for VisitFlanders, appear to have had any wider impact on Australian war memory. The YouTube video has only been viewed some 2,200 times and the garden hardly stands out among the numerous other monuments cluttering the memorial’s grounds⁹². Even more

suggestive of these efforts’ failure to increase Flanders’ visibility in the commonwealth is the fact that considerably more Australians visited Belgium in 2015, the year of the Gallipoli centenary, than in 2017, the year of the garden’s unveiling⁹³.

More influential in shaping Australia’s micro-geography in Belgium have been the partnerships Department of Veterans’ Affairs has formed with local agencies of memory, notably the communal authorities of Ypres, Zonnebeke and Comines-Warneton, which oversee the operations of the In Flanders Fields Museum, the Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917 and the recently opened Plugstreet 14-18 Experience interpretation centre respectively. These relationships have encouraged the expansion of the annual Anzac Day commemorations so that it now includes a dawn service at Polygon Wood, a ceremony at Tyne Cot and an afternoon stop at Toronto Avenue Cemetery (Comines-Warneton), the only all-Australian cemetery in Belgium⁹⁴. The In Flanders Fields Museum, Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917 and Plugstreet 14-18 Experience have also become anchor points for the Department of Veterans’ Affairs’ centenary project, the “Australian Remembrance Trail”, and each have received some form of support to develop Australian exhibits. However, in contrast to displays at Musée de la Bataille de Fromelles, Musée Jean et Denise Letaille – Bullecourt 1917 and the Musée Franco-Australien at Villers-Bretonneux, these exhibits do not receive any particularly special emphasis among the wider collections of each Belgian institution⁹⁵. Moreover, it is remarkable that, during the

89. PIERRE-ALAIN TALLIER, “Le centenaire de 14-18 en Belgique: Une grande guerre commémo-consumériste matinée de néo-nationalisme”, in *La Lettre des Académies*, vol. 30 (2–3), 2013, p. 3; KAREN SHELBY, *Belgian Museums of the Great War: Politics, Memory and Commerce*, London, 2017, p. 30.

90. “Brendan Nelson visits Flanders Fields (2016)”, VisitFlanders, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qoJR3KwwNzA>, accessed 25 July 2016.

91. Bronze plaque installed next to the Flanders Fields Memorial Garden, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, viewed 14 February 2020.

92. Not even all of the Memorial’s staff seem familiar with the garden given that the author had to ask several people about its location.

93. Kenniscentrum Westtoer, “Wereldoorlog I Herdenkinstoerisme in de Westhoek: Volumes en evoluties 2013-2018”, 2019, p. 23.

94. Australian Commonwealth Government, “Western Front Belgium: Anzac Day: Zonnebeke, Ieper, Comines Warneton”, (program, Department of Veterans’ Affairs) 2012–2016.

95. For more on these exhibits, see Matthew Haultain-Gall, “The Threshold of the British Empire”.



*The Flanders Fields Memorial Garden at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 14 February 2020.
Photograph by the author.*



One of the original lions in front of the Menin Gate photographed by Jan Matsuert just before its return to Canberra, 28 November 2017. 'Departure of the Lions of the Menin Gate', © Last Post Association (www.lastpost.be), 28 November 2017, <https://www.lastpost.be/en/photos/2017/departure-of-the-lions-of-the-menin-gate>.

“memory orgy” triggered by the First World War centenary, there have been no explicitly unique Australian additions to the memorial landscape of the salient outside of museums and interpretation centres⁹⁶.

This situation is both a reflection of the legacy of official commemorative policies during the interwar period, which focused on sites of Australian victories on the Western Front, as well as the willingness of French locals to actively seek Australian investment in their small townships that are otherwise off the beaten tourist track. In the dense, multinational site of memory that is the salient, locals cooperate with Australian officials on exhibitions and events, but they are neither their sole, nor primary partners⁹⁷. A particularly striking example of this can be seen when comparing the conferral of Medals of the Order of Australia (OAM) on locals from Villers-Bretonneux and West Flanders. By 2020, Australian authorities had granted this award to at least six inhabitants of the small French village for their work promoting “Australian history and memory in their community”⁹⁸. Conversely, just seven locals from the entire West Flanders region had received OAMs and four of these were awarded quite late, in 2016 and 2017. Moreover, only four recipients received the award for explicitly “promoting the role played by Australians during World War I in Belgium”⁹⁹. The

other three were awarded their OAMs by virtue of their broader commemorative work as long-serving buglers who performed at the daily Last Post Ceremony under the Menin Gate¹⁰⁰. In other words, their activities did not focus on fostering the memory of Australian soldiers in Belgium alone, but men of all nationalities “who willingly made the supreme sacrifice”¹⁰¹.

This broad, multinational stance towards war commemoration, which is shared by key memory agents in the salient, has proved challenging for commonwealth officials who seek to promulgate a narrative of war that elevates the Australian experience of 1914–18 above all others. Whereas Australian authorities have been able to stamp their influence on, if not completely “takeover”, the commemorative agenda in certain French villages, the same cannot be said for the cluttered memorial landscape of West Flanders¹⁰². In this context, the Menin Gate lions’ return to Ypres between Anzac Day 2017 and Armistice Day 2018 (illustration 8) and the Department of Veterans’ Affairs’ subsequent offer of replicas – complete with plaques referring to Australia’s role in providing these – have been necessarily novel and subtle ways of strengthening the commonwealth’s visibility in a town that has no interest in accepting a memorial park or statue solely dedicated to the AIF.

96. JOAN BEAUMONT, “Commemoration in Australia: A Memory Orgy?”, in *Australian Journal of Political Science* vol. 50 (3), 2015, p. 536–44.

97. Toerisme Vlaanderen and Westtoer, *Toeristisch marketingplan 100 jaar Groote Oorlog*, 2012, p. 7; PETER SLOSSE (business director of IFFM and head of tourism for Ieper), interview with the author, 30 September 2015; STEVEN VANDENBUSSCHE (curator of MMP 1917 and tourism officer for Zonnebeke), interview with the author, 30 September 2015; ANNY BEAUPREZ (founding member of Plugstreet Experience and former president of tourism for Comines-Warneton) and FRANÇOIS MAEKELBERG (President of local Returned Services Associations in Comines-Warneton and founding member of Plugstreet Experience), interview with author, 2 October 2015; CAROLINE WINTER, “The Multiple Roles of Battlefield War Museums: A Study at Fromelles and Passchendaele”, in *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, vol. 13 (3), 2018, p. 215.

98. Romain Fathi cites five such awards, but a sixth was awarded after the publication of the relevant chapter. ROMAIN FATHI, “A piece of Australia in France: Australian Authorities and the Commemoration of Anzac Day at Villers-Bretonneux in the Last Decade”, in *Nation, Memory and Great War Commemoration: Mobilizing the Past in Europe, Australia and New Zealand*, SHANTI SUMARTOJO and BEN WELLINGS (eds.), Bern, 2014, p. 280; *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette. Special*, 15 November 2018, <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2018G00907>, accessed 14 December 2020.

99. See the citation for JOHAN DURNÉZ in *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette. Special*, 30 November 2012, p. 1.

Also see the citations for FREDDY DECLERCK, GILBERT DELEU and FRANÇOIS MAEKELBERG in *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette. Special*, 18 September 2017, <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2017G01010>, accessed 14 December 2020.

100. *Vetaffairs*, March 2001, p. 8; *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette. Special*, 1 July 2002, p. 1.

101. Last Post Association, <https://www.lastpost.be/en/the-last-post/mission>, accessed 29 May 2020.

102. ROMAIN FATHI, *Our Corner of the Somme*, p. 144.

VII. Conclusion

Before 1914, Belgium rarely made the news in Australia. Once this small European nation became a *casus belli* for the British Empire, the inhabitants of the distant dominion would not stop hearing about it for the next five or so years. Vivid depictions of poor, little Belgium's calvary at the hands of a barbarous foe were used to mobilise hatred of the enemy and drum up support for Australian participation in the empire's war effort. Australians donated tens of thousands of pounds to Belgian relief, particularly during the early years of the conflict and, for the first time in the war, every single Australian division on the Western Front fought in the same campaign in 1917: the third battle of Ypres. More Australians were killed and maimed in this infamous offensive than in any other battles the AIF fought between 1914 and 1918. Yet, in the conflict's aftermath, the extent of these sacrifices in and for Belgium were marginalised within the dominant narrative of the war. Relief work was all but forgotten, while the Australians' baptism of fire at Gallipoli and their triumphs on the Western Front were the objects of much more concerted memory work than the tragic battles in the Ypres salient. The acquisition of the Menin Gate lions in 1935 had little to do with any par-

ticularly unique bond between Australia and Belgium. Instead, it owed far more to the opportunism of experienced war relic collectors on the Australian side and Ypres' officials who cast it as a token of friendship, but may have also had an eye on increasing visitor numbers to their town. That it took the Australians nearly fifty years to finally put the lions on display together says something about how little interest they had in using the sculptures as a springboard for a closer commemorative relationship. In the end, it was the badgering (and long memories) of Ypres locals, keen to know what had happened to these cherished symbols of their city, that finally forced Australian hands. Even when the lions finally appeared at the entrance to the Australian War Memorial, they were rather silent and easily overlooked ambassadors, ultimately more decorative than instructive. Only when the First World War centenary came around and Australian officials increased the intensity of their hitherto muted commemorative efforts in Belgium did the spotlight finally fall on the lions. Now the stone beasts are back in Canberra and have resumed their role as silent witnesses to Australia's commemorative relationship with their country of origin, a relationship that, despite recent events and rhetoric, has ebbed far more than it has flowed.

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