

THE ENDURING LEGACY OF ANZAC

"ANZAC stood, and still stands, for reckless valour in a good cause, for enterprise, resourcefulness, fidelity, comradeship and endurance that will never own defeat." CEW Bean ¹

The fundamental qualities which define the ANZAC legend have remained a constant, powerful and proud force in Australian society, since the legend was forged during World War 1 at Gallipoli, 95 years ago. This unsuccessful campaign saw the death of 10,000 Australian and New Zealand diggers² whose deeds were immortalised by Australia's official war correspondent CEW Bean. The simplicity of the ANZAC legend, however, has changed since its inception at Gallipoli; its meaning, significance and relevance have all been subject to debate and interpretation. This evolution has seen the qualities which characterise the ANZAC legend celebrated in situations where Australians have been challenged, both at war and in civilian life.

The controversy over the importance of the ANZAC legend in Australia's history has recently attracted interest. It is claimed that the ANZAC legend has been "the business of memory-making" and has "militarised" Australian history.³ It is also said that the legend is a "creation myth" because Australia's involvement in World War One was in support of the British Empire.⁴ Secondly, it is supposed that as the legend is constantly "militarised", the missing voices are not acknowledged and are lost; whether it be women, Aboriginals, New Zealanders or Jews, to name but a few.⁵ This tendency to focus on the roles of particular groups is a part of the changing ANZAC legend over time. In recent years, these "lost" groups have found their voice, therefore are an aspect of the evolution. As Australia was a part of the British Empire, the involvement in war was justifiable and significant. Australia's relationship with Britain has "been central to Australia's history in the twentieth century".⁶ The significance of war has moulded Australia's identity because it has had such an

¹ New South Wales State Library. (2010), *The Anzac Landing*, [Online, accessed 17/10/10]. Available: <http://www.anzacsite.gov.au/1landing/bean.html>

² M Anderson and A Low. (2007). *Jacaranda Essentials: History 2*. John Wiley and Sons Australia Ltd, Queensland, p.94

³ Lake, Marilyn. (23/4/09), *Fight free of Anzac, lest we forget other stories*, [Online, accessed 10/11/10]. Available: <http://www.theage.com.au/opinion/fight-free-of-anzac-lest-we-forget-other-stories-20090422-afb5.html>

⁴ Lake, Marilyn. *Fight free of Anzac, lest we forget our other stories*. [Online]

⁵ Oppenheimer, Meredith. (7/11/07), "Women missing in action: Why has ANZAC become a Boy's Own Story?" *The Australian*. [Online, accessed 23/10/09]. Available: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story>

⁶ Freudenberg, Graham. (27/7/10), *Lurching to the rite*, [Online, accessed 12/11/10]. Available: <http://www.wakleys.com/books/790/>

enormous impact politically, socially and economically. Furthermore, "ANZAC observances are seldom a celebration of martial values",⁷ but rather a commemoration and honour of those who sacrificed their lives for their country and its values.

Nowhere is this non-aggressive aspect of the ANZAC legend better represented than in the renowned, compassionate story of John Simpson Kirkpatrick and his donkey. Simpson carried injured diggers on his donkey at Gallipoli to medical aid and "continued this work from early morning to night".⁸ This story too has evolved to reflect society's needs. For instance, the symbolism of the donkey is often interpreted as a Christian reference paralleling the donkeys which carried Mary into Bethlehem and Christ on Palm Sunday. The religious analogy of "the comparison between the self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ and John Simpson Kirkpatrick" gave Simpson the status of a "saintly figure".⁹

From a Christian perspective, the donkey appears yet again with the changing ANZAC legend revealed in Violet Teague's painting of an "ANZAC Christmas". To understand the significance of Teague's painting, it is instructive to analyse a story from the Victorian Black Saturday Bushfires of February 2009, where the resourcefulness, resilience and mateship of ordinary civilians were exhibited. A poignant example of the response to this disaster is how artist Walter Magilton restored faith in the overwhelmed Kinglake community. Magilton made a copy of Violet Teague's "Anzac Christmas", which Teague originally painted in 1921 for St Peter's church Kinglake to honour those who died in World War One.¹⁰ "Anzac Christmas", also known as "The Adoration of the Shepherds", is an oil painting depicting the nativity scene; present at the crib are Mary, a donkey and two soldiers representing the shepherds.¹¹ In explanation of the soldiers, Teague wrote in a letter to the congregation "It was the wise men who followed the star and came to where the young child lay by these shepherds of our day [the soldiers], so many and so faithful, they followed a star too and went their brave way..."¹² Teague based the figures in the painting on real life friends and relatives who

⁷ Freudenberg, Graham. (27/7/10), *Lurching to the rite*. [Online]

⁸ Exert from the official diary of the 3rd Field Ambulance found in Drummond, Allan. (2009). *John Simpson Kirkpatrick*, Green Barrow Publishing, Victoria. p. 30

⁹ Drummond, Allan. (2009). *John Simpson Kirkpatrick*, p. 42

¹⁰ Edwards, Lorna. (23/12/09), "Artist's touch restores faith of Kinglake flock", *The Age*, p.1

¹¹ St Peter's Anglican Church Kinglake. (2009), *History of St. Peter's*, [Online , accessed 8/11/10]. Available: <http://christchurchwhittlesea.org/history-of-st-peters/>

¹² St Peter's Anglican Church Kinglake. (2009), *History of St. Peter's*. [Online]

served during World War One. Teague's original painting was moved from the altar place in St Peter's in Kinglake, for protection from arsonists and bush fires. When St Peter's Church was destroyed on Black Saturday, Magilton offered to make a reproduction of Teague's painting.¹³ The grateful parish priest of Kinglake, Rev Stephen Holmes, found that the painting's image "resonated hope" and Holmes sees "symbolism in the resilience of the Anzac soldiers, in the mateship and in the strength of people who work together, such as the volunteers".¹⁴ In this instance, the legend has been reinterpreted and enhanced by the work of both artists' touch. The enlightening journey of Teague's painting is an adaptation and modification of the legend whilst its essence and values remain constant.

The Christmas spirit and artistic endeavour again evoked the evolution of the ANZAC legend with the incredible journey of David Griffin's magical children's book "The Happiness Box". This book was dedicated to "the children whose fathers went to Singapore and never came back".¹⁵ It is an inspirational story which again reflects the adaption and malleability of the ANZAC legend – this time beyond Gallipoli's beaches, in a World War Two context. This book was written under harsh circumstances whilst Griffin was a prisoner of war in Changi prison camp in Singapore 1942.¹⁶ With others, Griffin compiled the story about three jungle animals, (based on soldiers the author knew) who go on a quest for truth as they discover the secrets for happiness, that are to: "go out into the world and teach fellow creatures how to be happy...teach our neighbours how to be clever, industrious and kind..."¹⁷ The story was initially written for the children of allied prisoners of war also confined in the camp as a Christmas gift. However once the Japanese found that one of the animals was called 'Winston' the book was ordered to be destroyed. An Australian officer buried the book and it was uncovered at the end of the war and published in Australia.¹⁸ The ANZAC legend in this instance is at play in a very different context, but the original core qualities of bravery, initiative, resourcefulness, risk taking and consideration for others are all present. The transformative nature of the legend is well illustrated in the tale of the initial creation of the book and its survival. This does

¹³ Magilton, W. (November 2010), *Walter's response to his Teague reproduction*, Interviewed by E. Sandbach [Transcript], Magilton residence.

¹⁴ Edwards, Lorna. (23/12/09), "Artist's touch restores faith of Kinglake flock". [Newspaper]

¹⁵ Griffin, David. (1947). *The Happiness Box*, The Australian Publishing Co. Pty. Ltd, Sydney.

¹⁶ Hinchliffe, Meredith. (January 2004), *The Story of The Happiness Box*, [Online, accessed 5/11/10]. Available: <http://www.nla.gov.au/pub/nlanews/2004/jan04/story-3.pdf>

¹⁷ Griffin, David. (1947). *The Happiness Box*.

¹⁸ Hinchliffe, Meredith. (January 2004), *The Story of The Happiness Box*. [Online]

not detract from the fundamental characteristics that "The Happiness Box" affirms under very different circumstances.

The ANZAC legend continues to play a vital role as a unifying bond for all Australians. Though the legend has changed, this evolution is a positive development as the legend's characteristics are demonstrated in every day Australian life. Simpson's religious symbolism, Magilton's reproduction of Teague's painting "ANZAC Christmas" and Griffin's "The Happiness Box" are multi-contextual examples of the transformative power of the legend. As former Prime Minister Bob Hawke declared at Lone Pine on the 75th anniversary of ANZAC Day, the ANZAC legend's "meaning can only endure as each new generation of Australians finds the will to reinterpret it and in separating the truth from the legend, realises its relevance to a nation and people..."¹⁹

¹⁹ Freudenberg, Graham. (27/7/10), *Lurching to the rite*. [Online]

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