

Com-Memoration of the Great War: Tourists and Remembrance on the Western Front

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Introduction

Australia fought the Great War as part of an allied military force, against similarly allied empires and nations, in campaigns across the Middle East, Turkey, and on the European Western Front, from Montbrehain in France, to Ieper (Ypres) in Belgium. The combatant countries focussed their early war memories on the dead, but they later used the war to construct national memories and identities. The decade leading up to the centenary has seen a further development towards acknowledgment of the Great War as an international experience. Within this environment however, Australia appears to have intensified its nationalistic vision, by limiting the perspective of the nation's war effort, even more narrowly, to the relatively small battles around the village of Villers-Bretonneux.

The focus of this paper is remembrance, that is, the physical, commemorative acts that are designed to perpetuate the social memories of war. Remembrance is performed as ritual, ranging from grand state-based ceremonies, to smaller acts that are undertaken by individuals, but which are socially shared. As Maurice Halbwachs¹ theorised, remembering together lies at the heart of social memory and, without the continuous actions and support of dedicated groups, memory will fade and disappear. He also theorised that changes to social memory are not an effect of time itself,

¹ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

but result from the unique characteristics of each new generation which impel them to re-prioritise history to accommodate a memory that better suits their needs. Furthermore, social memory involves the selective forgetting of some people and events, in order to promote a preferred version of the past. The aim of this paper is to describe how changes to remembrance and the memories it supports have intensified over the centenary period, and manifest in two main forms. First, the notion of a ‘commemorative bubble’ is used to describe a narrow, spatially and temporally constrained view of how Australian tourists in France are being encouraged to commemorate their nation’s part in the war, centred around Villers-Bretonneux. The second form, ‘Com-Memoration’, emphasises an internationalisation of the Great War memory, reflecting a broader collaborative form of remembrance among the many nations that fought the war.

This is a conceptual paper, which draws upon the author’s research in France and Belgium on the old Western Front battlefields, surveying and interviewing tourists, museum and visitor centre staff and local people. In France, the author has attended several commemorative ceremonies, including those in several small villages, as well as large state ceremonies, all of which help to inform the observations made with respect to commemoration. Reference is also made to a study of visitors conducted by the author in Pozières, on November 10 and 11, 2018. The paper adopts a tourism perspective which provides the theoretical basis for the notion of a commemorative bubble and sight sacralisation. While history forms much of the interest and context for battlefield visitation, tourism-based research incorporates a wide range of other perspectives, particularly from the different groups of people who visit (such as pilgrims), their motivations and connections to the war, their journeys across the landscape and remembrance activities.

Social memory

This section provides some background about the practices of remembrance and social memory that developed on the Western Front in the early decades after the war, and continued with relatively little change up to the centenary. As Pierre Nora argues, ‘memory insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it. . . . History, because it

is an intellectual and secular production, calls for analysis and criticism.² Jonathan Trigg notes also that social memory is by definition fluid and dynamic, thus ‘memories are not precisely the past, but our rosy fantasy of it’.³ Even so, criticism of the war was generally considered as being disrespectful to the dead for several decades, and as Dan Todman argues, it was not until the parents of the deceased had themselves passed away that the taboo on critical comment was eased.⁴

War is inherently political, but the Great War demanded the widespread recruitment of young citizen-soldiers whose death and wounding dispersed the impacts of the war throughout society. Jay Winter argues that, in this way, the war histories of families were ‘braided together’ with those of the nation.⁵ Ken Inglis observes that ‘in the early years after the war, in all countries, ordinary people were moved towards local commemorations involving people they knew, rather than ceremonies of the nation-state’.⁶ At the same time, Udi Lebel notes that, for centuries, ‘statesmen have converted private mourning into political spectacle, and individual grief into communal hope’, where state control simultaneously provides a means through which individuals can cope through ‘the companionship of collective bereavement’.⁷ In her study of commemorations in Ireland, Nuala Johnson found that state organised spectacles enabled the expression of grief for individuals within a collective whole, where ‘large scale death could be culturally and morally harmonized in a peacetime environment’.⁸

² Pierre Nora, ‘Between Memory and History: Les lieux de mémoire’, *Representations* 26, Special Issue (Spring 1989): 8.

³ Jonathan Trigg, ‘Memory and memorial: A Study of Official and Military Commemoration of the Dead, and Family and Community Memory in Essex and East London’, *Journal of Conflict Archaeology* 3, no. 1 (November 2007): 313.

⁴ Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myths and Memory* (London: Hambledon and London, 2005), 132.

⁵ Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 2.

⁶ K. S. Inglis, *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape* (Melbourne, Australia: The Miegunyah Press, 2005), 282.

⁷ Udi Lebel, ‘Panopticon of Death: Institutional Design of Bereavement’, *Acta Sociologica* 54, no. 4 (November 2011): 353.

⁸ Nuala Johnson, ‘The Spectacle of Memory: Ireland’s Remembrance of the Great War, 1919’, *Journal of Historical Geography* 25, no. 1 (January 1999): 40.

Memory was located on the battlefields, reflecting Nora's notion of modern memory as *les lieux de mémoire* ('material, symbolic, and functional') that are purposefully constructed, compared with traditional community forms that are based in the activities of daily life.⁹ Nora argues that 'the most fundamental purpose of the *lieux de mémoire* is to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial'.¹⁰ Memories of the Great War were set in stone, in monuments built by the state, that at once created places at which ritualised ceremonies would ensure transmission of the memories across generations. The thousands of military cemeteries are a mnemonic technique so that, as Thomas Laqueur observes, 'the human imagination is forced to see, as concretely as possible, what a million dead men look like'.¹¹ Even today, these cemeteries appear as they were a century earlier: unlike civilian burial grounds, the dates of military deaths are confined to a four-year period or less, new graves are rarely added and the headstones are regularly cleaned to look as new.

To an extent, the state can influence social memory, particularly its association with national identity, through control of time and space.¹² For example, Mandy Morris describes how the Imperial War Graves Commission transported soil and plants from England to the military cemeteries, quite literally creating small plots of England on the Western Front.¹³ Edward Said coins the term 'imaginative geography' to describe how a place 'can be manipulated, invented, characterized quite apart from a site's merely physical reality'.¹⁴ Australia famously invented a national

⁹ Nora, 'Between Memory and History', 18.

¹⁰ Ibid., 19.

¹¹ Thomas Laqueur, 'Memory and Naming in the Great War', *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. J. R. Gillis (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 161.

¹² Steven Hoelscher, and Derek H. Alderman, 'Memory and Place: Geographies of a Critical Relationship', *Social & Cultural Geography* 5, no. 3 (September 2004): 349.

¹³ Mandy Morris, 'Gardens "For Ever England": Landscape, Identity and the First World War British Cemeteries on the Western Front', *Ecumene* 4, no. 4 (October 1997): 353.

¹⁴ Edward Said, 'Invention, Memory, and Place', *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 2 (Winter 2000): 180.

story and identity based on the 1915 Gallipoli campaign, at a site distanced thousands of kilometres from the home country. By virtue of the coincidence of battles fought in Villers-Bretonneux on April 25, 2018, *Anzac Day* is now being used as a sign, to associate the same nationalist meaning created about Gallipoli to Villers-Bretonneux.

Tourism and remembrance

Battlefield visitation, in the forms of pilgrimage and tourism, began almost immediately hostilities ceased on the Western Front, with most travellers being from the upper and middle classes, because they could afford the trip.¹⁵ Tourists were interested in seeing the battle sites they had read about in newspapers, and were guided on circuits of ruined villages and shattered landscapes by guidebooks produced in the 1920s, such as the well-known Michelin series.¹⁶ From these times, the tourism industry has been a significant and stable component of battlefield visitation, contributing to local economies as well as assisting visitors through the provision of basic services, accommodation and information.¹⁷

Along with generational changes in memory of the war, battlefield tourism has also adopted different forms. Virgili et al.¹⁸ found that a patriotic theme developed in the French campaign area of Verdun, extending from the war years to the mid-1960s. From 1966 to 1995 they identify an era of ‘memory tourism’, mainly for French families and younger generations, with the twenty-year period from 1996 to 2016 including an entertainment perspective. Anne Hertzog describes a similar pattern in the British battle sector of the Somme, from pilgrimage tourism of the 1960s and 1970s through to a focus on history, and a touristic destination of memory in the 1990s.¹⁹

¹⁵ David Lloyd, *Battlefield Tourism: Pilgrimage and the Commemoration of the Great War in Britain, Australia and Canada* (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 39.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Jennifer Iles, ‘Encounters in the Fields: Tourism to the Battlefields of the Western Front’, *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* 6, no. 2 (2008):138–154.

¹⁸ Sandrine Virgili et al., “‘From the Flames to the Light’: 100 Years of the Commodification of the Dark Tourist Site around the Verdun Battlefield’, *Annals of Tourism Research* 68, no. 1 (January 2018): 66.

¹⁹ Anne Hertzog, ‘War Battlefields, Tourism and Imagination’, *Via@ Tourist Imaginaries* 1 (2012): 1–13. http://www.viatourismreview.net/Article6_EN.php.

Although battlefield tourists' motivations were once negatively opposed to the very sombre concerns of pilgrims seeking graves, recent research has found that the two groups are all but indistinguishable. Even today, the monumental memorials of individual nations form popular tourist attractions, partly due to their visual impact, but also because of the multiple functions that are often available onsite through visitor centres that provide refreshments, information and sophisticated educational facilities.

An Australian commemorative bubble

This section addresses the development of what can be termed a 'commemorative bubble', adopting Erik Cohen's notion, which he used to describe mass tourists, who can be 'transposed to foreign soil in an "environmental bubble" of his [*sic*] native culture'.²⁰ Clear examples of tourist bubbles are resorts, large tour groups and cruise ships. The characteristic feature of a 'bubble' is the lack of openness to the external environment, particularly other cultures, and while some systems are open, allowing tourists to mix with local people, closed systems such as resort enclaves, tightly control access and local interactions.²¹ The question that can be asked of such tourists is, did they really leave home?

To an extent, nations create war memories within their own social and cultural traditions and conduct remembrance activity within their political boundaries. The idea of an Australian commemorative bubble is a way to conceptualise a narrow and parochial form of remembrance and memory that Romain Fathi argues has been created in Australia and transported to the Western Front.²² A commemorative bubble refers to tourists who are exclusively interested in their national histories, sites and memorials, and who subsequently engage only in remembrance activities within these limited boundaries which have become centred on Villers-Bretonneux. Importantly, many tourists may be unaware of the extent to which their experience is being confined. Clearly, not all Australians travel within such a

²⁰ Erik Cohen, 'Towards a Sociology of International Tourism', *Social Research* 39, no. 1 (Spring 1972): 176.

²¹ Reiner Jaakson, 'Beyond the Tourist Bubble? Cruiseship Passengers in Port', *Annals of Tourism Research* 31, no. 1 (January 2004): 44–60.

²² Romain Fathi, *Our Corner of the Somme: Australia at Villers-Bretonneux* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2019): 202.

bubble and many, typically those who can be described as ‘free independent travellers’, visit multiple sites and memorials across the battlefields and are interested in extending their understanding of the war.

Two of the conditions that enable this bubble include the sight sacralisation of Villers-Bretonneux and an increasingly limited understanding of Australia’s historical role in the Great War. At the beginning of the centenary, the Australian government’s declaration of ‘The Centenary of Anzac’ clearly confined the nation’s commemoration of the war effort to a domestic perspective. While this may appeal to a nationalist ideal for some, it did not acknowledge the extent of the nation’s involvement in the Great War and in fact distanced Australia from the other nations that remembered ‘The Centenary of the Great War’. Joan Beaumont²³ comments that much of the Australian government’s planning and approach to the centenary was ‘deeply ahistorical’, and that the nationalist focus presented a traditional view, with questionable relevance to Australia’s contemporary population and its needs.

Other nations also planned major commemorative events for the centenary, and the Somme and Ieper areas have seen the construction and extension of visitor centres and museums to accommodate large numbers of new battlefield tourists, inspired by newspaper stories and television programs. The Australian government increased promotion of the Western Front campaigns, beginning with inauguration of a Dawn Service at the Australian National Memorial (ANM) at Villers-Bretonneux in 2008. Two features that were central to Australian commemorations were the construction of an Anzac Remembrance Trail and the Sir John Monash Centre (SJMC), adjacent to the ANM.

A critical analysis of the Australian government’s efforts to attach the nation’s Western Front military efforts to Villers-Bretonneux can be found in Romain Fathi’s recent history,²⁴ where he situates these efforts within the context of four periods of Australian remembrance since 1918. Fathi notes that the importance of Villers-Bretonneux has varied in intensity: from 1938 to 2008 it was virtually absent from most Australians’

²³ Joan Beaumont, ‘Commemoration in Australia: A Memorial Orgy?’ *Australian Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 3 (October 2015): 536–544.

²⁴ Fathi, *Our Corner of the Somme*.

consciousness, and in the period from the 1950s to 1984 it was mainly French agencies that encouraged memory of Australia.²⁵ Of particular significance is the Howard government era, from 1998 to the present, where the Australian government's activities in controlling time and space at Villers-Bretonneux can be conceptualised as being a part of a process of 'sight sacralisation'.

Sight sacralisation

Dean MacCannell referred to a process of 'sight sacralisation' to describe the transformation and elevation of a site through a system of semiotics, designed to distinguish it from other places, somewhat independently of its historical or other importance.²⁶ A. V. Seaton applied this notion to the Waterloo battlefield,²⁷ explaining how Waterloo and Wellington became household names, while Mont-Saint-Jean and Blucher were almost forgotten. Peter Slade describes a similar process occurring for Australians at Gallipoli where 'the area or object assumes a near- or part-religious aspect in the view of those who visit it'.²⁸ The process involves 'naming', where battles such as the Neck and Lone Pine 'evoke for Australians and New Zealanders images of the struggles of antiquity',²⁹ while 'framing' and 'elevation' relate to the erection of monuments and memorials. 'Mechanical reproduction' means that the site and its name become further 'produced' through the media, painting, novels and film, while in the final stage— 'social reproduction'— the site becomes a part of peoples' everyday world.³⁰ Bruce Scates' argument that visitation to the peninsular has become a 'rite of passage' for young Australians³¹ encapsulates the personal experience of sight sacralisation.

²⁵ Ibid., 196.

²⁶ Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 44–45.

²⁷ A. V. Seaton, 'War and Thanatourism: Waterloo 1815–1914', *Annals of Tourism Research* 26, no. 1 (January 1999): 130–158.

²⁸ Peter Slade, 'Gallipoli Thanatourism: The Meaning of ANZAC', *Annals of Tourism Research* 30, no. 4 (October 2003): 784.

²⁹ Ibid., 784.

³⁰ Ibid., 789–91.

³¹ Bruce Scates, *Return to Gallipoli: Walking the Battlefields of the Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

While the intent of sight sacralisation may in fact be positively motivated, its actual effect can be that other places are forgotten—selectively removed, or given a very low profile in social memory.

Sight sacralisation of Villers-Bretonneux is indicated by a significant increase in visitation to the village as well as media interest. Fathi's analysis of the Franco-Australian museum attendance shows that in 1992 Australians comprised 7.2% of total visitors and 90.5% were French people, but by 2014 Australians comprised 84.2% with French 8.1%.³² In an irony that typifies social memory making, the intensified focus on the relatively small battles at Villers-Bretonneux has begun to overshadow the much larger and more deadly battles that were fought at Pozières in 1916 and Passchendaele in 1917. A very broad indication of the significance given to different battles can be illustrated through media reporting in Australia from 1915 to 2020. Data in Table 1 were based on information that was sourced from a simple search using three key words ('Gallipoli', 'Pozières', 'Villers-Bretonneux') on the Trove website and Google, recording the resulting number of 'hits'. In the period up to 1938 (the year the ANM was inaugurated), the media reporting for Pozières and Villers-Bretonneux reflects the large difference in casualty rates, but by 2020 attention to Villers-Bretonneux had increased beyond Pozières. Clearly Gallipoli has remained a primary focus of the war for a century.

TABLE 1. Media frequency over the past century

Battle site	Date	Casualties (dead and wounded)	1915–1938 (Trove)	16/9/20 (Google)
Gallipoli	1915	26,094 ¹	183,204	3,530,000
Pozières	1916	23,000 ²	22,893	212,000
Villers-Bretonneux	April 1918	2,473 ³	430	256,000

¹ Bean (1941a: 909); ² Bean (1941b: 862); ³ Bean, (1941c: 637).

³² Fathi, *Our Corner of the Somme*, 204.

The historical basis for the attention given to Villers-Bretonneux has been strongly criticised by several historians. Scates³³ outlines the conflicting positions between some of the historians contracted for the SJMC and the project management team, over historical legitimacy of the exhibitions. He argues further that in looking ‘backwards to a singular, nationalist and soldier-centred vision of war’, and failing to consider wider social impacts, the SJMC runs counter to current museum practice.³⁴ Scates also notes that the SJMC does not acknowledge the much broader picture of Australia’s effort alongside its allies, particularly Britain, with Fathi adding that this includes military operations at Villers-Bretonneux.³⁵ Douglas Newton argues that ‘Australia’s narrow focus means that other people’s war is still almost entirely eclipsed by *our* war’.³⁶ Romain Fathi’s³⁷ analysis of a typical Australian school group’s visit to the battlefields found that as commemorants they placed themselves, rather than the dead, at the centre of their remembrance activities, saw themselves as Anzacs by association, and attempted to integrate themselves into history through an imagined on-site experience of the war.

The potential impact of sight sacralisation and the limits of a commemorative bubble are that Australian tourists are unlikely to acknowledge the war’s impact on other nations and their military forces, as well as on displaced citizens, bereaved families, ruined villages and poisoned landscapes. Unfortunately the ‘Centenary of Anzac’ has risked creating the impression of Australia as a nation of citizens who are interested only in themselves.

³³ Bruce Scates, ‘Remembering and Forgetting the First World War at the Sir John Monash Centre’, *The Great War: Aftermath and Commemoration*, ed. Carolyn Holbrook and Keir Reeves (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2019), 197.

³⁴ Scates, ‘Remembering and Forgetting’, 198.

³⁵ Fathi, *Our Corner of the Somme*, 15–26.

³⁶ Douglas Newton, ‘Other People’s War: The Great War in a World Context’, *The Honest History Book*, ed. David Stephens and Alison Broinowski (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2017), 29.

³⁷ Romain Fathi, ‘Connecting Spirits: The Commemorative Patterns of an Australian School Group in Northern France’, *Journal of Australian Studies* 38, no. 3 (July 2014): 348.

Com-Memoration and international remembrance

At the centenary of the Armistice, on 11 November, 2018, the front page of the *Courrier Picard*, an Amiens-based newspaper, featured a photograph of France's President Emmanuel Macron and Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel *main dans la main*, under the headline, *Jour de Paix*. The photo reflects, as Paul Cornish notes, a current impetus to acknowledge the contributions of all involved in the war, in a non-nationalistic approach, citing the *Historial de la Grande Guerre* museum at Peronne and the *In Flanders Fields* museum in Ieper as two leading examples of this perspective.³⁸ Emmanuelle Cronier and Victor Demiaux³⁹ argue that 'the Great War was an unparalleled period of circulations and exchanges involving millions of soldiers from the European metropolis or colonies, civilian workers, as well as refugees and displaced populations', and further, that the wartime mobilisation brought this vast number of people 'into contact with *other* soldiers, *other* populations or *other* places'. The Ring of Remembrance (*L'Anneau de la Mémoire*) is a new memorial, inaugurated in 2014 at Notre-Dame-de-Lorette near Arras, which 'marks a major break in the entire history of memorials to the dead of the Great War'.⁴⁰ The memorial has an explicit, international meaning, listing the names of 580,000 people from all nations who were killed between 1914–1918, with its website stating:

United in posthumous brotherhood, their names are engraved in a seemingly endless list. They are organised by alphabetical order and, for the first time, without any distinction between nationality, rank, gender or religion.⁴¹

³⁸ Paul Cornish, 'The Mobilization of Memory 1917–2014', *Commemorative Spaces of the First World War: Historical Geographies at the Centenary*, ed. James Wallis and David C. Harvey (Milton Park, Abington: Routledge, 2018), 232.

³⁹ Emmanuelle Cronier, and Victor Demiaux, 'Encountering the Other in Wartime: The Great War as an Intercultural Moment?', *First World War Studies* 9, no. 2 (September 2019):142.

⁴⁰ Cronier and Demiaux, 'Encountering the Other in Wartime', 147.

⁴¹ 'Unis dans une fraternité posthume, leurs noms défilent, les uns après les autres. Ils sont classés par ordre alphabétique et pour la première fois, sans distinction de nationalité, de grade, de genre ou de religion', Ring of Remembrance website, accessed 25 October 2020, <https://memorial1418.com/anneau-de-la-memoire/>.

‘Com-Memoration’ is used here to distinguish this second theme in commemoration, that extends from families, local villages and the nation, to acknowledging a shared international war experience. It is in effect, working in the opposite direction to a commemorative bubble. In her study of the war on the Italian front, Anna Irimiás argues that ‘due to the high number of nations involved in the conflict [Trentino] cannot be exclusively interpreted as a national heritage. The war influenced the collective memory of all the involved nations’. ... ‘War heritage sites are imbued with national and transnational sensitivities.’⁴²

Com-Memoration involves large-scale, state-organised events but, by its nature, it also incorporates small-scale events and other activities that are temporally and spatially dispersed. Gieling and Ong promote the idea of in-group and smaller group dynamics that may reflect all kinds of familial and individual experiences, and memories of war—not just battle.⁴³ A small example of Com-Memoration is the Centenary of Remembrance in Pozières, which the author attended on 11 November 2018. The activities included three official village ceremonies and wreath laying at: *le Monument Aux Morts Français*, *le Grand Cimetière Britannique*, *le Memorial Australien de la 1^{ère} Division*. The ceremonies concluded with *un Verre de l’Amitié* and *un Repas du Souvenir* at the Mairie. Pauline Georgelin⁴⁴ notes the airport-style security for the 2018 Anzac Day ceremony in Villers-Bretonneux but, in contrast, at Pozières security was assured by handshakes between the attendees.

This was not the case in 2016 for the Australian government’s centenary spectacle in the village which involved tight control of the commemorative space. In 2018, Pozières saw a group of approximately forty people, including ten Australians, some twenty French and about ten British. Admittedly the range of nations in Pozières on this day was limited, but the theme of

⁴² Anna Irimiás, ‘The Great War Heritage Site Management in Trentino, Northern Italy’, *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 9, no. 4 (September 2014): 330.

⁴³ Joost Gieling, and Chin-Ee Ong, ‘Warfare Tourism Experiences and National Identity: The Case of Airborne Museum “Hartenstein” in Oosterbeek, the Netherlands’, *Tourism Management* 57, (December 2016): 44–55.

⁴⁴ Pauline Georgelin, ‘French-Australian Encounters Number 2: Anzac Day at Villers-Bretonneux’, *The French Australian Review*, no. 65 (Australian Summer, 2018–2019): 85–90.

remembrance attempted to go beyond a single nation. Remembrance was centred on the dead, beginning with the Maire's reading of each individual name on the French memorial and later standing among the men buried in the British cemetery. Notably, the Australian government had forgotten to lay a wreath at the 1st Australian Division memorial on that day.

Tourism

Tourists play a major role in commemorative rituals, not the least of which is due to their large numbers but, more importantly, they visit memorials across the battlefields. Their continuous presence helps to maintain memories at all times of the year without being temporally confined by ceremonies organised by the state and other groups. An analysis of memorials in Arras, Tyne Cot and Runnymede, for example, found that tourists deposit objects such as poppies, wooden crosses and wreaths in small ritualised acts that manifest a vow to remember the dead.⁴⁵

The adoption of a tourism perspective with respect to commemoration acknowledges that visitors may be interested in a variety of narratives about a site, as well as in their own heritage.⁴⁶ Dallen Timothy⁴⁷ and Stephanie Kappler⁴⁸ observe heritage site visitors can be part of memory networks occurring between local, national and international memory agents. Australians in France who venture beyond the commemorative bubble of Villers-Bretonneux can find themselves part of an international group of travellers at a museum, a cemetery or a local pub, sharing a common interest in the war and local culture. At Tyne Cot cemetery in Belgium, for example, where approximately 8,000 of the 12,000 graves hold unknown remains, people from up to sixty nations write in the visitor books, reflecting a global sense of humanity in remembrance of the Great War dead.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Caroline Winter, 'Pilgrims and Votives at War Memorials: A Vow to Remember', *Annals of Tourism Research* 76 (April 2019): 117–128.

⁴⁶ Yaniv Poria, Avital Biran, and Arie Reichel, 'Visitors' Preferences for Interpretation at Heritage Sites', *Journal of Travel Research* 48, no. 1 (August 2009): 102.

⁴⁷ Dallen Timothy, 'Tourism and the Personal Heritage Experience', *Annals of Tourism Research* 24, no. 3 (July 1997): 751–754.

⁴⁸ Stephanie Kappler, 'Sarajevo's Ambivalent Memoryscape: Spatial Stories of Peace and Conflict', *Memory Studies* 10, no. 2 (May 2016): 130–143.

⁴⁹ Caroline Winter, 'Ritual, Remembrance and War', *Annals of Tourism Research* 54 (September 2015): 27.

The Somme Tourisme website promotes the idea of an ‘international war’, where twenty nations fought on the Somme, leaving men buried in 410 Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemeteries, twenty-two French and fourteen German.⁵⁰ The Somme guide book states:

In 1916 the Department of the Somme became a world arena: a meeting point for more than twenty nationalities who came to fight or to work with the three main belligerent empires (France, Germany and Great Britain). With the battles of 1918, internationalism did not cease, and was continued with the collection of souvenir objects by millions of men and a Great War Remembrance that is still alive today through war memorials and pilgrimages made to the battlefields.⁵¹

In contrast to the constraints imposed by focusing on a single site such as a national monument, Com-Memoration can reflect more realistically the way in which the war was fought across an extensive 700-kilometre trench line by soldiers from many nations.⁵² Maoz Azaryahu and Kenneth Foote argue that viewing the war as narrative provides for the incorporation of multiple temporal and spatial events, and by travelling across the battlefields tourists can expand their knowledge and understanding.⁵³ Jennifer Iles⁵⁴ notes the work of the Michelin guide books of the 1920s and Tonie and Valmai Holt during the 1970s. For today’s experienced battlefield travellers, Somme Tourisme produces a website and brochures where tourists can create their own remembrance trails. Stephen Miles’ research found that trails reflect how ‘understanding has shifted from broad “meta-narratives” of military history, to a multi-dimensional appreciation. . . . Remembrance Trails are handrails guiding the user between sites with a plurality of different identities and meanings.’⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Somme Tourisme, ‘Sites of the First World War’, 2020, 49, <https://www.somme-tourisme.com/nos-brochures>.

⁵¹ Somme Tourisme, ‘Sites of the First World War’, 6.

⁵² Cronier and Demiaux, ‘Encountering the Other in Wartime’, 141–150.

⁵³ Azaryahu, Maoz, and Kenneth E. Foote, ‘Historical Space as Narrative Medium: On the Configuration of Spatial Narratives of Time at Historical Sites’, *GeoJournal* 73, no. 3, (September 2008): 183.

⁵⁴ Jennifer Iles, ‘Encounters in the Fields’, *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* 6, no. 2 (September 2008): 138–154.

⁵⁵ Stephen Miles, ‘Remembrance Trails of the Great War on the Western Front: Routes of Heritage and Memory’, *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 12, no. 5 (November 2016): 444.

So too, the recently developed Western Front Way is ‘a new walking route for peace’,⁵⁶ established by a UK charity, that crosses the entire Western Front. Importantly, the Walk’s emblem comprises the remembrance flowers of four nations: cornflower (France), forget-me-not (Germany), daisy (Belgium) and red poppy (UK and Commonwealth). Sabine Marschall suggests that ‘one might investigate how the performance of tourism, the physical act of travelling or moving through space, contributes both to the individual preservation of memory and the trans-generational and in fact, transcultural transfer of collective memory’.⁵⁷

Back in Pozières on November 11, 2018, the author spent some time in *Le Tommy* pub, speaking with visitors, predominantly experienced battlefield travellers with well-developed itineraries. While most had attended one of the large national ceremonies (at Villers-Bretonneux for Australians and Thiepval for British) they were travelling to other places on the Somme and to Ieper in Belgium. They were involved in a range of small, personal commemorations such as visiting family graves and getting involved in local remembrance initiatives. Shanti Sumartojo,⁵⁸ has found that the individual experiential aspects of remembrance ‘complicates the often-familiar narratives crafted by the state that are intended to be reinforced in shared moments of remembrance’. Pauline Georgelin’s⁵⁹ description of her Anzac Day at Villers-Bretonneux reflects Shanti Sumartojo’s analysis of her day at the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne. Both authors reveal an experience extending beyond the serious commemorative components of the site and ceremony to the mundane aspects of travelling, the weather, negotiating security and the ‘banal, sensory experiences that pulled against the official solemnity of the Dawn Service’.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ The Western Front Way, www.thewesternfrontway.com, accessed 25 October 2020.

⁵⁷ Sabine Marschall, ‘Tourism and Memory’, *Annals of Tourism Research* 39, no. 4 (October 2012): 2218.

⁵⁸ Shanti Sumartojo, ‘New Geographies of Commemoration’, *Progress in Human Geography* online (July 2020): 1, DOI: 10.1177/0309132520936758.

⁵⁹ Pauline Georgelin, ‘French-Australian Encounters Number 2: Anzac Day at Villers-Bretonneux’, *The French Australian Review*, no. 65 (Australian Summer 2019): 85–90.

⁶⁰ Shanti Sumartojo, ‘Local Complications: War: Anzac Commemoration, Education and Tourism at Melbourne’s Shrine of Remembrance’, in *Commemorative Spaces of the First World War: Historical Geographies at the Centenary*, ed. James Wallis and David C. Harvey (Milton Park, Abington: Routledge, 2018), 168.

Remembering *with* the dead

On the battlefields, remembrance is not only *for* the dead, but *with* them. Some lie in identified graves in orderly cemeteries while others rest in unknown locations (Figures 1 and 2). All are individually named. Many are buried in cemeteries alongside their comrades and men from former allied nations, but the men from the other side of the trench line are also close by. Sometimes former enemies lie in the same cemetery. Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker remind us that ‘the apparent uniformity of the military cemeteries hides an essential distinction: in France the dead conquerors who died for justice were given light-coloured steles, the colour of purity, while the defeated Germans were given dark-coloured steles or crosses as a reminder of their black objectives’⁶¹ (Figure 3). Today however, wreaths and poppies placed by British and French visitors can be seen in German cemeteries, evidence of respect for all the dead.



Fig. 1. French and Commonwealth graves: AIF Burial Ground, Grass Lane. Photograph by C. Winter.

⁶¹ Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, and Annette Becker, *14–18 Understanding the Great War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002), 191.



Fig. 2. *Australian graves: Pozieres British cemetery.* Photograph by C. Winter.



Fig. 3. *Beaucamps-Ligny German Cemetery.* Photograph by C. Winter.

It is worth noting that the presence of the dead means that commemorations on the battlefields are fundamentally different from those held in the home countries where, as Michael Heffernan⁶² observes, ceremonies are conducted in the absence of those who are being remembered. In Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemeteries the inscriptions engraved on the walls reflect the close association of France with her allies. The 2020 Armistice Day ceremonies and other activities of the centenary period have extended this close association to acknowledge the common experience of all nations involved in a global war.

Le terrain de ce cimetière a été concédé gratuitement par la nation française comme lieu de sépulture perpétuelle des héros des armées alliées tombés pendant la grande guerre de 1914–1918 et honorés ici.

The land on which this cemetery stands is the free gift of the French people for the perpetual resting place of those of the allied armies who fell in the war of 1914–1918 and are honoured here.

Discussion

For the past century social memory of the Great War has been located on the battlefields, in the presence of the dead, where practices of remembrance sought to remember all of them forever (Figure 4). Tourists have been part of memory-making from the 1920s, with each generation manifesting different travel modes that reflected their needs and how the war was perceived. During the centenary, on the Western Front, a more intensified international focus on the war has been accompanied by a collaborative form of remembrance that can be distinguished as Com-Memoration. Almost in opposition to these global trends however, the development of Australian commemorations based at Villers-Bretonneux, driven in part by massive capital investment and promotion by the Australian government, appears to be intensifying a narrower historical basis and nationalist perspective. This process can be conceptualised as sight sacralisation which is, in effect, a technology of forgetting.

⁶² Michael Heffernan, 'For ever England: The Western Front and the Politics of Remembrance in Britain', *Ecumene* 2, no. 3 (July 1995): 294–295.

The attraction of Villers-Bretonneux, enhanced by the ANM and SJMC, is increasingly promoted as representing Australia's war effort, and risks establishing Australian remembrance within a commemorative bubble. This may affect not only tourists on the battlefields, but the Australian public at home. It is disappointing that Australia appears to have stepped aside from the opportunity to engage with former allies and opponents in recognition of an international conflict. It remains to be seen whether or not the SJMC will encourage Australians to explore other battlefields of their own nation, as well as those of the many others who fought, or whether it will further encourage Australians to visit within a commemorative bubble.

Com-Memoration seeks to unite former combatants and to expand understanding of all nations who experienced the four-year horror of the Western Front. The tourism industry is also adopting an international focus in its service provision, such as the development of remembrance trails and information to allow tourists to experience the Great War as narrative, beyond the traditional nationalist views. It is through Com-Memoration that Australian and French people, together with those from many other nations, may more actively appreciate a common war experience within the context of each other's culture.

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Fig. 4. *Known Unto God: AIF Burial Ground, Grass Lane.* Photograph by C. Winter.

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