Sarah’s Irwin’s son George went missing at Gallipoli in August 1915. Last seen plunging into the Turkish trenches at Lone Pine, his body – like so many others – was never recovered from the carnage. The testimony of the men who survived offered little comfort to Sarah or her family; memory, like the battle itself, had a merciless quality. George himself died many times in the course of a single Red Cross inquiry. He was shot, bayoneted or, in that sparse but eloquent soldier imagery, ‘knocked over’, as he climbed the parapet. Long before the Gallipoli campaign was over its memory was fractured, disputed and open to contestation:

I have interviewed so many boys who were with mine in the enemy trench and were blown up that I have... come to think that he might have been in one of these explosions, and been carried to some hospital suffering...
from loss of memory... [I’ve been] told... there were a number of cases like this.

So Sarah Irwin continues to ‘hope,’ ‘pray’ and imagine until the very end of the war, as indeed did so many others like her: ‘I have never been able to think of him as dead. I feel he is still living somewhere. I write regularly to Turkey, [and] I will keep on trusting and hoping, until this dreadful war is over’.¹

Twelve years after his death, Private Irwin’s parents finally make their way to Gallipoli. In the blistering heat of September, the Irwins climb to the summit of Lone Pine and Australia’s Memorial to the Missing. Unable to lay the body of their son to rest, they take a rubbing of all that is left of him, a name. Photographs published in the Sydney press captured that moment of ‘communitas’ for many a mourning family back home in Australia. Mrs. Irwin, whose long search for her son has finally ended, is crumpled at the base of the memorial, her face hidden from view, her hands limp and motionless, her eyes fixed on George’s name as it is traced out before her. Beside her rests a formal wreath of paper poppies, carried by the pilgrimage party, and her own ragged posy of freshly picked flowers. It was no coincidence that the Irwin’s pilgrimage was reported so fully in the media, that photographs of the couple, bent with grief at Lone Pine, were so widely circulated. Their loss came to symbolize that of a generation; the name they touched might have been any name. Therein lay the paradox of pilgrimage, a private act of personal devotion laid the basis for a community of bereavement and belief. Pilgrimage popularized memory for the many.²

Historians of war and memory might look at the Irwin’s journey to the Lone Pine Memorial in a number of different ways. What can we read into the space of remembrance? What messages, if any, are really ‘set in stone’? In the work of Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawn, we see what has been called a state centered approach. Commemoration at Gallipoli can be seen as an elaborate ritual of national identification and indeed the flags of both Britain and Australia festooned Mrs Irwin’s pilgrimage from beginning to end. In this light, memorials like the one raised at Lone Pine serve a conservative political purpose: they are grand, imperial, patriotic statements, templates of ‘official memory’. The cold clean stone of Gallipoli’s many monoliths sanitised the grim experience of death
and killing, transformed the killing field into neatly manicured cemeteries, subsuming private loss in the narrative of nation.3

But was that entirely true of Gallipoli in the 1920s? When Mrs Irwin stumbled across the shingle at Anzac Cove, the beach was still cluttered with debris. The hills she climbed were as steep and unforgiving as on the day of the Landing. Lone Pine itself was ringed by subsiding dugouts and trenches, in the tangled brush and sodden clay human bones, perhaps the bones of her own boy, worked their way insistently, obscenely to the surface. And those who would subsume private grief with the publicly sanctioned memory of war do well to ponder the Latin roots of that word ‘monument’. It literally means ‘something that reminds us’. As Mrs Irwin gazed on the name of her boy, chiselled in the long lists of the missing, King and Country were probably far from her mind. Indeed, in all her correspondence to the Red Cross, George is addressed as ‘my boy’, ‘my child’, ‘my son’, seldom as a soldier. He belonged, it seems, to a family, not to an Empire.4

The work of Jay Winter and the so called ‘social agency school’ offers a finer appreciation of what Winter has called the languages of mourning. Indeed, in the Irwin’s case we have a whole vocabulary of grief and bereavement. There is the sharp pang of loss, the flood of soldier witness accounts, years of denial, hope and anguish but finally the memory of war settles into the gentler task of remembrance. Families, Winter tells us, moved on, trauma was converted into misfortune, the haunted image of blackened, decomposing bodies is replaced by the white enduring stone of their memorials. In this light, Sarah’s pilgrimage to George’s memorial was a way of transforming private pain to public remembrance: ‘a means [Winter tells us] of passing through mourning, separating the dead from the living, beginning to live again.’5

But that passage from melancholia to mourning was never certain, never easy. In Sarah’s case, for instance, grief had a restless, relentless, volatile character. Like the mourning mothers of any of a dozen countries, she sifted ceaselessly through George’s belongings, the letters, photographs, muddied shred of uniform that came home without him. She relived that bitter moment of loss every time she read that cruelly inconclusive soldier testimony. Perhaps Mrs Irwin accepted George’s death when she took that rubbing of his name at Gallipoli – her ‘private loss’, as Catherine Moriarty would have it,
'publicly sanctified'. But that very same ritual could be read as denial, a refusal by the living to part with the dead, a longing still to hold him. Perhaps historians can never truly recover the emotional investment the first Anzac pilgrims made in their journey. Bound by the limitation of our sources, afflicted by the poverty of the archives, we can never completely reconstruct these messages set in stone. What we can do though is trace the making of Gallipoli’s commemorative landscape. This was a task that began well before the fighting had ended. And it continues ever changing to this day.

**Sites of Memory**

Perhaps the peninsula was always destined to be a place of pilgrimage. The ‘memory work’, as historians have called it, began on the Day of the Landing. It was not just that this was Australia’s first major military engagement or that rough untried Anzac troops had proved themselves ‘worthy sons’ of the Empire. The landscape itself seemed to provide the stuff of legends, the rugged slopes held at such terrible human cost, the battles fought in the shadow of Troy and on the shores of the Aegean. The legend grew larger throughout the 1920s as one soldier’s reminiscence after another evoked Gallipoli as the birthplace of a nation and Anzac became akin to a ‘secular religion’. As early as 1930 officers seconded to the Imperial War Graves Commission predicted their lonely outpost in the Dardanelles would one day be a site of both tourism and pilgrimage. ‘Soon Helles would boast Turkey’s largest airport,’ one declared, ‘and every Anzac Day the beaches will swell with visitors.’

There was no shortage of memorials to greet them. Arguably the making of Gallipoli’s commemorative landscape began within the first few weeks of the campaign. From the first days of the campaign bodies were brought in from the battlefield. Recovered at enormous human cost they were buried wherever space could be found for them and marked with whatever material came to hand. The graves of Gallipoli were lined with stones gathered from the beaches, their crosses were fashioned from biscuit boxes and boards, jam tins beaten flat and silver were made to bear a message and a name. Abandoning these graves was, for many, the hardest part of the Evacuation:
It was a sad day for us when the order [to leave] was issued. Every man of the... first division had someone whom he honoured and respected, lying in one of those solitary graves... the thought of having to leave these sacred spots to the mercy of the enemy made the spirit of the men revolt... Some of the men broke down and cried...8

Mercy proved a rare commodity in wartime. No sooner had Turkish troops reoccupied the trenches than the destruction of Gallipoli’s first memorials began. In a world mobilised by fear and hatred, ‘outrages’ of this kind expected of the enemy especially, it seems, when the enemy was Muslim. For much of the war, fears that the so-called ‘heathen’ Turk would ‘desecrate’ Christian graves posed, as one broken-hearted father put it, ‘a cruel and additional burden of grief’. A Papal Envoy was sent to the Peninsula in 1916 to investigate rumours that Anzac’s cemeteries had been desecrated.9 With the end of the war, allied troops reoccupied the Peninsula. Just days after their arrival, the worst possible news was cabled to Australia. An officer with the Graves Registration Unit reported that ‘cemeteries... are in worst possible condition... all the wooden crosses have been removed... Practically all the British and French graves at Cape Helles... have been systematically desecrated... Bones in many cases lying besides graves which have been opened; in other cases skeletons lying in open graves [most have been looted].’10 Subsequent inquiries, initiated by the Australian government, found little evidence of ‘deliberate’ or ‘systematic’ desecration. Crosses had been removed and burnt but only by a garrison desperately short of fuel and supplies. The looting of bodies, at Helles more than Anzac, was blamed on ‘isolated marauders’ not Islamic fervour and certainly not government policy. But that offered little consolation to grieving families back in Australia. The violation of Gallipoli’s graves in wartime set the whole tenor of commemoration of the Peninsula. Indeed it fuelled the desire to claim the landscape itself as a memorial.11

Under the Peace Treaty brokered at Lausanne, the Turks were forced to surrender ownership of the entire Anzac area. Nominally, they retained sovereignty over the site. But the battlefield itself, from the ridges down to the beaches, was ceded to the Empire. This was a compact unprecedented in war, claiming territory not for the living
but for the dead, driven by a deep-set anxiety that graves so distant from home might be desecrated or forgotten. More than that, the landscape itself served a commemorative function and the battlefield itself became consecrated ground.12

This was in marked contrast to what happened elsewhere in Europe. On the Western Front, the policy was largely one of ‘concentration’. Soldiers’ remains were gathered up from No Man’s Land and interred in vast sprawling cemeteries. Tyne Cot alone holds over 12,000 bodies. At Anzac, on the other hand, men were largely left ‘where they fell… so that the site of their graves would mark their heroism’. Their bodies would blend with the ground Australia held – every ridge, every gully, harnessed in a dramatic gesture of remembrance. Over twenty separate cemeteries consecrate the ground at Anzac, all huddled together in the space of a few square kilometres. The smallest – Pluge’s – marked the first hill the first Anzacs scaled on the first day of the fighting. Just twelve Australians are buried there.13

And so the front line itself was etched out by a series of graveyards. Wartime Posts like Quinn’s, Steele’s and Courtney’s are still in a sense held by garrisons of the dead. And at around the same time these cemeteries were established the horticultural branch of the War Graves Commission embarked on an even more ambitious landscape memorial. Throughout the 1920s, wattle and eucalypt were raised first at Kew or Cairo and then propagated along Anzac’s gullies and ridges, Australianising a landscape that technically belonged to Australia.14

Asserting ownership of Anzac was also the purpose of the memorials we build there. Driven by the logic of its Charter, the Imperial War Graves Commission insisted on recording each dead man’s name in stone – even when there was no body to bury. In time, each separate theatre of war would field its own monument to the missing, like Lutyen’s arching edifice at Thiepval on the Somme or the Menin Gate at Ypres. Each of these enormous structures was designed to carry its burden of names, every stone and panel groaning with details of men and regiments. But recording names for posterity was only one of their functions. Rising up over the killing fields, these Memorials to the Lost also proclaimed dominion. And nowhere is that more clearly seen than at Gallipoli.15

The memorial to the Missing at Cape Helles was described by Mrs Irwin’s generations as ‘a modern day Colossus’. Positioned at the
entrance of the Dardanelles it was intended ‘to be seen’ by every ship entering the Narrows. By day its stark white stone stares out from the shore, by night a searchlight swept a blazing arc across the water. Similarly, New Zealand’s memorial at Chunuk Bair occupies the highest point of the Peninsula. In reality the Kiwis never really fought there. The skeletons of men killed in the same August offensive that claimed George Irwin were moved a full 20 metres forward, all to achieve a better view of the narrows. And the New Zealand memorial to the missing was placed above them.16

Geography was one obstacle to Anzac commemoration, alternative cultures of remembrance another. A Turkish memorial once marked the site of the Lone Pine cemetery and the memorial to the missing which Sarah Irwin visited in 1927. The sole surviving photograph of the same appears in CEW Bean’s poignant account of his own pilgrimage back to Anzac, Gallipoli Mission. The monument took the form of a simple obelisk circled by artillery shells. It marked the point where Ottoman troops turned back the Allied advance and commemorated the savage fighting that claimed the life of George Irwin. Bean’s decision to caption the photograph ‘a temporary Turkish memorial’ was somewhat disingenuous. In 1919, Australian staff of the Imperial War Graves Commission measured the memorial, photographed it and then blew it to pieces. Not long after Bean’s return shards of the marble edifice were sold on the streets of Sydney to raise funds for crippled soldiers. Remembering, it is often remarked, is also an act of forgetting. The controversy over recent road works aside, neither the Turks not the Australians remember this bitter contest over the commemorative landscape of Gallipoli.17

THE LANGUAGE OF LOSS
Pillars, obelisk and garden are not the only Gallipoli memorials. Alongside those grandiose statements lie much more personal tributes – epitaphs chosen by grieving families to mark the graves of their loved ones. From the outset it should be noted that this was a reluctant concession to mourners. Many families longed to repatriate their dead and an epitaph on a headstone was, at best, a compromise, a means of securing what Bart Ziino has called ‘a compensatory presence by a distant graveside’. Families were charged threepence happeney for every letter and every space between them. Well into the
1920s, zealous bureaucrats in Melbourne pursued families who failed to pay, as if they had not ‘given’ enough for Empire.¹⁸

These statements in stone span a spectrum of emotion. Many are proud and patriotic, some intently imperialistic, others fervently Australian. In many cases, inscriptions transcend a loved one’s absence. Imaginary journeys in themselves, they recreate a soldier’s ‘voice’ or ‘touch’ or most commonly his grave. In doing so they traverse both a physical and a psychological distance, evoking place, space, presence – creating ‘metaphors for memory’. ‘Tread gently on the green grass sod’, Pte J. McCallister’s grave pleads from the Gullies of Gallipoli, ‘a mothers love lies here’.¹⁹ Many Gallipoli epitaphs record the names of next of kin. It was necessary, John Laffin has noted, ‘to stress their family relationship and bond with the dead soldier’. But a similar argument might well be extended to place names. All along the ridges of Gallipoli, men still belong to Merimbula and Coolgardie, Euroa and Korumburra.²⁰ And many a description of a lad could only ever have come from Australia: ‘A Dinkum Aussie’, ‘An Anzac’, ‘Our Bonzer Boy’ or simply ‘Mate-o-mine’.²¹ Lyrical or colloquial, secular or religious, epitaphs like these echo the terrible loss felt by distant families.

Few are more eloquent than the inscription chosen by Pte J. E. Barkley’s widow, left to care for a fatherless child back home in Melbourne: ‘I’ve no darling now, I’m weeping, Baby and I, you left alone’. A resident of one of St Kilda’s shabbier streets, Mrs Barkley would never have the means to visit her husband’s distant grave.

Perhaps, as a number of scholars have argued, it was distance most of all that drove the making of Gallipoli’s monuments and cemeteries.²² Journeys like Mrs Irwin’s were undertaken with all the fervour of pilgrimage, their urgency amplified by distance. It was not just that most Gallipoli travellers had some association with the dead who were buried there, or that the ground itself was seen as somehow ‘sacred’ to Australia. Most pilgrims in the interwar years subscribed to what Pat Jalland has called a Victorian view of death and bereavement: to see and tend a loved one’s grave was ‘a vital part in the process of mourning.’ All sought relics from the battlefield: badges, buttons, bullets and the ubiquitous pressed poppy became treasured mementoes of their journey. And the journey itself mirrored the pattern of pilgrimage since time immemorial. Diaries, letters, even tattered family albums, convey the sense of a ‘quest’, a journey ‘out of the normal parameters of life [and] entry into a
different other world’, a visit to a landscape saturated with meaning and a return home to an everyday world, exhausted but renewed by the experience.23

TRAVELLERS THEN AND NOW
Australians continue to make a pilgrimage to Gallipoli and no doubt the meanings of those journeys have changed considerably. Today’s Gallipoli travellers have no direct connection with the dead, though tens of thousands reverently retrace the steps of Anzac ancestors. Nor are these journeys always undertaken in quite the same solemn spirit of commemoration. For many a young back packer ‘doing Anzac Day’ at Gallipoli is more a statement about expatriation and nostalgia for home than a search for memory or grappling with history.24 And just as the meanings continue to evolve so too does the nature of Gallipoli’s commemorative landscape. The monuments raised in the immediate aftermath of war are dwarfed today by a new generation of memorials. The Turkish government’s recent tribute to the martyrs of Cannakale is three times the size of the British Monument at Helles; a statue of the Turkish leader Attaturk now confronts the New Zealand memorial at Chunuk Bair, defending the Peninsula against a new army of invading backpackers. Giant sculptures of Ottoman troops charge across No Mans Land, stumbling over beer cans, coke bottles and all the debris of tourism. And daily Corporal Sayit, encased in concrete on the heights, shells the ferries that carry sightseers to Gallipoli.25

One might view this outbreak of commemorative statuary unkindly, symptomatic of what some scholars have called the ‘Disnification of history’. Like any tourist destination the peninsula is carefully packaged by the industry, selling the memory of war to travellers hungry for authenticity. Recruitment posters have been cleverly recrafted. One of the most popular of these features the image of an Anzac straddling the straits of the Dardanelles, issuing a ‘cooee’ call to a new generation of travellers. ‘Wont you come?’, the Poster implores, beckoning the young to the beaches in much the same way as war-time patriots urged on the Landings. At Eceabat, ‘port’ of the Gallipoli ferry, the Boomerang Cafe bakes its Anzac biscuits; at Cannakale, transformed overnight to a back packer village, enterprising street stalls sell their Gallipoli tee shirts. In the 1920s, as we’ve seen, every effort was made to sacrilise Gallipoli’s
landscape, preserving every ridge and gully as a battlefield memorial. Now Gallipoli takes the appearance of a theme park. Recreated trench lines are artfully woven with barbed wire, No Mans Land occupied by larger than life soldier statues. In all this, one sees what the Canadian historian Graham Carr has called an ‘ersatz experience’ of memory. Though young travellers walk the beach and climb the ridges ‘standing where the soldiers stood and seeing it with [their] own eyes’, the sanitised landscape of Gallipoli bears no real resemblance to war’s actual reality. And of course the terror of the
campaign, the fear, pain and stench of war, defy the most enterprising travel agent’s power of reconstruction. History, it seems, has been held to ransom by tourism, the memory of war popularised to the point of forgetting.\textsuperscript{26}

Having said that, the memorials of Gallipoli have not lost their power to move, confront and often even inspire their visitors. Their meanings are re-visited, even re-invented by each successive generation of Anzac pilgrim. And, contrary to the simplistic monodimensional readings of some historians, the Peninsula’s commemorative landscape remains a site of fierce contestation. Pacifist and patriot, back packer and bereaved all interpret it differently.\textsuperscript{27} Moreover, the memorials of Gallipoli continue to alert us to different cultures of commemoration: Christian, secular and Islamic, Turkish, British, French and Australian. It seems ironic that the memorial at Lone Pine – focal point for the anguish, grief and anger of a generation – has now been eclipsed by Attaturk’s words set in stone by the sea, words spoken in fact spoken to that first generation of Gallipoli visitors:

\begin{quotation}
You the mothers from far away countries, wipe away your tears, for your sons sleep in the bosom of a friendly country, having lost their lives on our land they have become our sons as well.
\end{quotation}

One wonders if these words gave any comfort to Mrs Irwin.

Endnotes

\textsuperscript{1} Sarah Irwin to Vera Deakin, 16 March 1917, 4 August 1918; Pte. G. R. Irwin, Red Cross Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau Files, Australian War Memorial, 1 DRL/0428.


conservative dimensions of this ‘cult of remembrance’ see ‘Name upon
Name: The Great War and Remembrance,’ in Roy Porter (ed), The Myths of

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Remembrance Gallipoli: Salonica, London, 1926; C. L. Head, A Glance at
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Graham Seal, Inventing Anzac: The Digger and National Mythology,
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8 Pte A. L. Smith, cited in Bill Gammage, The Broken Years, Australian
National University Press, Canberra, 1974, p110; For the making of soldier
memorials see Bruce Scates, Return to Gallipoli: Walking the Battlefields of the

9 Correspondence between W. Warren Ker and W. M. Hughes, 3 December
1915, 6 January, 21 February 1916, ‘Arrangement in Connection with

10 Decode of Cablegram received from the High Commissioner’s Office, London, dated 23 December 1918, NAA A458, P337/6 Pt 1. For further details see War Diary of Graves Registration Unit, Gallipoli, 15, 19 November 1918; ‘Report on Work under the GRU on Gallipoli’, British Public Records Office (Kew) (henceforth PRO Kew), WO95/4954; WO 32/5640.

11 Bean, Gallipoli Mission, pp.45-6; see also Bean’s ‘Gallipoli Report’, AWM 38, 3DRL 8042/51; NAA A2909/2 A453/1/3; ‘Proposed cession to Great Britain of land in Gallipoli containing graves of British troops’, PRO (Kew), WO32/4843; see Lt. Kessing’s report, ‘Gallipoli Graves’, Sydney Morning Herald, 1 January 1920; see also Percy George Doherty’s letters (a New Zealand member of the War Graves Detachment), Kippenberger Military Archive and Research Library, Aotearoa/New Zealand, no 1989.994.

12 For the fraught negations surrounding Gallipoli see Scates, Return to Gallipoli, ch 2; also Lausanne Conference Proceedings, League of Nations Archives, Geneva, 949.9:063; Frederick Kenyon, War Graves: How the Cemeteries Abroad will be Designed, London, 1918; Philip Longworth, The Unending Vigil: A History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Constable, London, 1967. There was also an effort to preserve some of smaller cemeteries on the Western Front but concentration cemeteries became a bureaucratic necessity.

13 Where Australians Rest, p54. Although originally written by Lt Hampson, the text was heavily edited by Bean and bears obvious marks of his intervention. See C. E. W. Bean to T. Trumble, 18 February 1920, NAA (Melb) MP367/1 446/10/1331.


17 Bean, Gallipoli Mission; for sale of memorial debris see Mary Booth Papers, Mitchell Library, Sydney.


19 For the concept of ‘memory metaphors’ see Elizabeth Hallem and Jenny Hockey, Death, Memory and Material Culture, Oxford university Press,
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20 John Laffin, We Will Remember Them: AIF Epitaphs of World War 1, Kangaroo Press, Sydney, 1995, p88. See, for example, Pte R. T. Munn (Shell Green).

21 Tpr H. Rush (Walker’s Ridge); Cpr GP Cameron (Shrapnel Valley); Maj. J. E. Sergeant (Shell Green).


27 For a naive and misrepresentative reading of this landscape see Mark McKenna and Stuart Ward, “‘It Was Really Moving Mate’: The Gallipoli Pilgrimage and Sentimental Nationalism”, Australian Historical Studies, no 129, April, 2007, pp141-52. See also my subsequent reply, ‘The First Casualty of War: a Reply to McKenna and Ward’s “Gallipoli Pilgrimage and Sentimental Nationalism”’, Australian Historical Studies, no 130, November, 2007, pp362-71.