

## Introduction

This book had its origins in a search for my own family forebears and sense of identity. It was triggered by discussions with my brother who had begun the task but, with a family of small children, had neither the time nor the opportunity to do the detailed research required. We had as a starting point the findings of an earlier, and incomplete, examination of our particular line of the family conducted by a distant cousin. Added to this were the memories, some photographs and a few written accounts of the lives and times of our parents and their siblings. A small and inadequate record of so much past living. As a consequence I joined the thousands of people in different parts of the world who were frequenting libraries and record offices, visiting cemeteries, seeking out distant relatives, sifting through the contents of local history societies, and monitoring the ever-expanding information being placed on that latest, and most marvellous, of public sources, the internet.

As with most others, this personal journey of discovery was in the beginning a largely genealogical exercise, aimed at establishing links between the current and preceding generations, and building, quickly at first but then much more slowly as I moved back in time, a detailed family tree. Like all research and detective work, it involved long hours and numerous false trails. Some lines of the family proved resistant to exposure back beyond a particular generation. The connections between others with common names and before certain times were sometimes impossible to be certain about given the poor state of public records in parts of England, Ireland and Australia. The search was compounded, too, by discordances between established family folklore and the emerging documentary record. Nations and nation-builders, it seems, are not the only sites and agents of myth-making. These frustrations were compensated by the immediate, if short-lived, thrill of finding something new, unknown or unexpected, and the broader satisfaction of seeing the overall outlines of the family and its members' life experiences gradually taking shape.

At one level this book represents the outcomes of that research. It traces, as can best be gleaned from the public record and the

limited information they left behind, the stories of some of our forebears who came to and lived and worked in Australia between 1840 and 1920. The principal characters in this personal narrative include, first, two brothers, Thomas and Samuel Hickmott, who were transported from England to Van Diemen's Land in 1840. Second are Henry Hickmott (the son of Samuel) and William Free who came as assisted emigrants to South Australia and Victoria in 1849 and 1853 respectively and eventually became pioneer farmers in Victoria's Wimmera district. Third are two first generation Australians, William Laurence and Mary Jane Kersley, who were born during the gold rush era, got married in 'marvellous Melbourne' in 1884, and later settled on land in the northern Riverina district of New South Wales. The book ends with an account of two further brothers, Samuel and Albert Free. The grandsons of William Free, Bert and Sam grew up in rural Victoria in the years following the creation of the Australian nation. In 1916 they answered the call and travelled back to England and then on to Europe to fight on their country's behalf for the British Empire.

The backgrounds, lives and experiences of these individuals are broadly representative of those of the vast majority of Australia's early, non-Aboriginal inhabitants. All were of Anglo-Saxon or Celtic stock. They were all from humble origins, the outcasts of, or escapees from, a system of social order that at the time was harsh, censorial and generally indifferent to the plight of its poorer members. All braved a long and sometimes perilous sea voyage to get here. On arrival they were all confronted with the task of establishing, and usually re-establishing, themselves and their growing families in a new, unfamiliar and often unforgiving land. They differ from many of their peers in that they lived mainly in the bush rather than in the country's towns or cities. Although in most cases they were not its leaders, all contributed to the rural communities they helped pioneer, and to the development of an emerging colonial and, over time, Australian economy and society.

Their story, then, is in many ways the story of ordinary (white) Australians during the period covered; a story that in the past at least, has not figured highly in our historical canon or consciousness. It is marked by personal and family upheavals, by long journeys to lands that were either new or 'further out', and by uncertain, sometimes capricious and always difficult times and circumstances. Most tried their hand at goldmining and when that failed to deliver, they turned to the land. Like so many others from those times, they were required to look out for themselves and their families, toiling long hours in remote and bushland settings

as members of convict chain gangs, as shepherds, stockmen, and agricultural labourers and, eventually in most cases, as pioneer settlers and farmers.

They lived at different times in the open, in tents or lean-tos, and in crude bark huts with dirt floors. The women among them gave birth to large numbers of children some of whom died at childbirth while others were lost through disease or accident. They experienced at first hand the droughts, bush fires, dust storms, rabbit plagues, and lightning strikes that were an integral part of life on the land. Some participated in the displacement of the country's original inhabitants. Others witnessed or were not far from Eureka and the red ribbon 'riots' at Bendigo and on the McIvor. Some may have joined the public demonstrations against convict transportation and the Chinese, while others formed part of the masses agitating to 'unlock the land'. Many were present at the establishment of the Australian nation, and some later defended its sovereignty amid the man-made pyrotechnics and carnage of the First World War.

A growing knowledge and appreciation of the ordinary and yet, from a twenty-first century (and ivory tower, academic) perspective, extraordinary lives and times of my forbears raised a number of new questions and concerns. What kind of people were they? What did they believe in, value most and stand for? What drove or led those who first came to Australia to do so? Why did they lead the kind of harsh and nomadic lives they did? Why did young men who were born and brought up in Australia return to England to help defend the British Empire? And why were current family members aware of their immigrant, pioneer and digger forbears but not those who came as convicts?

Neither family folklore nor the history lessons remembered from school were of much use in answering these broader questions. To become better acquainted with my forbears and begin to make some sense of their lives, I had to read about the social and political history of Great Britain, Ireland and Australia, its colonies and their component communities. This was no simple or easy task. The material published within academe alone about Australia's history has expanded enormously over the past few decades. It has been written from a myriad of experiences and perspectives, provides a range of different interpretations about the events that are described, and is marked by the usual theoretical debates and controversies that seem to characterise all areas of scholarly research in our increasingly post-modern times.

As a consequence, my research and reading at this level has been necessarily selective and draws primarily on secondary sources in order to construct my own account of Australia's and my forebears' colonial pasts. This level of the narrative continues to take its lead from the principal characters but focuses on the changing circumstances in which they found themselves, the key forces and frictions to which they were subjected, and the major characteristics—derived from the expanding body of sociological, cultural and genealogical studies becoming available—of the families, communities and classes to which they belonged, and the broader value and belief systems to which they subscribed or were inculcated in by their leaders and 'betters'.

This story of Australia proceeds in three parts. Part One, *Australia Bound*, deals with the period from 1788 to the onset of the gold rushes. It describes why the convict colony was founded, provides an account of the lives and circumstances of such felons as Samuel and Thomas Hickmott both before and after they were transported, and outlines the important changes that were occurring and would develop in the colony from around the time of the brothers' arrival at Hobart Town in 1840. By this stage the small penal establishment clustered around Sydney Cove had expanded into a large and important pastoral economy. Much of the hinterland in the southeast of the country had been traversed by convict shepherds and their sheep whose wool was providing Britain's industrial mills with over half their needs. Outlier settlements had been established in Van Diemen's Land, in the free colony of South Australia, and in the Port Philip district of New South Wales. Those who had come free to the colonies now outnumbered the convicts and their descendents, the native-born white Australians. Society in Sydney and the other major colonial townships was growing more stratified, complex and discerning. Their inhabitants were beginning publicly to agonise over such questions as whether convicts should continue to be transported to the colony, who should own the land on which the flocks of sheep now grazed, and who should be primarily responsible for running colonial affairs.

These debates and dissensions centred often on the related issues of respectability and the convict stain. As argued in Chapter Two, these were used by newcomers and members of the old guard alike to rationalise their harsh and often unfair treatment of the

convicts and their offspring, to demean and marginalise political opponents, to retain in place a largely paternalistic and autocratic system of social and political control, and to declare their worthiness to the world and, as importantly perhaps, to themselves. A key element in this last pursuit was the perceived importance of being, or being seen to be, English; in taste, manners, proclivities and above all loyalty. Colonial acceptability was measured not in terms of where its people were but where they had come from and, in many cases, preferred eventually to be. Colonial identity was being connected not to the people who had or were being born in the country but to those who had occupied it, were continuing to exploit its resources, and had overseen the dispossession and near destruction of its original inhabitants.

The colonists were thus imagining, or being encouraged to imagine, themselves in a way that dismissed or decried certain peoples or races and denied certain happenings, experiences and possibilities. The construction of colonial identity in this way was primarily an elite-driven exercise, conforming to the practices, preferences, and pretensions of the grandees in Government House and their social circle. Although moderated to some extent by the pragmatic materialism of the colonies' merchants and dealers, there was little acknowledgement of the rights or aspirations of the country's artisans, workers and original inhabitants. Nor was there space in this imaginary for the convicts and their offspring. Indeed, by the middle of the nineteenth century, Australia's convict beginnings, like those of Aboriginal Australians, were being moved from the centre to the periphery of the colony's historical consciousness. The convicts themselves were being painted as a feared and unwanted 'other'; shadowy 'outsiders' onto whom white colonists could project their fears and apprehensions. For crucially, this constitutive process was shaped as much by fear as anything else: fear of an alien and unknown environment, fear of physical and cultural isolation, fear of attack by felons or contamination from convictism, fear of censure and shame in the eyes of the British establishment, and fear of exposure of the ruling classes' own deeds and desires.

This broad cultural enterprise and associated 'cult of forgetfulness' or denial was not only unfair, it was also somewhat fraudulent given the sexual and other connections that had existed between the early rulers of the colonies and those they ruled. Perhaps because of this the reinvention of Australia's historical past was pursued with considerable resolve. It would prove to be highly

successful although as Chapter Three describes, the process would take longer to take effect in the frontier settlement of Port Phillip (later Victoria). There, as had been the case in the early days of the parent colony, the laggards and fringe men were needed initially to help their masters and middle-class overseers convert the forest wastelands into pastures new.

The transportation of convicts to the south eastern colonies finally ended with the discovery of gold there in 1851. Convicts and former convicts remained in the country of course as did the legacies of their harsh treatment, and the feelings of fear, disgust and guilt they inspired. But the massive inflow of gold seekers and immigrants over the next four decades saw their relative numbers and perceived importance decline dramatically in all places other than Tasmania, and new issues, new concerns and new anxieties begin to exercise the thoughts and imaginations of the people and their leaders.

These are discussed in Part Two of the book, *Australia Felix*, which deals with the period from 1851 until the turn of the century. It looks at why such people as William Free and Henry Hickmott decided to emigrate to Australia with their families, describes their subsequent experiences as gold seekers, rural workers, and pioneer farmers, and examines the values they brought with them and the impact these and their actions may have had on the country's evolving political, social and ideational structures. For the everyday experiences of the newly arrived immigrants took place against a background of a series of political struggles in which the country's workers and those who represented them sought to obtain justice on the goldfields, achieve political representation and a say in the running of colonial affairs, and perhaps most important of all, 'unlock the land' from the grasp of the squatters and pastoralists. Although the discussion of these struggles focuses on what happened in Victoria, the experiences described are broadly representative of what occurred across the country as a whole. Those living during this time were also presented with a new and alternative way of conceiving of themselves, one that drew its strength not from the country's continuing social and imaginative connections with Great Britain, but from the Australian landscape and the bushmen who (in the past at least) had inhabited it.

At first sight the period from 1851 to 1900 seemed a heady and exciting one, full of hope and promise and fulfilment. It was a golden age marked by constant change and development, driven on by a continuous influx of people, money, energy and ideas. It was a period in which all of the colonies became self-governing. All put in place systems of governance that were broadly democratic and representative. All proceeded with legislation that would eventually wrest the land from the few and distribute it among the many. And, towards the end of the century, all agreed to merge together to form a unified Australian state. This move from a series of dependent and relatively autocratic British colonies to a relatively democratic, egalitarian and independent nation occurred, moreover, with almost no violence or bloodshed, and with the (grudging) acquiescence of the squatters and others who stood to lose most from the reforms being introduced.

A closer inspection, however, reveals a rather more complex and cautionary tale, one in which continuity and opposition are as much in evidence as change and reform. The introduction of a fully democratic system of governance was not sought by many among the colonial elite who, like their counterparts in Britain, equated democracy with 'mob rule'. It was forced on them, rather, by a liberal-minded government in London whose time in office would be fleeting. Although power had been wrested from the pastoralists, it was assumed not by the people but by members of a newly emergent middle class. While some among the middle classes fought to advance the rights of ordinary workers, most believed that popular rule needed to be balanced with economic and social interests. They were more inclined to conservatism than to liberalism or republicanism, and more disposed towards elitist and condescending views of society, progress and their fellow man (women's issues were not yet on the political agenda).

In later years they were increasingly motivated (in theory if not always in practice) by the maxims of Victorian Evangelism—sobriety, piety, frugality and fealty to God and Queen Victoria. Such beliefs had been brought with them from Great Britain and, like there, were encouraged in those who sat below them on the social ladder (though not always or entirely successfully). Many among the emerging middle class were of the further belief that colonial democracy had necessarily to be of an English variety. They also saw democratic rule to be of less import than continuing membership of the British Empire. Without British protection, the colonies would be vulnerable to the predations of other expansionist European powers. More alarming

still, Australia could be menaced by the teeming millions of Asia. For during this time, the fear of physical and cultural contamination by convicts and convictism began to be replaced, in the minds of middle and working class Australians alike, by concerns about Asia and Asians.

These fears were first triggered by the appearance of Chinese workers on the Victorian goldfields. They emerged again in the 1880s and the debates over the use of coloured labour to develop the country's tropical north. As had been the case with the convicts and convictism, the fears of Asian invasion and contamination were grossly exaggerated. But they were widely-held and drew strength from social-Darwinist and other pseudo-scientific discourses of racial difference imported from Britain. Colonial identity and acceptance were again being painted in terms of difference. True colonists were not only not convicts or Aboriginals, they were not Asian or members of non-white races. Australians remained, according to this view, very much southern hemisphere Britons.

The period 1851 to 1890 also witnessed a manifold increase in the country's population where the majority of the newcomers were made up of new immigrants. These comprised two broad groupings. The first consisted of those, like William Free and Henry Hickmott and their families, who travelled to Australia under various government-assisted emigration schemes. They constituted around half of all those who arrived in the country between 1821 and 1890 and were drawn largely from among the rural poor of Britain and Ireland. As detailed in Chapter Four, the assisted emigrants underwent a rigorous and comprehensive selection process that yielded people who, though individually independent, tended also to be socially and politically conservative. Most were 'good Christians', church goers who placed great store in family and fireside life, drew inspiration from the Bible and pulpit orations, remained nostalgic towards the Old World and its values, and thrilled to tales of imperial adventures.

Goodly numbers of them went on the land, taking their values and beliefs with them as they moved inland from the coast. Though often and unfairly disparaged by the middle classes of both Britain and Australia as being little better than the convicts who had preceded them—'self-inflicted transportees', or the products of 'pauper-migration'—they were instrumental in succouring rural communities across much of Australia. There they served generally to reinforce rather than unsettle the social and political

*status quo*, deferring to rather than challenging or seeking substantially to reform existing systems of magisterial governance and religious direction. Following the example of their leaders and 'betters', they tended also to imagine themselves more as transplanted 'Britishers' than as Australians, replicating in placenames and sporting and social activities, the comforting sounds and routines of their British and Irish pasts.

The second group of immigrants arrived in Australia of their own accord, or under the patronage of friends or relatives. Though they had much in common with the assisted emigrants, and would mix and inter-marry with them, they were as likely to be single as married, artisans or mechanics by trade, relatively well off financially, less beholden to existing systems of privilege and authority, and more conscious of their rights and collective power. They would take the lead in the agitations on the goldfields, in the struggles over land reform and the right to vote, and in the conflicts beginning to take place between the colonies' capitalist classes and organised labour. Their leaders and prophets lived mainly in the towns and cities where, as Chapter Seven relates, they yearned for the simplicities of an earlier bush and gold rush society, one marked by egalitarianism, independence and self-sufficiency.

Like the model it was challenging, this new form of imagined identity was structured as much around how Australians differed from others as about the shared values and experiences of the bushmen and other iconic figures being lauded. According to this view, 'true' Australians were not squatters, police officers, magistrates or other figures of authority associated with the colonial and English establishments. They were not Aborigines or Chinamen, or 'New Chum' emigrants, or 'Fatman capitalists'. Finally and contentiously, they were not women, or at least the kinds of women that seemed to be distrusted and disliked by Henry Lawson and his fellow proselytisers. Viewed from the perspective of constructed differences, this alternative vision of Australian identity had much in common with that already imagined by most white colonists, differing only in its anti-English and anti-ruling class sentiments. This would contribute to the new creed's broad and continuing appeal, even among members of the middle classes, but also made the discourse vulnerable to future cooption or corruption by imperialists or other enemies of the workers. For it represented less a rejection than an accommodation of Australia's imperial connections with great Britain; a strident form of Australian nationalism certainly, but one that continued

largely to be framed and understood within a global, imperial context.

The new form of Australian nationalism was taken to heart by the shearers and other workers who, from the 1890s, participated in the major confrontations between unions and employers. It informed the accounts of the experiences of Australian soldiers serving in South Africa during the Boer War. And it probably served to encourage thousands of hopefuls, like William Joseph Laurence whose story is told in Chapter Eight, to relinquish the comfort and security of town or city life and try their luck in the bush as new settlers and yeoman farmers. With its emphasis on self-sufficiency and family production, the yeoman model of land settlement was seen by colonial and national governments alike as the best means of converting Australia from a pastoral to an agricultural economy. Although strongly held, however, the model was neither economically nor socially appropriate to Australian conditions. It may, over time, have converted most of the county's former sheep runs into golden wheat fields, but it was also responsible for considerable and largely irreparable environmental damage. In combination with the masculinist tendencies in the Australian imaginary, the yeoman ideal also committed thousands of women and children to a life of unremitting, unpaid and largely unrecognised toil assisting their husbands and helpmates in recultivating the bush-covered landscape.

By the turn of the century, large-scale immigration into the country had all but ceased and locally-born white Australians now outnumbered those who had come from overseas. The earlier era of expansion, marked by the ever movement inland of European explorers and adventurers, squatters and overlanders, and pioneer settlers and their supporting communities, was also ending. Some in the country would now, as we have seen, begin reflecting on who and what they were. Some dreamt of creating an Australian-led extension of the British Empire in the South Pacific. Some, like colonisers everywhere, began worrying about how thinly spread and potentially vulnerable the country was to the forces and ferments that lay beyond its territorial borders (or within the confines of their own fertile imaginations).

This last concern, and its consequences, are taken up in the third and final part of the book, *Australian Reckonings*. It begins by

outlining the aspirations and actions of Alfred Deakin and his fellow federal politicians in their efforts, after 1 January 1901, to build at the foot of Asia a nation of independent Britons. Particular emphasis in this latest journey is given to the issue of national defence. From the time of the withdrawal from Australia of the British redcoat regiments in 1870, the acquisition of an independent military capability was seen by most colonists to be of great importance. Not only would it provide protection against possible attacks by French, Russian or other sea-borne raiders, it would also help develop a sense of colonial and national identity. While most colonists favoured having their own military forces, most felt as well that until such forces were strong enough to defend the country, they must look to Great Britain for protection initially against other European powers but increasingly from the forces and foment of an 'awakening Asia'.

The tension between the need for an independent defence capability and continuing dependence on British military power mirrored the broader (and still to be resolved) conflict between the nationalist (or republican) image of Australian identity and its pro-British and pro-Imperial contenders. The resolution of this nationalist-imperialist divide was important as it would determine the new nation's future direction as well as the destiny of many of its citizens. The eventual outcome would be shaped by a number of often countervailing factors and considerations. Included among these were the key legacies and lessons of the colonial era. On the one hand, were the strongly-held fears of cultural and strategic isolation, plus the 'crimson thread of kinship' that had long existed between Great Britain and its most loyal subjects in the southern colonies. On the other was the strong sense of British race patriotism within Australia itself. This conjoined with a fear of further rejection or betrayal by British decision makers of the kind perceived in the Colonial Office's machinations over Germany's partial annexation of New Guinea in the mid-1880s, and its vapid response to the issue of French colonialism in the South Pacific.

A second broad factor affecting the outcome was the perception of Australia's changing external circumstances. Here, just as it had when the individual colonies were accorded a measure of self-determination and independence, so the country's move as a whole in this direction produced a heightened sense of anxiety amongst its leaders and people. This was reflected in (and reinforced by) the publication of a series of lurid, and highly popular, accounts of imagined invasions of the country by Mongol

or Asiatic hordes. The earlier fear of Asia and Asians was back with a vengeance although unlike its precursor, it was focussed increasingly on the threat posed to Australia by Japan (at the time a formal ally of Britain).

A third and related factor was the attitude and actions of the British Government and its officials and emissaries to Australia. While not unhappy about Australian moves to build-up its own defence capabilities, Britain's military planners were keen to ensure the direct participation of such forces in the future defence of the United Kingdom and its Empire. With a possible European conflict looming, they wanted to replace the so-called 'Sudan model' of contingency planning, whereby troops from the former colonies volunteered for active service once war broke out, with something much more predictable, permanent and malleable. The nationalists within the Australian government were firmly opposed to such an approach and legislated to prevent it occurring. They believed, rightly as it turned out, that future governments could not be trusted to ensure that Australian troops and Australian lives would not be expended on costly and unnecessary imperial adventures overseas. Chapter Nine describes how the British schemers in Whitehall and their local supporters eventually circumvented this prohibition with a little help, it must be added, from certain Australian politicians (who kept from the public their part in the process).

The convergence of these various forces and factors led Australia in 1914 to follow Great Britain into the First World War. The last three chapters of the book examine the consequences of this involvement for the Free and many other families in the Wimmera district of Victoria, and for Australia and Australians more generally. As detailed in Chapters Ten and Eleven, the war and the attempt, in 1916 and again in 1917, to introduce universal conscription reignited the social, political and sectarian divisions that had always existed within Australian society but which some thought (or hoped) had dissipated with the formation of the Australian state in 1900. They also produced a number of new 'others' onto whom Australians could project their fears and anger and from whom they were encouraged to disassociate: so-called 'enemy aliens', 'shirkers' and 'disloyalists'. Although bitterly divided over the issue of conscription, most Australians subscribed to, or condoned, the attacks on and persecution of German-Australians and other internal 'aliens'. They proclaimed with equal vigour their loyalty to the British Empire, and readily responded to the racially prejudiced arguments used either to

support or oppose the conscription of their husbands, brothers and sons.

As Chapter Twelve argues, most Australians would also uncritically embrace the traditions being constructed, by Charles Bean and his fellow myth makers, around the Gallipoli landing and the young men who did go to war. These invented traditions served to affirm Australia's involvement in the war, celebrated the role of the frontline diggers, and sought to transform the private losses and suffering incurred into the more ennobling (and less politically charged) notions of public duty and sacrifice. Over time, the traditions invented around Anzac and the diggers would come to constitute a national, secular religion that would be worshipped by people of all faiths. The aspirations and values that were lauded by the Anzac legend would shape and underpin Australia's national culture, its continuing sense of identity, and as discussed in the book's postscript, its future approach to the world and world affairs. The Anzac traditions were also readily embraced by Australia's political leaders (and their conservative supporters within society) who used them to justify their actions during the war, to absolve themselves of their part in the carnage and suffering it caused, and to mobilise the public against forces and ferments said to be threatening the stability and established order of post-war Australia.

The story presented of Australia between 1840 and 1920 not only provides an historical context for appreciating and understanding the lives and times of the country's ordinary citizens. It alerts us as well to certain patterns and themes in the Australian colonial and early post-colonial experience. These include, first, the central and continuing place of fear and anxiety in the Australian imagination. Second has been our tendency both to project these anxieties onto, and identify ourselves in contra-distinction to, a range of feared, unwanted or disparaged 'others': Aboriginal Australians, convicts, Asians, certain types of women, and 'shirkers', internal 'aliens' and 'disloyalists'. Third has been our preparedness to obscure, repudiate, deny and expunge from our historical and broader consciousness the persecution and ill-treatment of the 'others' in Australians' minds and midst, as well as some of the more uncomfortable and politically unpalatable episodes in our past.

These conditioned responses and their underlying attitudes were driven by prevailing interests and circumstances. They were

supported by ideologies and doctrines imported from Great Britain on such issues and concerns as race, religion, self-fulfilment, progress and imperial power. And they were reinforced by those among the country's elite who stood to benefit politically and in other ways. They also served, I would argue, as important constraints on Australia's colonial aspirations, imagination and development. They limited the colonists' sense of humanity and capacity for independent and empathetic thought and action. They caused them to be overly susceptible to political manipulation and coercion both by their own leaders and by those they courted or looked to for approval. They restricted the opportunities for incorporating into the Australian story different, additional and potentially enriching experiences and perspectives. They served to deny (or insulate Australians from) a range of alternative national narratives, choices and identities. And they channelled the country in certain directions strategically, with catastrophic consequences for Australia and generations of its people.

They raise, finally, the question of whether and to what extent the practised behaviours and learned values of Australia's colonial era remain in force today. Have we, like the Australian state and its economy, grown beyond our adolescent and formative years, to understand, put into perspective and appreciate and learn from the various lessons and legacies of those early times? Or are our values and beliefs fundamentally informed or constrained still by the echoes and the strategic and broader cultural imprints of our colonial past? Have we learnt from our earlier mistakes and misjudgements, or are we likely ever to repeat and reaffirm the platitudes and plainsongs of that era? Were the losses and suffering of the First World War and earlier conflicts avoidable? Or was the sacrifice of the colonists' children and grandchildren an inevitable (and continuing) consequence of a culture constructed around fear and denial? These questions are taken up (albeit briefly) in the book's postscript which peers back into the past through some of the key events and debates that occurred within Australia broadly over the period in which this book was researched and written.