

# **Divided Loyalties: St Joseph's Nudgee College, the Great War, and Anzac Day 1915 - 1939**

## **Abstract**

St Joseph's Nudgee College is an Irish Christian Brothers boys' boarding school in Brisbane. The College was established in 1891 in order to provide the children of Irish Catholics living in regional and remote Queensland and northern New South Wales access to an education that would act as a vehicle for socio-economic advancement. The first decades of the college's existence were nevertheless defined by two competing, sometimes contradictory imperatives. An often belligerent determination to retain an Irish identity existed side by side with an awareness that a 'ghetto mentality' would hinder the socio-economic advancement of Queensland's Catholics. The balancing act that this necessitated was particularly evident in the College's mixed reaction to the outbreak of war in 1914 and the subsequent reticence to celebrate Anzac Day between 1916 and 1939. This article will explore the College's response through its Annuals (Year Books) and place it in the context of the Australian Irish Catholic experience of war and commemoration.

## **Keywords**

Anzac Day, Australian education, Australian history, boarding schools, Christian Brothers, Gallipoli, Great War, historical commemoration, Irish Catholics

## Introduction

In May 1915 Lieutenant Walter Byron Pattison of the Australian 9th Battalion was admitted to the No. 1 Australian General Hospital located in the Heliopolis Palace Hotel in Cairo. He had been badly wounded on the first day of the landing at Gallipoli and though he survived long enough to be evacuated to Egypt where doctors amputated his right leg, he succumbed to his wounds on 10 May, 1915. By that time, well over 16 000 wounded Allied soldiers had already flooded into Egypt. His death was unremarkable in a broader sense given that half a million soldiers from both sides would become casualties before the campaign ended in January 1916. Yet for a Catholic boarding school in Brisbane almost 16 000 kilometres away, the death of this young man, who less than a year before had been a law clerk in Rockhampton, had a particularly tragic significance. To Pattison belongs the unenviable distinction of being the first of 157 former students (Old Boys) of St Joseph's Nudgee College to be killed in action, die of wounds, disease, in accidents, or to be executed while serving in a branch of the Australian military after 1901 (53 during the Great War, 103 in the Second World War, and one in Vietnam).<sup>1</sup> However, it was not until the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War that the College embraced what has been unflatteringly characterised as a militarisation of Australian history.<sup>2</sup> This article will explore what shaped the College's response to the Gallipoli campaign and Anzac Day between 1915 and 1939 and place it in the context of the Australian Irish Catholic experience of war and commemoration.

## St Joseph's Nudgee College 1891 - 1915

The Irish Christian Brothers who founded Nudgee in 1891 were driven by a mix of educational, religious and political ambitions. Though a sizeable minority of Nudgee's first intake came from metropolitan areas, until well in the early 1980s the target demographic was the children of Irish Catholics living in regional and remote Queensland and northern New South Wales. The need for a boarding school in Queensland was acute. In 1891, 54 percent of the state's 226 759 people lived outside of Brisbane, spread across 1.73 million square kilometres. Almost 42 percent of breadwinners were primary producers, just over half of whom were engaged in agriculture. As the statistics show, Queensland was still in many regards a frontier society, one dominated by recent migrants who 'found a fluid context in which their capabilities for leadership in politics and commerce could surface'.<sup>3</sup> The Christian Brothers were a good fit for this context. They recognised that the socio-economic advancement of the state's Irish Catholics, who made up one quarter of Queensland's population and who were over-represented in the lower working class, required access to an education that offered more than basic literacy and numeracy. It would also need to be one which at least outwardly cultivated a Catholic, non-materialist spirit.<sup>4</sup> There was no place, therefore, for a high class, prestigious Catholic boarding school, though in time that is exactly what it would become.<sup>5</sup> In spite of these hopes, the Christian Brothers operated in a society that had adopted the aggressive pursuit of material advancement as their *raison d'être*.<sup>6</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> St Joseph's Nudgee College is widely referred to simply as Nudgee. In the interests of brevity, this article will do likewise.

<sup>2</sup> M. Lake, H. Reynolds, J. Damousi, and M. McKenna, *What's Wrong with ANZAC? : The Militarisation of Australian History* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2010)

<sup>3</sup> M. MacGinley, 'Irish Migration to Queensland, 1885 - 1912', *Queensland Heritage* 3 (1) (1974), 15.

<sup>4</sup> T. Boland, *Nudgee 1891-1991* (Boolarong: Brisbane, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> R. Goodman, *Secondary Education in Queensland 1860-1940* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1968), p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> M. Kerby, M. Baguley, A. MacDonald, & V. Cruickshank, 'The battle of the colours: Irish Catholic identity, St Joseph's Nudgee College, and rugby 1891-1914'. *Irish Educational Studies*  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2020.1814840>

Brothers did not immediately recognise the need for a utilitarian education that reflected Queensland's relative lack of development compared to the southern states. In time, though, they came to understand that the provision of an education that facilitated entry into the Public Service and the subsequent emergence of Catholics in leadership positions required them 'being in the world and of the world'.<sup>7</sup>

The issues that drove the Christian Brothers who staffed Nudgee in the years before 1915 were deceptively complex. The first decades of Nudgee's existence were defined by two competing, sometimes contradictory imperatives. The often belligerent determination to retain an Irish identity existed side by side with an awareness that a 'ghetto mentality' would hinder efforts at socio-economic advancement. The balancing act that this necessitated was particularly evident in Nudgee's mixed reaction to the outbreak of war in 1914 and the subsequent reticence to celebrate Anzac Day between 1916 and 1939. This was not, however, unique to Nudgee. For as Patrick O'Farrell characterised them, Australia's Irish Catholics were 'ambivalent, ambiguous people, thinking Irish, talking English; hating the tyranny, serving the tyrant'.<sup>8</sup> The students might not have been comfortable with this assessment, but they knew the truth of it. In 1904, they presented two statues to the College that still reside in their original locations on the front lawn. St Patrick, Patron Saint of Ireland, and St Francis Xavier, his Australian counterpart, stare at each other across the lawn, symbols of the twin calls on the loyalty of the state's Irish Catholics. They are the story, written in stone, of a people who sought both inclusion through conformity and separation through identification with Ireland, and the College that sought to cater simultaneously to both desires.

This sense of separation was fuelled by a nationality and a religion that encouraged a distinct Irish Catholic self-picture. As Rupert Goodman acknowledges, very early in its history Queensland became known as 'the Catholic State', a characterisation that reflected their number and their growing influence.<sup>9</sup> Although Catholics had begun to improve their economic and political standing, indeed TJ Ryan rose to be state premier in 1915, many still subscribed to Cecilia Hamilton's observation that they were 'socially, a subordinate class, allowed no proportional influence in the community; economically, filling the ranks of unskilled labour, the society's hewers of wood and drawers of water'.<sup>10</sup> In this construct, as O'Farrell observed more broadly of their Irish Catholic heritage, it was not the *reality* of Ireland but Ireland as a symbol of local causes and grievances that exerted the greatest influence:

Ireland, persecuted, unfree, heroic and rebellious, seemed to many Irish and Irish Australians to represent in the great arena of nations, their own position as underdogs and outcasts. Ireland was their personal predicament writ large. In weeping for the sorrows of Erin, they wept for themselves.<sup>11</sup>

The Christian Brothers did not seek to mitigate this sense of grievance. Indeed, they were constant reminders of it. They had been founded in Ireland with a membership devoted equally to the service of Christ and Fatherland. Although in the lead up to Federation in 1901 they claimed that their 'love of Ireland is second only to [their] love of Australia' they

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 150.

<sup>8</sup> P. O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia* (Kensington, NSW: New South Wales University Press, 1993), p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Goodman, *Secondary Education in Queensland 1860-194*, p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> C.L Hamilton, 'Irish-Australian Catholics and the Labour Party: a historical survey of developing alignment in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland, 1890-1921', Unpublished Masters Research Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1957, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia*, p. 6.

remained ‘flaming agitators for Ireland’s rights’.<sup>12</sup> Many of their students had at least one Irish-born parent and were well aware that Ireland was their ‘spiritual home’. If by some accident they were not, the Christian Brothers were ever present ‘evangelists, as well as examples, of Irish culture along with Irish faith’.<sup>13</sup> They were well aware of the political implications of this world view. One contributor to the 1899 College Annual criticised the English for their ‘grim determination which conquers everything that can be conquered’. Their rule of Ireland was described as nothing short of ‘tyranny’.<sup>14</sup> Like the bishops and priests, who were themselves also predominantly Irish, the Christian Brothers saw Catholicism and a reverence for Ireland as one and the same.<sup>15</sup>

The hostility and sectarian divisions that confronted Irish Catholics, to which it must be acknowledged, they made their own contribution, generated an often belligerent defence of Irish culture. Nudgee’s physical setting served only to exacerbate this insularity. Located 17 kilometres from the city centre, it was serviced only infrequently by train and was then only accessible through the scrub. As the college historian Tom Boland noted, the Brothers and their early students ‘were their own country’, a veritable ‘300 acre kingdom’.<sup>16</sup> When they looked beyond the walls of this kingdom, however, they saw entrenched discrimination and injustice which extended even to the State’s political culture. After 1900, many Catholics aligned themselves with the Labor Party. In contrast, Protestants generally aligned themselves with a variety of non-Labour parties which were then readily demonised as vehicles for militant Protestantism.<sup>17</sup> This development, as Elizabeth Malcom and Dianne Hall argued, exacerbated deep political and religious divisions. Sectarianism, which had long been a feature of colonial life, was thereby ‘institutionalised in the new Australian commonwealth’s political culture’.<sup>18</sup>

Catholic newspapers, clubs, and societies also played their part in asserting Irish Catholic identity, but it was the existence of a separate schooling system that became, and to this day remains, a political battleground. Although an early college prospectus asserted that ‘the spirit that permeates Nudgee College is essentially Catholic’, if anything, this was an understatement.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps more than any Catholic school in the state, Nudgee devoted itself to creating good Catholics. The opening of an ornate Chapel in 1916, the holding of the Corpus Christi pageant on the college grounds, daily prayers, Mass, religious instruction in the classroom, the Sodality of Our Lady and a host of religious observances gave many outside of the college, particularly Protestants, ample proof that Nudgee was more seminary than school.<sup>20</sup> Despite the withdrawal of state aid to denominational schools in Queensland in 1875, from 1900 all government funded bursaries and scholarships were made tenable at any approved school. The Scholarship Examination became a dominant feature of Queensland education, one that further drove the college to engage with a ‘godless’ system about which it harboured deep suspicions.<sup>21</sup> By 1911, Nudgee was receiving £2500 in scholarships and bursaries. By 1914, it was £3500, and by 1920 100 scholarships brought £4000 to the college.

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<sup>12</sup> NCA, 1897, p. 68; Boland, *Nudgee*, p. 38.

<sup>13</sup> Boland, *Nudgee*, p. 38.

<sup>14</sup> Nudgee College Annual (NCA), 1899, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> M McKernan, *The Australian people and the Great War* (Sydney: Collins, 1984).

<sup>16</sup> Boland, *Nudgee*, p. 17.

<sup>17</sup> E. Malcom and D. Hall, *A New History of the Irish in Australia* (Sydney: New South, 2018); P. O’Farrell, *The Catholic church and community in Australia: a history* (West Melbourne, Vic: Thomas Nelson, 1977), p. 288.

<sup>18</sup> Malcom and Hall, *A New History of the Irish in Australia*, p. 307.

<sup>19</sup> Nudgee Prospectus, 1896.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p. 154.

<sup>21</sup> Goodman, *Secondary Education in Queensland, 1860-1960*.

Inevitably, the assertion of an Irish Catholic identity was at least in part informed by events in Ireland. In 1911, for example, the Irish envoys visited the college on a fundraising tour of Australia in the wake of the British government's promise of Home Rule for Ireland in return for the support of the Irish Party in the Parliament Bill. The Choir sang *A Nation Once Again* and *God Save Ireland*. In his address, the headmaster Brother Barrett observed that Ireland should have Home Rule just as Queensland did, and further noted that eighty percent of those present were descendants of Irish ancestors and would have, in his view, 'inherited their patriotic spirit from the old land'. The Envoys invited all those present to 'come home' for the inauguration of the Irish parliament.<sup>22</sup> The move toward Home Rule actually facilitated a greater identification with Australia, for 'Ireland would be itself; they would be themselves', and both would soon 'ride in comfort, into the warm welcoming heart of the Empire'.<sup>23</sup> The Envoys, consisting of John Redmond's son William, Richard Hazleton, and JT Donovan raised £30 000, of which Nudgee's share was £73.

This sense of Irish Catholic solidarity was, however, balanced by an equal and opposite force, one clearly articulated by Robert Dunne, the second bishop (1882-1887) and the first Archbishop of Brisbane (1887-1917). He wanted Irish Catholics to:

... take more than they do to Australia; to help them to appreciate its glorious Constitution, its social and political atmosphere, and to cherish a full hearted brotherly feeling towards their fellow colonists of every creed and country. In one word, I would be glad that to every one of them, Australia were as much as it is to myself—it made thoroughly theirs, and they thoroughly of it.<sup>24</sup>

Having made the case for integration, he was quick to add that this did not mean 'disloyalty or infidelity to Ireland'. The disloyal, at least in this discussion, were those who used the name of Ireland to pursue 'personal interests, personal spites, or personal prejudices'. By all means, he assured Australian Catholics, 'sympathise with her, be proud of her, never by word or act deny her' but do it as 'high-minded, successful colonists'.<sup>25</sup> This approach was in step with the majority of Irish Catholics, ranging from influential Church figures Archbishop Mannix and Archbishop Duhig, to the Queensland premier TJ Ryan, who though he opposed conscription but supported the war effort. This compromise allowed rebels to conform in peace, 'setting up a marvellous tension between myth and reality which gave the Australian Irish the best of both worlds – the proud and fearsome reputation for rebellion, heroism, and devotion to principles of freedom; and a quiet profitable stake in the new country'.<sup>26</sup> For all their Irish loyalties, the Christian Brothers were particularly open to the compromise, adept as they were at balancing pragmatism with philosophy.<sup>27</sup> Early Annuals celebrated any success born of an engagement with the Protestant majority, particularly if it was success in a competitive endeavour. Rugby became, and has remained, a flagship sport. While in the modern college, rugby success has almost become an end in itself, in these early decades, it was a potent expression of allegiance to the College and to the faith. Off the rugby field, it was performance in the public examinations of the University of Sydney (Queensland did not

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<sup>22</sup> Boland, *Nudgee*, p. 81.

<sup>23</sup> O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia*, p. 249-250.

<sup>24</sup> *Week*, 25 March 1882, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> *Week*, 25 March 1882, p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia*, p. 31.

<sup>27</sup> M. Baguley, T. Riordan, and M. Kerby, 'Pragmatism and philosophy: enriching students' lives through a critical investigation of spatial literacy in shared spaces'. In: D Pullen and D Cole, *Multiliteracies and technology enhanced education: social practice and the global classroom* (Hershey, PA, United States, IGI Global, 2010).

have a university until 1911) which took centre stage; it pitted ‘boy against boy, school against school, state against state, and produced rivalries that in time distorted the whole field of examinations’.<sup>28</sup> The Brothers were already singing from that particular song sheet, but inevitably it created an ‘examination strait jacket’; examination success became more important to the schools than to their pupils. For non-government institutions, they were an important means of attracting students, which in turn ensured their continued survival. This was particularly true in the case of Nudgee was heavily dependent on the financial health of rural Queensland.<sup>29</sup>

### **Nudgee College Old Boys at War**

Although the Australian military was woefully unprepared for war when it came in 1914, Australians were no stranger to the idea of war.<sup>30</sup> No conflict has been fought on Australian soil other than the Frontier Wars, which ended in the dispossession of Australia’s Indigenous peoples, yet Australian thinking has always been shaped by a threat of invasion: the French, Russians or Germans in the nineteenth century and the Japanese, Chinese and Russians in the twentieth. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Brothers, seeking inclusion in the new land, inculcated in their students a strong commitment to the ideal of service in the national interest. The 1900 Annual included an article entitled *Australia’s Future Danger* in which the writer argued that the ‘immense mineral and other resources of [our] country are regarded with covetous eyes by millions of eastern people ... are we, then, to sit down quietly and wait till the yellow flood shall flow in on our happy land’?<sup>31</sup> In 1906, Neal Macrossan, eighth and youngest child of Irish-born parents and later Chief Justice of Queensland, contributed an article to the Annual in which patriotism and Christianity was rendered indivisible. ‘The True Australian’ he argued, should place above all other ‘temporal concerns ... the interests of his native land’. The duties of citizenship had clear historical antecedents:

He should be filled with that enthusiastic devotion, that simple elemental passion of love for his country and his people, that sacrifice of all for hearth and home and liberty, that animated Horatius Cocles on the bridge, that inspired the resistance of the Greeks to the myriad hordes of Xerxes or that in our own times, has strengthened the resolution of the true hearted sons of Ireland through long centuries of tyranny and oppression.

This was not just an abstract notion of citizenship that Macrossan espoused and that the Brothers almost certainly authorised:

To right his country’s wrongs, to vindicate her cause, to protect her from an alien yoke, the True Australian must be content to devote himself to his country’s service, and if necessary to pay her in the last extremity the supreme homage of the sacrifice of his own life, in the full confidence that he is thereby performing an action most acceptable to the Creator that dowered him with existence – For how can man die better than facing fearful odds, For the ashes of his fathers, And the temples of his God’s?<sup>32</sup>

As both articles suggest, the Christian Brothers, and the community they served, shared with the Protestant majority a preparedness to glory in a ‘race patriotism’ which ‘defined their

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<sup>28</sup> Goodman, *Secondary Education in Queensland, 1860-1960*, p. 251.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 253.

<sup>30</sup> Kerby and Baguley, ‘The Bully of the World’.

<sup>31</sup> NCA, 1900, p. 55.

<sup>32</sup> NCA, 1906, p. 62.

nation as a bastion of “whiteness” in the Asian region’.<sup>33</sup> Though it is true that the Brothers may not have been as fervent devotees of Imperialism as their Grammar school counterparts, they were nevertheless content to adhere to a world view that accepted the ‘manifest destiny of the British races to hold dominion over palm and pine’.<sup>34</sup> Yet it was not the same Empire loyalty celebrated at government schools. Catholic schools such as Nudgee argued for a dual loyalty to Ireland and Australia within an Imperial context. That this might entail military service was acknowledged and accepted. Nudgee established a cadet unit in 1903, a rifle club in 1905, and a senior cadet corps in 1909, comprising ‘J’ and ‘K’ companies of No. 1 Queensland Battalion. They reached such a remarkable degree of proficiency that they won second place in the Commonwealth Championship in Melbourne in June 1912. As the headmaster Brother Felix Magee commented in 1941, ‘little did these young soldiers foresee that many of them would in days then hidden turn to the stern service of their country the military training and knowledge that enabled them to acquit themselves so worthily’.<sup>35</sup> Two years after the cadets’ success, Britain’s declaration of war on Germany was received with a degree of national support almost inconceivable to modern audiences. Every political party and most of the newspapers and the churches were eager to pledge their support. The attitude of Australia’s Irish Catholics was less enthusiastic, though not markedly so. In time, as the casualty lists lengthened and as social and political discourse was increasingly conducted in a poisonous, almost hysterical atmosphere, enthusiasm would wane.

Nudgee’s response to the outbreak of war displayed the same ambiguity that had defined it since 1891. The Brothers extended an invitation to Australia’s new Governor General, Ronald Munro Ferguson, to attend the 1914 Speech Day. The Scottish born Munro Ferguson was a committed imperialist, one who possessed little faith in the loyalty of Australia’s Irish Catholics. He was unable to attend and instead sent his wife, Lady Helen Hermione Blackwood, daughter of a viceroy of India, ‘an able and imperious woman on whose judgement of politics and of protocol he relied absolutely’.<sup>36</sup> What she thought of speaking at such a bastion of Irish Catholicism when she was a member of a prominent Ulster unionist family is not recorded. She played an admirably straight bat and delivered a speech in front of a large Union Jack that would not have been out of place in one of the state’s grammar schools:

Just now they all realised that if the British Empire was to be beaten it would not be in war, for the army had done as well as the army of old. But that was not the only way in which the Empire could gain distinction; they must also have the men of training, ability and intellect to win in peace, for the future was to the nation with ideas.

She acknowledged that many students would like to ‘be fighting for the Empire’ but for the time being they should make the most of the opportunities offered by the college. They could then ‘make the Empire, including their Australia, one of the richest, most prosperous, and happiest countries in the world’.<sup>37</sup> Though she may well have delivered the speech with tongue firmly in her cheek, she found in the Christian Brothers worthy adversaries. The 1914

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<sup>33</sup> J. Beaumont, “‘United We Have Fought’: Imperial Loyalty and the Australian War Effort’, *International Affairs* 90(2) (2014), 400.

<sup>34</sup> Boland, *Nudgee*, p. 38.

<sup>35</sup> *Golden Jubilee of St Joseph’s College Nudgee 1891 – 1941* (South Brisbane: Strand Publishers, 1941), pp. 95--96.

<sup>36</sup> J. R. Poynter, ‘Munro Ferguson, Sir Ronald Craufurd (1860–1934)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/munro-ferguson-sir-ronald-craufurd-7688/text13457>, published first in hardcopy 1986, accessed online 26 April 2020.

<sup>37</sup> NCA, 1914, p.27.

Annual claimed that the speech was met with ‘universal approval’. Yet elsewhere there was evidence that this was not the case. Another article appearing in the same publication critiqued Australia’s involvement in a manner that an Empire loyalist might well have considered treasonous. If not actually written by a Christian Brother, at the very least the article must have been officially sanctioned. The author refused to blame Germany alone for the outbreak of war, going so far as to criticise censorship as a ‘conspiracy of silence in regard to the harrowing details of the daily slaughter’. The ‘sensational headings’ in Queensland newspapers were ‘affording a kind of pleasurable excitement, mingled with some feelings of a vague kind of patriotism’.<sup>38</sup> That criticism was, if anything, generous. The *Queenslander*, the weekend edition of the *Brisbane Courier* is a case in point. What its reports lacked in accuracy about German atrocities, they made up for in detail: the execution of a priest among other ‘serious outrages’, ‘arrogant brutality’, ‘rapacity’, ‘military barbarism’, burning churches, shooting priests, raping girls and women, taking hostages, cutting the ears off children, forcing a woman to drink the blood of her murdered son, bombing a Red Cross vessel, shooting civilians, mistreating British POWs and amputating children’s hands.<sup>39</sup> Though he stopped short of calling these reports exaggerations or lies, the author raised an even more confronting objection:

Let us not imagine that only some Prussian soldiers would act in this manner. Anyone who knows what the ordinary soldier is in an enemy’s country will tell you that Prussian, French, Russian or English would act much in the same way under like circumstances.<sup>40</sup>

The image of ‘brave Little Belgium’ battling ‘the ruthless invaders’ became a particularly strong image for those seeking to position German actions as antithetical to the civilised values that animated the British Empire.<sup>41</sup> The author was not convinced:

Of all engaged in it, the only country that can claim to be fighting for Home and its Altars is little Belgium; all others are simply engaged in a political struggle, in which the people of the various countries are not really affected. Let all Australians be true to their magnificent Country and its Homes, granted to them by a kind Providence, and let them be ready and willing to defend those Homes should dire necessity compel them. But as they love their Homes, let them not be too ready to make wretched the Homes of those who have never injured them.<sup>42</sup>

This spirited discussion of war aims, militarism and the misuse of patriotism was actually illegal. The passage of the *War Precautions Act* 1914 was the first step in a process that subjected Australians to one of the most severe censorship regimes of all the Allied nations.

Nudgee was not immune, however, to the nationalist fervour sweeping the country. It was one thing to question the war when Australian troops were training in Egypt, which the Australian soldiers dismissed as ‘a land of sin, sand, shit and syphilis’, it was entirely another to do so after the landing on Gallipoli.<sup>43</sup> For the drive to conform was ever present. In late 1915, the headmaster Brother Felix Magee, born in 1865 in County Cavan, which had been

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> *Brisbane Courier*, 22 August 1914, p. 13; 29 August 1914, p. 13; 19 September 1914, p. 37; 3 October 1914, p. 37; 24 October 1914, p. 38; 31 October 1914, p. 40.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> *Beauesert Times*, 16 October 1914, p. 5.

<sup>42</sup> NCA, 1914, p.27.

<sup>43</sup> B Gammage, *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War* (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 43.



hard hit by the Famine (1845-49), boasted that there were ‘upward of 140 of our boys sharing the glory of the risks of the present cause of right and justice against aggression’.<sup>44</sup> This same Annual acknowledged the mistreatment of Ireland without slighting the Empire responsible for it:

The Irish soldier, though conscious of England’s tyranny and injustice to his native land, yet generously forgets the past and fights with his wanton heroic spirit in the cause of Empire. But the Australian, the Irish, and the Scotch must fight each after his own fashion and imbued by his own national spirit, when duly fostered, exalts, ennobles, and glorifies the Empire.<sup>45</sup>

Whether many, or indeed any Old Boys saw their service as exalting, ennobling, and glorifying the Empire is uncertain. What is clear, however, is that before the end of August 1914, dozens had already enlisted. By the end of the Gallipoli campaign in December 1915, by which time news about some of the casualties had reached Nudgee, well over one hundred would be wearing khaki. Approximately forty old boys would serve on Gallipoli, three of whom were killed and 11 either wounded or falling ill. The first two days proved particularly costly for the College, though as for the nation, the real bloodletting would be on the Western Front between 1916 and 1918. The first Australians ashore on the morning of 25 April 1915, were with the 9th Battalion, among them Old Boys WB Pattison, H de Tuetey, CS Hanley, S Devitt and RH Verry. All were either wounded or killed in the first 24 hours. On the afternoon of the first day five other Old Boys landed with the 15th Battalion - NR Mighell, CF Corser, WH Watters, AS Desplace and JT Stewart. All five were eventually evacuated after being wounded.

The failure of the August Offensives, which included the attack at Lone Pine, sealed the fate of the Gallipoli campaign. At one stage it was believed that up to 40 percent of the force would be lost in an evacuation. In reality, however, the evacuation of 35 445 men over 11 nights was achieved without loss. On the last two nights alone (18 and 19 December) 20 277 were evacuated. Old Boy TR Williams was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) for his contribution to the evacuation. One of the last soldiers to leave was JR Cassidy, a former Rhodes Scholar and future Air Vice-Marshal in the RAF. Serving with the British Army, Cassidy remained almost to the last at Suvla to destroy stores to prevent them falling into Turkish hands, after which a motor boat transferred him to a waiting warship. M McEniery, who served with the 25th Battalion offered a particularly articulate post-war description:

... the feeling of relief experienced when the nervous tension of being continually under fire was relaxed on that night in December 1915 when we shook the dust of it from our feet and climbed aboard a transport headed once more for Lemnos. At the same time however, no one was altogether unmindful of those who slept beneath the numerous white crosses on the beach, in the gullies, and on the hillsides, whose requiem for evermore, the low-lying scrub and stunted olives of an alien land will sing to the music of the Aegean waves.<sup>46</sup>

At the same time that McEniery and his companions were leaving Gallipoli, the 1915 Annual was celebrating the nation’s baptism of fire in language that echoed Ellis Ashmead Bartlett’s

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<sup>44</sup> NCA, 1915, p. 10.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, p. 8.

<sup>46</sup> M. Kerby, *Undying Echoes* (Brisbane: Boolarong, 2002), p. 13.

initial report on the landing which would subsequently lay the groundwork for the Anzac mythology:

The Australian soldier, though lacking the wonderful military precision acquired in the mother country, has, however, gained laurels for the Empire and high prestige for his native land, by the reckless dash and fearless spirit exhibited in the Dardanelles, and he joyfully throws in his lot for the Empire while maintaining his own special individuality.

The capacity for contradiction was, nevertheless, still present. In the same Annual, there was a scathing critique of the 'practical men' who before the war had argued that 'harnessing science to make the most destructive weapons of war would make war impossible or of short duration'. Trench warfare had revealed this to be 'nonsense and had merely created German strafe, French revanche and Anglo-Saxon hate'.<sup>47</sup>

### **St Joseph's Nudgee College 1915 - 1939**

The deaths of 53 students, primarily on the Western Front, would have been keenly felt in any environment, but in such a tightly knit community it must have been particularly traumatic. What Nudgee initially made of Anzac Day, however, is difficult to ascertain, as the Annual was not published between 1916 and 1922 and when it returned it was much reduced in size. If the Nudgee response kept in step with the wider Irish Catholic community, and there is no reason to suspect that it did not, in most years Anzac Day may well have passed almost unnoticed. Indeed, it was not until 1930 that it was a public holiday in Queensland. Efforts were made to ensure that public events were secular in nature or were broadly religious rather than denominational in nature. Yet the sectarian animosities fanned during the bitterly contested conscription plebiscites and the brutality of the British government's response to the Easter uprising in 1916 had created an estrangement between Catholics and the new forms of national ceremony.<sup>48</sup> This was exacerbated by the fact that Catholics were forbidden by the Church to attend interdenominational religious services, which effectively barred them from many of the major commemorative services. Their absence left some Protestants suspicious that this reflected a lack of commitment to the cause. Indeed, Rev. Father ES Barry, an Old Boy and chaplain with an impressive war record, asked the congregation gathered in Brisbane's Catholic cathedral on Anzac Day 1921 whether the enormous sacrifice of the war years had been worthwhile. The very act of posing that questions was, as Jay Winter observed, 'bound to be appallingly difficult: full of ambivalence and confusion, charged with tentativeness and more than a fragment of futility'.<sup>49</sup> There was no such ambivalence for some of his Protestant counterparts who on the same day celebrated 'the trinity' of religion, empire, and nation.<sup>50</sup>

The difference in rhetoric hints at a wider fracturing of society, one that had reached its zenith during the conscription plebiscites in 1916 and 1917 but which showed no signs of abating. The cost of the long awaited victory in 1918 had been exorbitant. Just under forty percent of eligible Australian men had enlisted; 62 300 of them were killed and at least 155 000 wounded.<sup>51</sup> For Queensland, the cost was 6850 dead and 15 950 wounded (depending on

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<sup>47</sup> NCA, 1915.

<sup>48</sup> S. McIntyre, *A Concise History of Australia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 166; J. Beaumont, 'The politics of a divided society', in J. Beaumont, ed., *Australia's war: 1914-1918* (St Leonards [NSW], Allen & Unwin, 1995), p. 56.

<sup>49</sup> J. Winter, *Sites of Memory Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 200-201.

<sup>51</sup> D. Noonan, *Those We Forget, Recounting Australian Casualties of the First World War* (Melbourne, 2014). Extrapolating from these figures, the Queensland total becomes 7055 killed and 79750 wounded or hospitalised.

the source and the criteria for wounding, the figures might be as high as 7055 and 79750 respectively). This was ‘fatal [and] beyond anything yet experienced in its severity and indeed, more shocking than anything that lay ahead for the state’.<sup>52</sup> Until the 1970s many Australian historians continued to characterise the Great War as a national coming of age. In this construct, Australia emerged after four years of war stronger and more united than it had been in 1914. In reality, by 1918, it was a ‘broken nation’<sup>53</sup>, for the exertions made in pursuit of victory ‘had unhinged many people ... People from the Prime Minister down were becoming frantic, irrational and unmindful of consequences’.<sup>54</sup> Nowhere in Australia was this intensification of pre-war stresses more evident than in Queensland. Sir George Steward, the founder and head of the Counter Espionage Bureau, Australia's first secret service, derided Queensland as a ‘hot bed of disloyalty ... conspicuous among the Australians states [for] notorious acts and utterances of a disloyal type’ it was not an isolated view.<sup>55</sup> Each of the Commonwealth surveillance bodies concurred, and likewise identified this ‘arch-home of everything anti-Empire and anti-Australian’ as the principal trouble spot in terms of dissent and anti-war activity.<sup>56</sup>

A world that encouraged the picking of sides was anathema to the balancing act that had become ingrained in the College’s psyche. Even war in Ireland, the atrocities committed by both sides, and an Australian press that was more pro-British than the British, could not provoke the Irish in Australia into a direct and deliberate conflict with other Australians.<sup>57</sup> So it was with Nudgee, for if they entertained reservations, they kept them to themselves. This was not necessarily just a question of religion. Public and municipal interest in Anzac Day waned in the early twenties and in fact virtually disappeared in some parts of the country – ‘inconsistent ceremonies and flagging attendance was echoed in the city centres, and for a time it seemed that Anzac Day would simply die away’. However from the mid-1920s Anzac Day underwent a transformation, and by the end of the decade it was institutionalised as a popular patriotic pageant.<sup>58</sup> As such, it is not entirely surprising, therefore, that the Annuals of the 1920s and 1930s are almost entirely devoid of wartime references or to a yearly ceremony marking 25 April as a significant event at either a local or national level.

The first mention of Anzac Day in the surviving school documents was the 1926 College Annual, four years before Queensland legislated it as a public holiday. After the conclusion of the Literary Society’s meeting on 25 April, a Sunday night, the junior boys were admitted to the college hall where a ‘special programme commemorative of Anzac Day was carried out’. After singing *Star Flag of Australia*, given that *God Save the King* was hardly appropriate, one of the students delivered what in later years would be called ‘The Anzac Day Address’. The students listened to the speech with ‘rapt attention’, though contributors to the Annuals never countenanced any other reaction. There was no mention made of the Imperial connection this time, only that the Australian and New Zealand troops had ‘performed a feat

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<sup>52</sup> R. Evans, *A History of Queensland* (Port Melbourne, Vic.: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 155.

<sup>53</sup> J. Beaumont, *Broken Nation: Australians in the Great War* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2013).

<sup>54</sup> R. Evans, ‘Red Flag Riots’, in R. Evans, C. Ferrier and J. Rickertt (eds), *Radical Brisbane: An unruly history* (Carlton: Vulgur Press, 2004), p. 166

<sup>55</sup> Steward, George (1918) to WA Watt 20 November. *National Archives of Australia*, PM Department CP447/3, S.C. 5[1].

<sup>56</sup> *National Leader*, 1919, in Evans, *Queensland*, p. 159.

<sup>57</sup> O’Farrell, *The Irish in Australia*, p. 287.

<sup>58</sup> Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend*

<http://books.publishing.monash.edu/apps/bookworm/view/Anzac+Memories%3A+Living+with+the+Legend+%5BNew+Edition%5D/196/Chapter5.html>

of reckless bravery that directed the attention of the whole world upon them'. Central to the understanding of the day was that it was a celebration of Australian virtues:

It was a deed of supreme heroism unsurpassed in the annals of war. All day long those Australians clung doggedly to the little sector that they had won nor could they be dislodged by repeated mass attacks of the Turks.

This was in keeping with the broader celebration of Anzac Day in Brisbane in the inter-war years. As Corty and Melrose observed, it was marked by a 'triumphalism ... fuelled by pride in the achievements of Australian soldiers and thanksgiving for victory over a perceived Prussian-German military despotism'.<sup>59</sup> There was, as they also posited, a place for lamentation, for 'Many thousand Australian graves' the Annual reminded the students, 'may now be seen in the rugged gullies and weather worn slopes at Gallipoli'. The evacuation was the subject of a cursory mention, but only as a prelude to further celebration, for 'no Australian will forget those heroes who sleep by the fabled shores of the Aegean sea, and that day, from all good Australians, a fervent prayer went up to the throne of Grace: 'May God have mercy on their souls'.<sup>60</sup>

In 1929 the newly formed Old Boys Association, whose membership would have had deep family connections to many of the dead, raised £187 for a school honour roll to be placed at the door of the Chapel. In the same year, the Catholic Church declined to participate in the ceremony marking the laying of the foundation stone of the national war memorial in Canberra. Two further mentions of Anzac Day in Annuals in the early 1930s and that was essentially the full extent of public recognition by the college of the Great War until the 1941 Jubilee Annual. In contrast, Brisbane Grammar School, Nudgee's great sporting rival in these early years, held its first Anzac Day ceremony in 1917 and every year thereafter. Stuart Stephenson, headmaster between 1928 and 1939, a period during which Nudgee all but ignored its war time heritage, summed up his community's view by explicitly linking school spirit and patriotism:

The Old Boys had, during the war, shown on the battle-field the spirit of loyalty and devotion to duty, the courage and self-sacrifice and comradeship that were the very essence of the school life and tradition.<sup>61</sup>

Nudgee's response, however, was more consistent with developments in Ireland. In the Irish Free State, returning soldiers were a 'distinct embarrassment to a government whose credentials rested on resistance to recruitment and, indeed, outright rebellion against British rule'.<sup>62</sup> The 35 000 dead Irish soldiers were not nearly as prominent in the memory of the war years as Easter 1916 and the 64 rebel and 254 Irish civilian dead. In contrast, in Northern Ireland the Great War was 'appropriated as another sacred chapter in unionist mythography'.<sup>63</sup> It was certainly not an embarrassment at Nudgee, but nor was it a sacred event, evidence again of the battle between conformity and separation. For this was the community that in the early days of the war when enthusiasm was at its highest, argued that there are 'two words in European tongues that have been the most frequently abused, these

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<sup>59</sup> M. Crotty and C. Melrose, 'Anzac Day, Brisbane, Australia: Triumphalism, mourning and politics in interwar commemoration', *The Round Table* (2007) 96.

<sup>60</sup> NCA 1926, p. 74.

<sup>61</sup> Penrose, H, *Light dark blue: 150 years of learning and leadership at Brisbane Grammar School*. Excerpt taken from <https://www.brisbanegrammar.com/news/news-feed/~board/news-feed/post/anzac-day>. Accessed 20 January, 2021.

<sup>62</sup> Charles Townshend, 'Religion, War, and Identity in Ireland', *The Journal of Modern History* 76(4) (2004), quoted in J Kildea, *Anzacs and Ireland* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2007), p. 219.

<sup>63</sup> Kildea, *Anzacs and Ireland*, p. 222.

words are liberty and patriotism ... next to Religion, Liberty and Patriotism are the noblest things on Earth. Because they are sacred men clothe frequently their most wicked deeds with their glorious raiment'.<sup>64</sup>

## Conclusion

Mourning, as Jay Winter argued, 'refers to a set of acts and gestures through which survivors express grief and pass through stages of bereavement'. This process of separation from the dead, as he further noted, is about forgetting as much as it is about remembering.<sup>65</sup> Adept at balancing contradictory impulses, Nudgee looked to both forget the war by refraining from a yearly commemoration and to remember it by placing its memorial plaque at the door of the chapel. Yet it was not just about what to remember and what to forget. It was, and has remained, a process marked by attempts to find a place for the war within the college's broader history rather than commemorating those 54 months as a disjuncture between past and present, or as broken years as Bill Gammage so evocatively characterised them.<sup>66</sup> Nudgee's commemorative plaque (which like many Great War examples names all who served with deaths marked with a gold star) sits on a wall at the door of the chapel alongside plaques commemorating students who died while attending the college (including one who was shot dead by a sex offender while the rest of the student body was in the Chapel), deceased Christian Brothers, and the Second World War plaque. Though modern additions, they are indicative of Nudgee's efforts to subsume the war years into the wider celebration of student and staff achievements. Forgetting, as David Lowenthal argued, is 'often a merciful as well as a mandatory art'.<sup>67</sup>

In May 2020 word reached Nudgee that research was being conducted into the war service of an Old Boy. His name is not on the war memorial, the college roll, or class lists. Only a reference to him singing to the Irish delegates in 1911 placed him at Nudgee. Given that his attendance proved difficult to confirm, it is hardly surprising that like Walter Pattison, his story never became part of Nudgee's commemorative traditions. The story of Old Boys during the Great War now dominates Anzac Day ceremonies conducted on the main oval each year with 1500 students, 170 staff and invited speakers and veterans of foreign wars. In 2021, it will be interesting to see what the college does, or does not do, with the story of Frank Smith, class of 1911, Military Cross and Distinguished Flying Cross winner, who with 16 kills, was the fourth highest scoring ace in the Australian Flying Corps. His name will probably be added to the plaque when it is next removed for cleaning but his achievements, measured in kills, will be ignored, or more correctly, forgotten even as it is remembered.

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<sup>64</sup> NCA 1914, p. 37

<sup>65</sup> Winter, *Sites of Memory Sites of Mourning*, p. 224.

<sup>66</sup> Gammage, *The Broken Years*.

<sup>67</sup> D Lowenthal, 'Preface', in A Forty and S Kuchler (eds), *The Art of Forgetting* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), p. xiii.

**Acknowledgements – None**

**This research received no specific grant from any funding agency, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.**

**Conflicts of Interest - None**