

# AUBURN WAR MEMORIAL AND RSL CLUB HOUSE IN NORTHUMBERLAND ROAD

## AUBURN RSL LEST WE FORGET PROJECT

Teacher Notes prepared by Ron Inglis.

### The Memorial

Over one thousand men from the Auburn district signed up to fight for King and Empire in The First World War. 136 of them, including Mayor William Johnson, did not return from battle.

After the Armistice the local community organized for a memorial to be built to recognise their servicemen and to give special honour to those who did not return. As was standard practice at the time, the names of all who served are listed with special indication of those who paid the ultimate sacrifice. The memorial was unveiled with great public ceremony in 1922 by the Gallipoli veteran and popular commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> division of the first Australian Imperial Force (AIF), Major General Sir Charles Rosenthal. The memorial first stood in Railway Park next to the station. It was designed and built by Melocco Bros, a firm of stonemasons established by two Italian immigrant brothers in 1909.



To include Second World War (1939-1945) servicemen and women, a large commemorative area in Auburn Park was set up and the refurbished memorial was moved there in 1946. Security and preservation concerns led to the memorial being moved in 1987 to its present site in Northumberland Road.

As with most Australian war memorials, the names of Second World War diggers along with names of later conflicts and special events have been added to the memorial or to plaques in the surrounding garden. Among the plaques is a Turkish memorial and a tribute to the ANZACs from Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, leader of the Turkish forces at Gallipoli and later founder of the modern republic of Turkey. There is a large community of Turkish people in Auburn and local Turkish ex servicemen have their own association within the Auburn sub branch of the RSL.

Some First World War battle sites are listed on the Auburn memorial. This is a feature of a few Australian war memorials including the Australian National Memorial at Villers Bretonneux in France, unveiled in 1938 and the Australian War Memorial in London, unveiled in 2003.

The sculpture at the top of the Auburn memorial is an elaborate one. Having a statue of a soldier with his arm raised in the revolutionary position as the main memorial artwork is fairly rare in Australia but it is quite common on French war memorials.

Female figures appear on a number of Australian war memorials. Usually they represent Justice, Victory, Virtue or Peace.

The Great War memorial shown at right is in the French village of Beauval. Memorials in France are called *Soldiers' memorials* rather than *War memorials*. This is because in France they are monuments only to the dead – *monuments aux morts* – not monuments to everyone who served as is the case in Australia.



The RSL (originally the *Returned Soldier, Sailor and Airmens' Imperial League of Australia*) Club

After the First World War many returned diggers would get together to share reminiscences, to maintain friendships with old comrades, to assist any digger 'down on his luck' and to honour the memory of their coppers who did not return. Auburn was one of the earliest clubs. It was formed in 1920. Clubs organized regular meetings, appointed welfare officers, lobbied government departments for proper recognition and organized commemorative events such as ceremonies on ANZAC Day (April 25) and Armistice (Remembrance) Day (November 11). They also became custodians of much military memorabilia and publishers of news sheets and magazines of interest to ex-servicemen.

When poker machines were introduced into NSW clubs, most RSL clubs became the mini casinos we see today. The clubs now cater for the wider community, not just ex-defence force personnel. Every night in RSL clubs right across Australia, everyone stands and pauses to remember those who have given their lives for Australia. The *Last Post* is sounded and everyone repeats *The Ode*. (*The Ode* is one verse from the poem *For the Fallen* written in 1914 by Laurence Binyon.)

*They shall grow not old as we that are left grow old  
Age shall not weary them nor the years condemn.  
At the going down of the sun and in the morning  
We will remember them.*

*Lest we forget*

The Homebush War Memorial  
below carries the inscription:

THE GREAT WAR OF 1914-1918

ERECTED BY THE HOMEBUSH  
PATRIOTIC ASSOCIATION

IN MEMORY OF THE BRAVE



The Lidcombe Memorial  
above tells us that the  
soldiers fought 'FOR GOD,  
KING and COUNTRY'



The Strathfield Memorial above  
tells us that the British Empire  
was very important to the  
generation that fought World  
War One. Originally, all British  
Empire countries were painted  
in gold on the globe on top of  
the memorial and the  
inscription reads 'GOLDEN THE  
LINKS THAT BIND OUR FAR  
FLUNG EMPIRE.'