Adelaide and the birth of Anzac Day

Gareth Knapman, Australian National University
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*Monash University*

In an impressive title that really does not say much, the *Times* (London) labelled what is often regarded as the first Anzac Day, 25 April 1916, the 'High Cause of Freedom and Honour'. The biggest show and grandest commemoration occurred in London, with 2,000 troops marching from Charing Cross to Westminster Abbey, where the official service was attended by the King, the Australian prime minister and a raft of dignitaries. The day marked the Gallipoli landings, regardless of their description elsewhere as 'an astute and cynical propaganda exercise' in the wake of crushing defeat. Across Australia, similar events were held. But this was not the first Anzac Day. Australia had already commemorated it on 13 October 1915, in Adelaide, where it replaced the traditional Labour Day holiday. This first Anzac Day had many quirky aspects; it was more of a carnival than a solemn ceremony of commemoration.

*Creating the idea of Anzac Day*

On 28 August 1915, the *Adelaide Advertiser* published a notice declaring that the 'Executive Committee of the Monster Procession, Pageant, and Carnival to be
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held on Wednesday, October 13... shall [now] be known as ANZAC DAY'. The Pageant was a fundraising endeavour to support the 'wounded soldiers' Fund', and the committee was consequently renamed the 'ANZAC Day committee'. Importantly, as a 'carnival', the event was filed under 'Amusements' not 'Public notices'. This was to be a popular day of celebration, with commemoration being a tag-on.

It was already a public holiday in South Australia: the Eight-Hour Day celebration and, therefore, marked by a 'pageant' and 'celebrations'. The drive to create the first Anzac Day came from Trades Hall's organising committee. In a show of patriotism, unionists joined the Gouger Street Traders' Association and Broken Hill's Australia Day committee to move the 'Broken Hill Pageant' to Adelaide, and promised 'a gigantic show'. The unionists were out of their way to specify that the event would not be 'a trade union display' that year and wanted 'prominent ladies and gentlemen to join the new Anzac Day committee'. After initially adopting the term 'Patriotic Procession and Carnival', the new committee made a public appeal for a new name. Robert Wheeler, a draper from the suburb of Prospect, proposed the name 'Anzac Day'. Its final selection of the name came down to chance, for it was 'drawn from lots'.

The organisers promoted the event with a sandwich-board parade through the city, among the sandwich men, accompanied by a brass band, were Adelaide theatrical identities. Each board bore a letter, punctuation mark, or number spelling out 'Anzac Day, Oct. 13'. The parade 'stopped frequently to permit wondering pedestrians and others to read the disjointed inscription' to 'cheer' given by 'spectators'. Surviving correspondence indicates that early tensions existed over the popular meaning of Anzac. The sandwich men had spelt Anzac Day in upper and lower case, reflecting a popular desire to transform the acronym to a noun with folklore meaning.

Anzac, democracy and the nucleus of a national day

The significance of this hosting of the first Anzac Day on Eight-Hour Day cannot be underestimated. As I write in the 21st century, the nature of Eight-Hour Day has been largely lost; a hundred years ago it was an event of major symbolic social importance. In 1913, the Adelaide Register editorialised that the day 'has its story. It has its national significance... It evolved in sharp definition from the ideals of the democracy'. The Advertiser echoed that view, describing it as 'an emphatic declaration of Australia's democracy', and proclaiming:

Australia should be proud of its Eight Hours Day [sic].... The holiday in all its implications is typically Australian. In no other county in the world have employer and employee come to such an amicable agreement about the burning question of hours of labour as to admit of a public and spectacular declaration of the principle.  

These sentiments from 1913 express the importance of Labour Day to the development of Australian identity; they also share the sentiments applied to Anzac Day in the aftermath of World War I. For the Australians of 1913, Labour Day was a unifying compact between classes, emaning from a protracted struggle in which Australia achieved a social contract of international significance. The three themes of unity, struggle and global recognition are the residing trope of Anzac Day.

The Register's editorial takes these even deeper: 'It is not merely political, this glorification of a people's daily manual and mental accomplishment. It is more than a holiday. It is a thanksgiving day. Few people are there who from choice would flout the celebration of a fair day's toil. These sentiments, which move towards grounding Labour Day as a sacred day share strong similarities to the later mythologisation of Anzac Day - who also looked to forging a sacred day for the birth of the nation.

Although we can make connections between the symbolism of national days, this analogy is made more direct because, in Adelaide in 1915, Eight-Hour Day became Anzac Day. Such a radical transition needed to be explained to the South Australian community. From early on in the campaign, Trades Hall - with support from the daily papers - emphasised the importance of patriotism and the task of raising funds for the war-wounded.

The Advertiser told its readers that Labour Day had 'naturally risen to the general scale of patriotism' and that the emphasis now was on 'the great task of providing funds for the brave sons who have... sailed overseas to practise, for the sake of the blessed Land of the south, the greatest principle of defence - offence'. Despite the 'maidstrum of horror and death', the Advertiser maintained that war 'has been unifying in its effects' because:

Class interests have been seduced... [and the] son of the rich man has clasped, in the wonderful ties of a comradership of life and death, the hand of the worker. With shoulders touching they have leapt exultingly to the heights of glory; with their life blood mingling they have fallen, the faults of both erased by the supreme sacrifice.'
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Memory & Memorial

The *Advertiser*’s focus on unity through the shared spilling of blood implies an underlying class tension over the Labour Day public holiday. In comparison, the *Register* was more direct in attacking the union movement:

In the ordinary course of events this would be Eight Hours Day [sic], and that also is a composite in a certain sense, for the eight hours’ system was a result of amicable arrangements between employers and employed . . . . In later years, however, Eight Hours Day has usually been styled Labour Day, to indicate that it is a wage-receivers’ more than a wage-payers’ day.17

For the writer of the *Register* editorial, Labour Day had clearly become a partisan issue, declaring: ‘At the trenches there is no question of employers or employed, any more than there is any question of eight hours’ work, eight hours’ play, eight hours’ sleep, and eight ‘bob’ a day. Master (if the use of that term be still permissible) and man fight and die/together’.18 These sentiments are in stark contrast to the *Register*’s 1913 editorial in which it proclaimed that Labour Day defined the ‘ideals of the democracy’. The theme of unity through shared blood sacrifice speaks to an underlying tension between the labour movement and commercial and industrial interests.

There was clear support in the press for a national holiday based on shared sacrifice in war. These early South Australian advocates for Anzac Day are identifying many of the later tropes surrounding Anzac Day. The writers link Anzac Day to democracy, both through the murky notion that the Great War was fought to defend democracy and by grounding it in the Australian industrial agreements of the early 20th century. Most importantly, these early myth-makers were hawking the idea that the nation was born out of blood, and that Anzac provides the shared identity that they felt Australia needed.

The procession

The procession was the central commemorative activity of the day. The eight-hour-march began its life in the 19th century as a demonstration, and the union movement had transformed it into a sacred display. It had its own relics, chief of which was the ‘clasped hands’ banner that led the procession. An observer of the 1913 Labour Day march commented ‘the workers wore their trade badges with as good a grace as a soldier might be expected to wear the Victoria Cross’.19 The day also commemorated the veterans of the labour movement, with the ‘pioneers’

Top: The Mounted Ladies. The original caption read: ‘Fair equestriennes who raised a large amount for the Wounded Soldiers’ Fund’.

Adelaide Chronicle, 23 October 1913, courtesy State Library of Victoria

Middle: Plumbers and Gasfitters marching with their banner in Rundle Street: ignoring the Anzac Day theme, they maintained the traditional way of commemorating Eight-Hour Day.

Adelaide Chronicle, 23 October 1913, courtesy State Library of Victoria

Below: Going off the rails: the staged tram smash at Adelaide Oval

Courtesy State Library of Victoria
of the eight-hour movement having their own wagon and being in a place of reverence, much like that reserved for Great War veterans still participating in the march in the 1990s. The union movement had long since drawn inspiration for its regalia from the military. Its trade banners, sashes, badges and organised marches all emulated 19th-century military organisation and display.

Heading the march was the Royal Australian Naval Brigade marching with fixed bayonets, accompanied by its band. An irony of the day was that the only servicemen to carry weapons were the members of this reserve unit, which sat out the majority of the war. The emotional centrepiece of the march came next – the wounded from Gallipoli, travelling by automobile. Following these campaign veterans, and probably with trepidation, were 2,000 recruits who had been training in camps on the outskirts of Adelaide.

Following the Anzacs was the traditional union march, but even that was unique for the day. In the vanguard of procession was the ‘Women Employees Mutual Association and the Government Women Workers’, which observers at the time saw as indicative of the social changes that war was producing. Separating the female unions from the main body of trades was the ‘croop of mounted ladies’ that were promoted at the time as a popular ‘diversion’. Following the mounted ladies was a series of trade-orientated floats, bands and fundraising endeavours that extended for two miles. Many of the floats had a Gallipoli theme, such as the one for the ‘Operative Painters and Decorative Employees of Australia’, which hosted a background painting of Gallipoli’s hills with the painters dressed as soldiers occupying the foreground, at the ready to clamber up the painted escarpment.

Displays of imperial patriotism were also a facet of the day, with numerous floats representing historic heroes of the British Empire and imperial mascots such as John Bull and Britannia. Another float consisted of a giant effigy of the Kaiser skewered with a sword. The banner read ‘The Kaiser wants Copper, hit him with some’. The purpose of these floats was to raise money with patrons hurling pennies at the different floats.

Men were the main target of the largely female fundraisers. With men being the only people that could serve, those still in civilian clothes were placed under moral pressure. As the Advertiser’s leader put it: ‘If all may not lay their lives upon the altar of their country, at least all may dip deeply into their pockets.’ Prior to the day, extensive efforts were made to recruit female street collectors and stall-hands, leading the Adelaide Mail to comment that ‘with such a body
of young and charming collectors the poor mere male person who is caught in the streets on Anzac Day will have to be hard-hearted indeed if he successfully retains any silver in his pockets after passing through the lines of enthusiastic helpers.21 But efforts to raise money were mixed, with 'one convener of a stall' complaining 'that people were not so ready to contribute to the patriotic funds ... and the men particularly were anxious to see value for their money. Thus tobacco and cigarettes, for instance, found a ready sale at shop prices, but the trinkets and other things ... were baulked at'.22

After the parade, the celebrations moved to Adelaide Oval. Circling the oval was a group of people dressed as prehistoric animals being chased by cave men. This was probably not a parody of indigenous people; the visual style, captioning, and promotion all related to a satirical image of prehistoric Europe. For weeks, the papers had covered the build-up for Anzac Day, particularly the preparations for the 'tram-car crash'. Described as an 'American novelty', the event was highly choreographed and reportedly attracted a 15,000-strong crowd. Two obsolete horse-drawn trams were mounted on a track raised at both ends. With gravity powering the trams to a speed of sixteen miles per hour, the impact of the collision was made more impressive with timed explosions causing the wreckage to burst into flame at the moment of impact. An eyewitness described 'watching two tramcars melt into a shapeless mass of twisted iron and splintered wood. The flames completed the total destruction'. Other notable events included a display of air balloons and military kites (the precursors to the aeroplane). In addition, there was a mock arrest of cabinet members from the South Australian Government, who pretended to be common thieves.

Aftermath of the first Anzac Day
Although many people headed for Glenelg or the Adelaide Hills, the day overall was considered a fundraising success.23 The Register commented that 'Anzac Day will live long in the memories of South Australians'.24 In the immediate aftermath, Alderman Twelftree moved that St Peters Street be renamed 'Anzac Avenue', proposing that 'it would be a memorial in the days to come'. Twelftree argued that it 'would encourage recruiting' because 'young men of the district realize that when they went away they were honoured and not forgotten'.25 Such reasoning demonstrates the importance of memorials in recruiting a volunteer force for the newly formed Australian Imperial Force. It also highlights the role of Anzac Day in maintaining a sense of national unity and pride.

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forgotten, but the avenue would remain, and would be a monument in the days to come'. The memorial never eventuated for the 'motion lapsed, as there was no seconder'. Although the apathy towards Twelftree's idea suggests the burgheers of Adelaide had not totally embraced the idea of Anzac Day as a memorial, his actions show how quickly the idea of Anzac (as a memorial name that embraced an ideal) was fast developing in the population's imagination.

War relief fundraising events were a common occurrence during the Great War. A couple of months later, Victoria hosted an 'Anzac Remembrance Day', and one regional newspaper — after shortening the name to 'Anzac Day' — headed its editorial 'Another Button Day'.27 The organisations of Anzac Day in South Australia, however, emphasised a level of national importance to the day, ensuring that it stood out from other fundraising occasions. As part of this endeavour, the organisers solicited messages from the governor-general, Sir Ronald Craufurd Munro Ferguson, and the governor of South Australia, Sir Henry Galway. Munro Ferguson was the first to cable his message, with a simple note that failed to grasp the importance of the day: 'Hope your Anzac Day will be as successful as previous efforts organized and supported by generous people of South Australia'.28 In this instance, Sir Ronald saw the day as merely a fundraising endeavour. The following year, he again failed to grasp the gravity of Anzac Day, and was widely criticised for not capturing the commemorative mood more fully.29 In comparison, Galway, the state governor, did capture an understanding of the emergent gravity of Anzac and the idea of Anzac Day:

May great success attend what must prove to be a memorable occasion in the history of South Australia. I hearty join in the tribute of admiration and gratitude which is being paid to-day to the gallant fighting men, whose valour and achievements in battle will be household words throughout the Empire for all time, and I bow my head in respect to the glorious memory of our heroic dead whose epitaphs are engraved on the hearts of a proud and grateful people. To do all we can for our sick and wounded is only our duty, but an equally great and solemn obligation is that we should fill the place of every sick and wounded man as it becomes vacant, and so ensure that the great deeds and self-sacrifice of our men in the firing line may not have been in vain.30
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reasoning demonstrates the importance of memorials in recruiting a volunteer
army. Later wartime Anzac Days were seen as key days for recruiters. With
an eye to posterity, the councillor reasoned that ‘Anzac days might pass and be

forgotten, but the avenue would remain, and would be a monument in the days
to come’. The memorial never eventuated, for the ‘motion lapsed, as there was
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have been in vain.

In the governor’s words, we start to see the link between official patriotism
and honouring the wounded. Although the wounded were indeed recognised,
the great unstated truth is the commemoration of the dead. Despite this speech, the labour movement rebuked Galway for not attending the day’s events, with the *Advertiser* reporting the apparent class tensions: ‘Seeing that they, as eight hours men, and as loyal men of the Empire, had given up their ordinary celebration and had made it a celebration for the whole of the citizens, they had expected His Excellency to pay them a visit’.

Unlike the governor-general and the governor, who forwarded their messages to the organising committee, the prime minister, Andrew Fisher, advanced the political importance of the day by forwarding his message directly to the premier of South Australia, Crawford Vaughan, on the morning of Anzac Day:

> I am glad to send a message as Anzac Day begins. It is as well known that our brave soldiers, who voluntarily face danger and death for Australia’s honour and our safety, have been cheered by the news, that those left behind appreciate their action, and feel it an honour to raise funds to minister to their comfort. I trust South Australia will to-day respond in a noble way in recognition of what we owe the gallant boys who have made the name of Australia famous the world over.

Fisher’s message encompasses much of the rhetoric of patriotism, sacrifice and freedom that became routine in later Anzac Days. The order of these messages suggests an emerging political awareness around the concept of Anzac and how the idea of an Anzac Day was spreading beyond South Australia.

The events in Adelaide received coverage in major newspapers throughout the country, with such comments as: “This year the Eight-hours-Day [sic] committee sacrificed the identity of its celebration by conducting a carnival in aid of the wounded Soldiers’ Fund.” Importantly, each account was headed ‘Anzac Day’, and by stating this patriotic ‘day was observed as Anzac Day’, the idea of Anzac Day was thus introduced to the broader Australian public. The nationally-circulated *Illustrated Australasian* included a half-page spread and the *Illustrated Adelaide Chronicle* had a full-page spread of images.

The idea of Anzac Day began to change once the invading troops had been evacuated from Gallipoli. The editor of the *Even Advertiser*, in Victoria, observed this changing mood, noting that:

> While Australians were celebrating ‘Anzac Remembrance Day’, this last week, and had been assured by cables that the forces were to be retained at Gallipoli no-one had the slightest suspicion that our

Celebrations were literally truly named — that, even then, Anzac and Suvla Bay … were but a memory of the great war.

December certainly marked a transition, with ‘Anzac’ becoming a moment in history to be commemorated. It was from this immediate historicising perspective that the Anzac Day Commemoration Committee was formed in Queensland on 10 January 1916 after a public meeting. This meeting was organised by the political leadership of Queensland (including the state’s premier and its governor), along with senior officers of the armed forces. It proposed that 25 April 1916 should be commemorated as Anzac Day, and that other states should also have similar celebrations.

In contrast to the Eight-Hour Day’s Anzac Day, the preparations for the one-year celebrations/commemorations were to be government-led. The *Adelaide Advertiser* reported on 21 February that there was to be ‘Another Anzac Day’ and that the ‘The Queensland Government’ had ‘written to the South Australian Government, who have also received communications from well-known citizens proposing that they should take steps to have Tuesday, April 25, observed as a great national day’. The *Advertiser* also reported that ‘one of the correspondents pointed out that if the government did not take up the matter some small patriotic body might do so’ and therefore would not raise as much money or be as beneficial.

On one level, this argument was about efficiency: that government could coordinate a national celebration/commemoration. On another level, it was a call for official controls on commemoration. This was certainly the message coming from Queensland, with the Anzac Day Commemoration Committee suggesting to the mayor of Adelaide that Anzac Day is to be kept with solemnity and with avoidance of anything approaching jubilation or carnival.

This was in contrast to the original Anzac Day in South Australia and subsequent days in Victoria.

**Conclusion**

When Robert Wheeler proposed the Anzac Day to the Monster Procession, Pageant, and Carnival Committee, he could not have realised the gravity and reach of his suggestion. His actions were instrumental in a chain of commemorative events that enshrined the name ‘Anzac Day’, rather than the idea of Gallipoli Day as the notion of an Australasian identity. In September 1915, the term ‘Anzac’ was embryonic in the Australian imagination. Events
in Adelaide and then Melbourne subsequently made 'Anzac Day' appear as the natural name for 25 April.

Importantly, the first Anzac Day replaced the Eight-Hour Day public holiday in South Australian. Although it was proposed as a fundraising initiative, the fact it occurred in place of the industrial commemoration meant that it took on a deeper meaning. Therefore from its initial conception, Anzac Day was used a unifying day. Yet, by being advertised through the amusement section of the newspapers, the first Anzac Day resembled a carnival more than a day of solemn commemoration. Its success in Adelaide meant that it was repeated as Anzac Remembrance Day in Melbourne, with accounts of both events published in newspapers throughout the country. This branding meant that concerted moves to commemorate the first anniversary of the Gallipoli landings could easily be referred to as Anzac Day.

Dr Gareth Kissman is research fellow and project manager for the History of Anzac Day project at the National Centre for Australian Studies, Monash University.

Notes
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4 'WAR FUNDS', *Advertiser*, 27 Aug. 1915, p. 9
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6 'Anzac Day', *Mail*, 11 Sep. 1915, p. 2
7 Ibid.
8 'Anzac Day', *Register*, 27 Aug. 1915, p. 6
9 'War Funds', loc. cit.
10 'Advertising Anzac Day', *Register*, 11 Sep. 1915, p. 8
11 Ibid.
13 'In Holiday Mood', *Adviser*, 9 Oct. 1915, p. 9
14 'The Magic Eight', loc. cit.
16 Ibid.
17 'Adelaide Wednesday, October 13, 1915', *Register*, 13 Oct. 1915, p. 6
18 Ibid.
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23 *Nun of The Day*, *Register*, 14 Oct. 1915, p. 4
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26 'To Get man, Great Effort on Anzac Day, Recruiting Rally', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 Apr. 1916, p. 8
27 Another "Burton Day", *Gippolli Times*, 16 Dec. 1915, p. 3
31 'The Governor and Anzac Day', *Advertiser*, 15 Oct. 1915, p. 8
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35 'Anzac – A Memory', *Eureka Advertiser*, 23 Nov. 1915, p. 2
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