

Hon Brendan Nelson, AO  
Director, Australian War Memorial  
Treloar Crescent, CAMPBELL ACT

Dear Dr Nelson

Congratulations your decision to demolish ANZAC Hall, a construction I had bitterly opposed as despoiling the iconic nature of the War Memorial precinct. But I am writing to seek assurance that other developments proposed will not further despoil the site's status as a national icon.

My late father was a WWII airman, an RAAF pilot who later settled on the Ainslie foothills. His friends and colleagues in Canberra included Australian ex-airmen like the late Ron Hosking (whose operation over Europe was significant in early discovery of German flying V-bomb installations).

Though undocumented, it was always understood in our circle that Anzac Parade from the air was configured as a national icon in Canberra – a great grave laid on the foothills, with the Memorial building distinctively standing as a cross at its head. Gravel, siting, proportions and other features from the air made this intention in the designs blindingly obvious (though hidden from the ground).

I trust you, Council members, planners, etc, have viewed and closely considered this iconic significance from the air - though I did not glean this from your recent article on the developments. You do state that at its heart the Memorial contains a grave (ie that of the Unknown Soldier).

I would contend that people, including politicians, administrators and more recent AWM site developers misunderstood, overlooked or ignored the iconic nature of the whole precinct when viewed from the air. In particular the distinctive cruciform significance to the precinct of the Memorial building 'in the round' has not been adequately documented in heritage studies (possibly passed over in piecemeal/façade studies or in view of secular social and government norms).

This was never more in evidence when the 2000 Centenary came around - to the glory of modern day politicians, ANZAC Hall was tacked on to the Memorial building, sacrilegiously diminishing the site's iconic significance as a great grave-like symbol in the heart of our national capital, reminiscent of Australian military graves the world over. This was not grasped at all.

I consider that if the truly iconic nature of the whole AWM/Anzac Parade precinct was better understood, then new large exhibition spaces, administrative and visitor developments etc would be located by preference on the Constitution Avenue corner near the foot of Anzac Parade, preserving the symbolism of our national icon and also encouraging use and visitation to the precinct as whole.

I would appreciate your assurance that these concerns are sufficiently addressed in current planning. What steps is your administration taking in the currently proposed site developments to ensure the iconic significance of the AWM building and precinct as outlined above is recognised and preserved?

Sincerely

  
Roger Fitzgerald

23 April 2019