

Matthew Glozier, *Sydney Grammar School and the South African Boer War, 1899-1902* (Sydney: Sydney Grammar School, 2018); 328 pp.; ISBN: 978-1-32653-370-0; hardback; RRP: \$49.99.

Australian military involvement in the Second Boer War is often overshadowed by the much larger commitment in the subsequent two world wars and also by the obvious fact that, at the outbreak of hostilities in 1899, Australia was not yet an independent country. However, Australian forces did play a significant role in this conflict and any further scholarship on this subject is to be welcomed.

It is in this light that we see a new and important work from Dr Matthew Glozier on the contribution that former Sydney Grammar boys (Old Sydneians) gave. As Glozier relates, Sydney Grammar had a strong ethos of loyalty to Queen and Empire much fostered by A. B. Weigall (Headmaster 1867-1912). And indeed almost 150 Old Sydneians fought in South Africa. An unusually high number from one school (p. i). Glozier takes us through the events surrounding the outbreak of hostilities and its implications for the colony of NSW and then onto the specific circumstances involving the Old Sydneians who rushed to join up.

Much of the book is taken up with the experience of the Boer War told through the first person accounts of the combatants from letters home or published in the *Sydneian*, the school magazine and an invaluable source of information. From this we can see the initial, perhaps naïve, enthusiasm for the coming great adventure tempered in time by reality. For example in this letter published in the *Sydneian* in May 1900 from Lieutenant Keith Mackellar (brother of the famous poet Dorothea): “Within the next few days, however, we had quite our fill of ‘sniping’, and came to see that after all it is not much of a game to ride as a target for a Boer who is sitting at ease on a kopje behind a stone” (p. 12). Mackellar was subsequently killed in action at Deedepoort on 11 July 1900.

Overall, approximately 16,000 Australians fought in South Africa and just under 2 per cent died fighting and a similar number from disease. On the other hand, 149 Old Sydneians fought and 13 died. This figure is just over 9 per cent, and so more than double the combined Australian losses (p. 49). It is understandable, therefore, that this conflict should have such significance for Sydney Grammar. In addition to the letters from the combatants we also have much interesting material from Old Sydneian Andrew ‘Banjo’ Paterson who was a war correspondent for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the Melbourne *Age* who wrote some accounts of the exploits of ex-Grammar boys in uniform in South Africa (p. 11).

Much of the later part of the book is concerned with the efforts to remember the fallen and the erection of the memorial board at Sydney Grammar. There was much controversy about who should be recorded on the memorial board and ultimately only eleven names are inscribed as definitely Old Sydneians known at the time to have died in South Africa (p. 61), three officers and eight other ranks. Although since its erection it has since come to light that at least two other names should have been added.

The memorial board for the South Africa war has since become the model for all further dedications of its type at Sydney Grammar (p. 78). In particular the much larger memorials to the Great War and the Second World War. Nor were commemorations to

the fallen from Sydney Grammar limited only to the school. Other communities erected memorials to their local dead. For example, in Hunters Hill All Saints Anglican Church there is a polished red granite cross in honour of Corporal Walter Laishley Spiers (p. 57). There are memorials to Mackellar at both the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and St James Anglican Church on Macquarie Street (pp. 52-53).

The experience of the Boer War for Sydney Grammar helped to further instil the martial spirit within the school and contributed to the motivation for large numbers of Old Sydneians to join up for the First World War (p. 72). This is a fascinating insight into a sadly neglected part of Australian history with importance well beyond the confines of Sydney Grammar and it will undoubtedly be of great use to researchers and amateur enthusiasts alike.

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