Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.
“Remembering” within the Avondale Returned and Services’ Association (Incorporated):

Gossip; Social Dramas; Women’s Roles; Ritual and Commemoration within a Voluntary Association.

A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Social Anthropology at Massey University, Albany

Margaret Caroline Johnson
2009
Abstract

“A war has many lives”, appropriate words written by an Avondale Returned Serviceman. The Royal New Zealand Returned and Services Association was created in 1916 by World War I veterans serving as a place to gather and support each other post-war, giving those who joined a sanctuary of peace, the battlefields of war. These men created a space ready for the next group of men and women to return from World War II.

Avondale Returned and Services Association (Incorporated) began in 1933, serving the Avondale community and Avondale returned personnel. Through the years the clubrooms have been a place where service personnel receive support, can relax and enjoy the company of like minded people, family and friends. The clubrooms have seen many changes and milestones; namely allowing women into what began as a “men only” club and creating their own Women’s Sections. With the introduction of membership to family members of war veterans, membership numbers increased dramatically. More recently however, membership was afforded to members of the community. This was necessary because of the decreasing numbers of returned service personnel.

The changes have allowed a wide age group of people to experience the R.S.A., ranging in age from teenagers through to some now in their 90’s. This has allowed for a diverse club culture to be established, with many ethnicities mixing in a historic, sacred space, created to remember the wars and honour the dead. There is an eclectic mix of rituals and traditions taking place within the one space, the clubrooms. I have likened these clubrooms to Erving Goffman’s theory of a theatre, with daily performances by many of the actors, taking their entrances and exits on cue. Others will only make a cameo appearance every now and then. Many actors perform solely for the audience, putting on their masks for their performance and removing it on exit, replacing it with another for the next performance in their life.

In this thesis it is my aim to give my perspective on the many aspects of what one particular Returned Services Association, situated in a particular place and time is about. My research methods were primarily the anthropological, that of participant/observation, with some interviews and archival research to help make sense of the history behind the Association. Many of the war veterans I interviewed and spoke to informally were happy to share their memories with me, of the Association and also their time at war, adding another dimension to the research, giving a positive feel to the overall benefits of having an Association such as this in the community.
Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the members of the Avondale Returned and Services Association (Incorporated) who shared their lives and memories with me. Especially to the returned service men, who freely gave their time allowing me to talk to them about their experiences of war, life as an Avondale R.S.A. member and in the course of the interview, often shared memories of other aspects of their life during, and post-war. Also to the women of the Women’s Section, especially Claire Emberson for allowing me the privilege of serving on the Women’s Section, albeit for a short time.

For me, this has been an extremely challenging piece of research and thesis writing experience. Through this time I have experienced life at its most difficult. Without the love and support received from many people this thesis would remain uncompleted.

To my Supervisors, Dr Eleanor Rimoldi and Assoc. Prof. Peter Lineham, a sincere thank-you for your time and encouragement. For your invaluable feedback and guidance, but most of all I thank you for your support and patience. I can never thank you both enough, especially Eleanor, and Peter throughout, as well as giving me that final push.

Thank you also to the Massey University library staff for their patience and assistance in obtaining literature from obscure places.

To my family and work colleagues who continued to tell me to “just do it”, a big thank you. A huge thank you to Russell, who came into my life towards the end of this thesis. His continued words of encouragement, love and support got me to the finishing line.

Finally, I would like to thank also the New Zealand Federation of Graduate Women, North Shore Branch, for granting me a $2,000 Harriett Jenkins Award. This financial support was invaluable to me.

Thank you all.
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<td>This photograph is of World War I veterans outside the original R.S.A./R.S.C. Building. Unfortunately their names are unknown because of the loss of valuable information in two fires in the early years of the club. The Avondale Returned Soldiers’ Club (Inc.) became official on 19 May 1936 (Johnson 2002:15).</td>
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Illustration 13  Photographs and translations of the Maori carvings displayed at the entrance to the clubrooms courtesy of Avondale R.S.A. Secretary and sourced from Johnson (2002:90-91).

Illustration 14  The memorial bricks placed in the new “memorial garden” (photo taken by author).

Illustration 15  The photo of the memorial bricks in their old home, behind the glass in front of the original clubrooms (photo taken by author).
The “Ode” comprises the fourth stanza of the Poem “For the Fallen” written by Laurence Binyon. It was first published in “The Times” in London on the 21st September 1914. The “Ode” was written by Binyon as a tribute to those who served their country in war times and in particular to those who made the ultimate sacrifice. The complete poem, with the “Ode” highlighted is as follows:

With proud thanksgiving, a mother for her children,
   England mourns for her dead across the sea.
Flesh of her flesh they were, spirit of her spirit,
   Fallen in the cause of the free.

Solemn the drums thrill: Death august and royal
   Sings sorrow up into immortal spheres.
There is music in the midst of desolation
   And a glory that shines upon our tears.

They went with songs to the battle, they were young.
   Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted:
   They fell with this faces to the foe.

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.

They mingle not with their laughing comrades again;
   They sit no more at familiar tables of home;
They have no lot in our labour of the day-time;
   They sleep beyond England’s foam.

But where our desires are and our hopes profound,
   Felt as a well-spring that is hidden from sight,
To the innermost heart of their own land they are known
   As the stars are known to the night.

As the stars that shall be bright when we are dust,
   Moving in marches upon the heavenly plain;
As the stars that are starry in the time of our darkness,
   To the end, to the end they remain.

By Laurence Binyon