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***“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

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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.

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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.

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For the Fallen

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