



## ANZAC Day 2025

### The Very Reverend Dr David Hoyle, Dean of Westminster

I need to say something to say about history this morning. I can do that; I have written history books. My problem is I need to say something about ANZAC history and I am English. I am as English as umbrellas and warm beer. I am the Englishman who apologises to the person who has just trodden on my toe in the tube. So, forgive me, if I start with English history.

At the end of last year, lots of us Brits were watching a television series about Henry VIII and his first secretary and 'fixer' Thomas Cromwell. The drama was based on the last two novels that Hilary Mantel wrote, sequels to *Wolf Hall*. I thought it was great television - religion, sex and death - but it made some of my friends very cross. When I was working as an historian, I studied this period: Catholics, Protestants, bibles in English, burning at the stake. It was violent and passionate. Five hundred years later it is still passionate and we still take sides. Hilary Mantel made the protestant Cromwell into one of the good guys and turned the Roman Catholic Thomas More into a bigot. My Roman Catholic PhD supervisor was spitting tacks. History has us telling different stories. History can make us argue.

Now, one of my historian friends is an Australian and currently Vice Rector of St John's College in the University of Sydney. He drank warm beer when I knew him, but he is a proud Australian. I remember him making the journey to Gallipoli back in the '90s. I have been in touch with him this week. I told him that I would be preaching today. In reply, he told me that he is been reading a book by a man called Mervyn Bendle, called '*ANZAC and its Enemies: The History War on Australia's National Identity*' (2015). The book apparently describes the debate about the role of the ANZAC story in Australian ideas about nation and identity.

At this point, I am going to cough one of those polite English coughs, firmly furl my umbrella and set out for the Dog and Duck for my warm beer. I am not going to stand up here and comment on historical debates about Australian identity. Still, I have paused this week and looked at Australian news and Australian websites. If you are here as a New Zealander, or as part of the Turkish delegation, can I just ask you to bear with me a few moments longer? This is not just about being Australian. I have got interested in how the ANZAC story is told, interested in who tells it and who is listening.

We can look around at the Abbey, a house of memory filled again with proud remembrance and we can be confident that there *are* important things to be said about nation, loyalty and commitment. We can know that this story is told with pride and conviction. For many of you this started with a dawn service and I know there is more to come. There are commemorations all over Australia and New Zealand. My historian friend will already have been at the local Cenotaph in Orange New South Wales. There are commemorations at Gallipoli, on the Cook Islands, and in Tonga; there are more in Rome, Malta, New York, Nicosia, and Newfoundland... the list goes on. We know the story is told and we know that the story is being told differently.

There is a shift, we see it a little in this country - a shift in how the story is understood. Here our Remembrance Services have grown and changed. What was a story about armies, battles, a

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world stage, and broad loyalties is more and more a more personal story of what great grandfathers and great-great grandfathers saw, endured and achieved. The letters and diaries written above Suvla Bay are studied and the stories are made to live. An Australian writer called Alex McClintock has written about one great grandfather who fought in Dead Man's Ridge and another who won a VC on the Western Front. It is not a national myth he describes, nor is it a history lesson. It is family pride, a pride McClintock himself does not entirely understand, but it makes him think of what is surprisingly humanly possible. It makes him think of courage and resilience. He talks about 'a necessary remembrance'. My friend Peter, a generation older talks of his Uncle Matthew, injured at Gallipoli and killed on the Western Front.

I can only speak to you today as an Englishman. Two nights ago, I sat in a pub festooned with flags - a red cross on a white background, the cross of St George. If we have a national day, I suppose St George's Day might be it. No one said anything about nation that night, no one sang, and we wondered whether to eat Chilli con Carne or Chicken Curry. What happened here today is of a different order. Here we consider what it might mean to have a shared memory and even perhaps a shared calling. Here we wonder if belonging to a country has something to say about belonging in a world. Here we consider loyalty and allegiance. Here we will listen to the words of Revelation sung to remind us that heaven is a city, a place where we live together. We remember that we will be saved together or not at all.

This world is fascinated by the power of the markets, it measures political allegiance, discusses the danger of migrants. This world divides to rule. We witness those around us fashioning new narratives to suit the times. The stories are so often intended to deepen our divisions. Here though, we remember and weave together both memory and hope in stories that unite and do not divide. So please accept my thanks for this lesson in storytelling, accept my thanks for your fidelity and accept my thanks for describing a hope we can share. Telling this story in this place is an act of commitment to a future lived under God's grace in a city we must, a city of memory and hope. It is good to be with you.

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