

# Hellenism's Ballarat Heritage

While most know about the country town of Ballarat, few know of its deep connection to Hellenism. One of its native sons, GEORGE DEVINE TRELOAR, became one Australia's greatest contributor to Hellenism as League of Nations' Commissioner for Refugees in northern Hellas in the 1920s. Of more recent vintage is the AUSTRALIAN EX-PRISONERS-OF-WAR MEMORIAL. Some 90 kilometres north-west of Melbourne is another of those corners of Hellenism.

## GEORGE DEVINE TRELOAR

Born in 1884 and educated at St Patrick's College, a varied and wide-ranging career led George Devine Treloar to serve Hellenism in unique ways. In Colonel Treloar's own words, in early 1922, "I then accompanied the Greek army, as a British observer, during its last catastrophic retreat. I met Mustafa Kemal Pasha, ... So it was that before ever I witnessed the plight of Greek refugees I had seen great suffering by civilian populations as tides of battle and oppression overwhelmed them and drove them in every direction".

After an inspection tour of eastern Thrace, Treloar's work concentrated on settling tens of thousands of Christian Hellene, Armenian and Assyrian Genocide survivors on about 1,300 square kilometers of potential farm land between Komotini, Porto Lagos and about as far east as what is now Aratos in western Thrace. "In some respects my responsibilities extended further, and covered the regions Xanthi, Karagatch, Gumuldjina (Komotini), Dedeagatch (Alexandroupolis), Didymoteicho, and Soufli, and as far west as Kavala". It is estimated Colonel Treloar's mission saved the lives of 108,000 survivors of the Hellenic, Armenian and Assyrian Genocides.

Colonel Treloar's mission established a dozen new villages in this region. One of them was named in his honour. Ninety years later, it continues

to proudly bear its founder's name, Thrylorio in Rodopi Prefecture, western Thrace. (see photo)

Even more spectacular are the collection of photographs Colonel Treloar took. As he later wrote: "These photographs portray undeniable hardship and misery, although these Thracian refugees actually had a few days in which to gather some possessions onto a wagon. In that respect they were luckier than many from Anatolia who had to pick up anything they could carry and leave virtually immediately, with far lesser chances of survival".

George Devine Treloar passed away in Perth in 1980. His legacy of philanthropy lives on, through the communities he built, as well as through the words and images he recorded. Treloar may not have been a Hellene by birth; he was undoubtedly a Hellene in spirit, developing a legacy that eternally binds his horio of Ballarat and Hellenism.

The AUSTRALIAN EX-PRISONERS-OF-WAR MEMORIAL in the Ballarat Botanical Gardens is another of binding links between Australia and Hellenism. Its 130-metres of black granite bear the names of over 35,000 Australian servicemen who have been taken prisoner on the field of battle, as well as the places they were held.

This beautiful complex of native Australian plants and stones include the names "Greece" and "Crete", commemorating the men of the 6th Division of the Second Australian Imperial



Force who fell into the hands of the Nazi invaders of Hellas.

The Memorial also commemorates the unnamed Hellenes who, at great risk to themselves and their families, assisted Australian servicemen in escaping the clutches of the enemy. This occurred across two World Wars.

Men such as Captain Thomas Walter White are recorded on the Memorial. A prisoner-of-war from the Mesopotamia Front in World War One, he witnessed the Armenian, Assyrian and Hellenic Genocides during his two-and-one-half years of Ottoman

captivity. In late-1918, it was with the assistance of some Hellenes of Constantinople that he escaped to Russia.

It is often said that wherever you turn a stone over, you will find a trace of Hellenism underneath. The town of Ballarat is but one more illustrative example of the depths of the relationship between Australia and Hellas.

Since 1998, Dr Panayiotis Diamadis is director of the Hellenic Unit of the Australian Institute for Holocaust and Genocide Studies (AIHGS). He also serves as Secretary of the Australian Hellenic Council (NSW).

## A Better Migration Program is Not Built on Empty Promises and Hollow Threats

*As politicians sharpen their focus on refugees in boats and arbitrary caps and targets designed for short term political gain, Australia's migration program remains unbalanced, mismanaged and confusing for current and potential migrants and sponsors and for the general public.*

The true migration issues that need to be dealt with are about skills shortages and Australia's reputation abroad, but Government and the Opposition remain locked in an absurd and short-sighted contest to see who can have the fewest boat arrivals and the smallest migration program.

The Migration Institute of Australia (MIA) urges all politicians to leave aside their tired talking points and address this essential issue with honesty, clarity and good faith.

Hundreds of thousands of migrants and potential migrants have been negatively affected by the oscillating, overcooked changes to Australia's migration program over the past six months, only to face an election campaign that threatens further cuts and besmirches the positive social and economic roles they play in communities across Australia.

"It should not be too much to ask for our leading politicians to acknowledge that any migration policy must meet skills needs, value family unification and honour international humanitarian obligations," said MIA CEO Maurene Horder. "To claim otherwise fundamentally misleads the voting public."

The Migration Program is complex and has a wide-ranging effect across public policy, so treating it with care and diligence requires a political cooperation that is undermined by the distracting and dispiriting political debate on refugee arrivals.

"The real issues facing Australian migration concern the skills and people we need for growth and prosperity, especially as our humanitarian intake represents a tiny fraction of the overall Migration Program," Horder said. "Politicians should resist emotional language in conversations about refugees and make it clear that, regardless of method of arrival or country of origin, it is not illegal to come to Australia in search of humanitarian entry."

