



Executive director of Heritage Perth Richard Offen at the Bell Tower. Pictures: Mogens Johansen



Anzac story rings out

The Bell Tower's Diggers tribute is a rousing experience, finds **RONAN O'CONNELL**

My eyes are wide, my heart is swelling, and my fingers are in my ears. What I'm witnessing in Perth's city centre is an event that is astonishing, moving and, quite frankly, deafening. Just in front of me, beyond a thick glass window, Australia's largest bell is ringing inside the Bell Tower.

At 6500kg, it is about five times the weight of an average hatchback car. What makes this bronze goliath especially significant is that it's dedicated to the Anzacs, the bold men and women who've served our nation in wars, battles and peacekeeping units from Kokoda to Korea.

About three years ago, Perth's Anzac Bell rang for the first time. It was quite an occasion. On what was the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 2018, a lone bugler played the last post from a lofty perch on the observation deck of the Bell Tower.

That familiar tune was synchronised with those of dozens of other buglers positioned across the CBD, Kings Park and South Perth foreshore. After a minutes silence, a brand new sound echoed through the city as the giant Anzac Bell made its debut. The Bell Tower's website states this was "an incredibly moving

moment for the crowd who were awash with poppies".

While this bell was built as a lasting mark of respect for the Anzacs, it's also a terrific, if somewhat overlooked, tourist attraction. I must admit I was not aware of this wonder until July, when I joined the Anzac Bell tour. In fact, this was the first time I'd even stepped inside the Bell Tower. I'd always appreciated the architecture of this graceful structure and intended to explore it one day.

When it opened in 2000, this glimmering glass spire was designed to house the ancient bells of London's St Martin-in-the-Fields Church, which is located opposite the famous Trafalgar Square.

Those 12 historic bells, which are almost 300 years old, are a highlight of the Bell Tower, which I found to have an impressively modern interior as I took part in the Anzac Bell tour.

This one-hour tour takes place at 11.30am every Thursday, Friday and Saturday at the Bell Tower, which itself is also open on Sundays.

The Thursday tour, which I joined, is particularly appealing as it coincides with a display by experienced bell ringers between 12pm and 1pm. This group performs in concert on the Swan Bells, a set of 18 bells that consists of those ancient dozen imported from London, and another six cast more recently. It was a transfixing exhibition.

Before that, our tour guide had

gathered us participants together in a small hall within the Bell Tower to explain, in riveting detail, how the legend of the Anzacs was born. I'm not a military buff. But listening to this rousing account of Australia's armed combat history was a stirring experience.

Once our emotions settled, we were given the chance to ring a set of bells by hauling down on the thick cords that dangle from the ceiling of this hall. It was surprisingly tiring work, and gave me a deeper appreciation of the efforts of the bell ringers we would later watch.

As we climbed the tower's stairs, up towards the Anzac Bell, we earned increasingly striking views of the CBD. On level five we found that colossus. It is not just a giant, functional object. Great care was put into embellishing it with designs and words that evoke the Anzac tale.

Engraved in the bell's exterior is an intricate depiction of Australian soldiers and nurses. They are walking towards a rising sun, which has long been an icon of the Australian Army, members of which wear a badge decorated by that daily natural spectacle.

Then the Anzac Bell came out of hibernation. Its deep tone vibrated through my body. I closed my eyes briefly and imagined the bravery and sacrifices of the men and women this bell was made for. Even as I was driving home after the excellent tour, that moment lingered in my mind. The Anzac Bell is a marvel.



WYNTK what you need to know

- The Anzac Bell Tour is a small group, premium tour at the Bell Tower. Step behind the scenes and learn about the Anzac legend and the 6500kg Anzac Bell, and hear it rung at midday. Guests also receive an Anzac Bell medallion.
- The one-hour tour is \$27 and available each Thursday, Friday and Saturday.
- Book at thebelltower.com.au or phone 6210 0444.