

Boer War Memorial Hobart



Thousands of motorists pass it every day. Travelling out of the city towards the Tasman Bridge on the highway to the left stands an imposing memorial. It is topped with a bronze statue of a soldier looking towards Hobart's waterfront. It has been there for 119 years.

The Hobart Boer War Memorial, originally called the Tasmanian Soldier's National Memorial, had its foundation stone laid July 4 1901 by His Royal Highness, the Duke of Cornwall and York. The bronze statue is an impressive, if not a beautiful piece of art. So grand it was that there is a replica of it in Halifax, Yorkshire England.

The Boer War Commemorative Day which is held at the site. There is an opportunity for the public to lay a flower, posy or wreath at the foot of the memorial in honour of those Tasmanians who served in that forgotten war (1899-1902) throughout the day. Yours truly will do his honours at 11am followed by a lone bulger playing the Last Post.

At the time of the laying of the foundation stone in 1901, 16 Tasmanians had died because of the war, with the final total being 42.

The site of the memorial was chosen as it would be in view of all vessels entering the harbour. The chairman of the memorial committee was Bernard Shaw (cousin to the English playwright George Bernard Shaw) and the architect was Alan Walker. The creator of the remarkable sculptured piece was Ben Sheppard senior who married Elise Morrisby, sister to Bernard Morrisby, who died in the war. It is believed Bernard Morrisby may have been the model for the statue or his brother Raymond Morrisby who survived the war. There is also another contender for the model, that being Fredrick Weeding, who worked at the time on Lt-Colonel Cameron's property in the Midlands. Cameron led the first contingent to South Africa.

Benjamin (Ben) Sheppard was London born who moved to Hobart, joining his sister and her schoolmaster husband at Bismarck, now Collinsvale. He won a commission for the memorial which he executed in London. It received great acclaim both in Britain and in Australia. Undoubtedly, it was his masterpiece.

In the cavity of the foundation stone was placed the names of those comprising the Tasmanian contingents that went to South Africa also newspapers containing the announcement of the first meeting held in connection of the memorial, the death of Queen Victoria, the accession of King Edward VII, the arrival of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York in Australia and the names of the Executive Committee and others who took part in having the memorial erected.

The foundation stone was placed in position by the means of a pulley and a further three huge granite stones were added for the base. The monument was described as the "National Monument" and that subscription for its erection came from all classes of people throughout Tasmania.

The reason why the soldier is looking in the direction that he does is because he watches the troops leaving and returning to and from our shores.

The statue was sent to London for casting in bronze and exhibited there. The Founder was Messrs Singer and Co of Somerset. While in Venice and Rome, Sheppard found inspiration from Michelangelo's statue of David, hence the trooper's pose. The Times (London) reported: "He stands on the alert, his field glasses in one hand and his rifle in the other, a fine type of the young manhood of the colony who came forward so readily to help the mother country and the Empire." The helmeted figure, however, is not peculiarly Australian. The statue returned to Hobart on the SS Papanui in January 1905. The statue obviously was added after the unveiling of the memorial.

Ben Sheppard won the design for the memorial out of 52 entrants, sixteen of which came from Britain. Twenty guineas were given as a prize. Sheppard died in Cape Town, South Africa after leaving Tasmania for a warmer climate because of his failing health. The Mercury described Sheppard as a "promising young painter". (July 25th 1902).

Forty Tasmanians died from various causes during the war with two dying returning on an over-crowded troopship making the total of 42 with more than 600 Australians. The war was declared 11th October 1899 and peace was proclaimed 31st May 1902. Today, numerous memorials are scattered throughout Tasmania, including the wonderful Launceston one, testifying to our involvement and paying homage to those who served and to those who died. Most are probably forgotten and neglected. Perhaps they are considered a quaint reminder of some war many Tasmanians have little knowledge of, with these memorials overshadowed by the later major World Wars.