

Moruya and the Sydney War Memorial

By Bill Glennie



Designed in Sydney, made in Moruya and London

On 25 June 1927 the *Moruya Examiner* reported that a large block of granite, estimated to weigh around 2,000 tons, had been blasted out in one piece from the quarry face at Moruya. John Gilmore, the quarry manager, declared it to be a fine specimen, adding that there was unlikely to be another to equal it during the Harbour Bridge contract.ⁱ

John Gilmore needed a piece of quality granite in June 1927. John Bradfield, the Chief Engineer of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, was due to arrive shortly at the quarry. He was not coming on Harbour Bridge business. Bradfield had been entrusted with the job of supervising the preparation and erection of the war memorial intended for Martin Place in Sydney, and Dorman Long, the British company constructing the Bridge, had been contracted to provide the stonework.

The choice of design and site for the war memorial had not been without controversy. The decision to commission Sir Bertram Mackennal to design the memorial surprised many and angered a few. The Victoria-born sculptor had left Australia in 1882 to study in London and Paris. After a brief return to set up a studio in Melbourne, he returned to Europe, and basing himself mainly in London received commissions for work in Britain and in Australia. His most viewed work, seen by millions, was not a sculpture. It was the image of King George V on British postage stamps and coins.

Mackennal arrived in Sydney in February 1926 to oversee his Shakespeare Memorial being set in place next to the Mitchell Library. His reputation arrived

ahead of him, and from the moment he stepped off the Melbourne train at Central Station, he was feted and celebrated. He was so sought after, declared the *Sydney Morning Herald*, that he became almost inaccessible.ⁱⁱ

Somehow Jack Lang, the premier of New South Wales, gained access. Within a week of Mackennal's arrival Lang had persuaded the committee responsible for planning and funding Sydney's war memorial to award the commission to Mackennal.

The real driving force for a memorial was not Lang but the Returned Soldiers and Sailors Imperial League, and the League dominated the Memorial Committee which had been established in 1925. The Committee's readiness to accept Lang's recommendation did not go down well in all quarters. The editor of *The Soldier*, the League's journal, condemned the Committee's abandonment of its original plan to hold an open competition for a design, when it had been hinted that submissions from returned servicemen would be looked on favourably. '*The handing over of important work to a sculptor who may have attained a certain eminence and publicity is no guarantee of getting good work*', wrote the editor, adding that those who had experienced the conflict, '*would best feel the spirit of the reason for the design*'.ⁱⁱⁱ There were similar reservations in the council of the Town Planning Association. '*He comes with a little bit of overseas kudos and they rush to him*', commented the secretary of the Association. Nor was she impressed by the sculptor's representation of William Shakespeare:

'His eyes are all awry and his toes are twisted in'.^{iv} Such comments fell on deaf ears.

Martin Place was not the unanimous choice to site the memorial, but it was the preferred choice. One letter-writer to the *Sydney Morning Herald* complained that 'the traffic rushing past must forever drown the voices of those who would reverently show the memorial to their children.'^v Another *Herald* reader agreed: 'The Cenotaph, placed in the middle of a cab rank, with up and down vehicular traffic on each side of it, is hardly the best place to obtain the atmosphere of peace and calm necessary for a monument of this kind.'^{vi} Pedestrianisation was still a long way off. But because of its association with the patriotic rallies of 1914 and the armistice celebrations of 1918, Martin Place was chosen.

Mackennal submitted sketches of six designs to the Committee for consideration. On 7 January 1927 the *Sydney Morning Herald* announced that a design had been selected and would be carried out in bronze and granite. It would be referred to as the Martin Place War Memorial to Fallen Sailors, Soldiers and Nurses, a name which not surprisingly did not catch on.

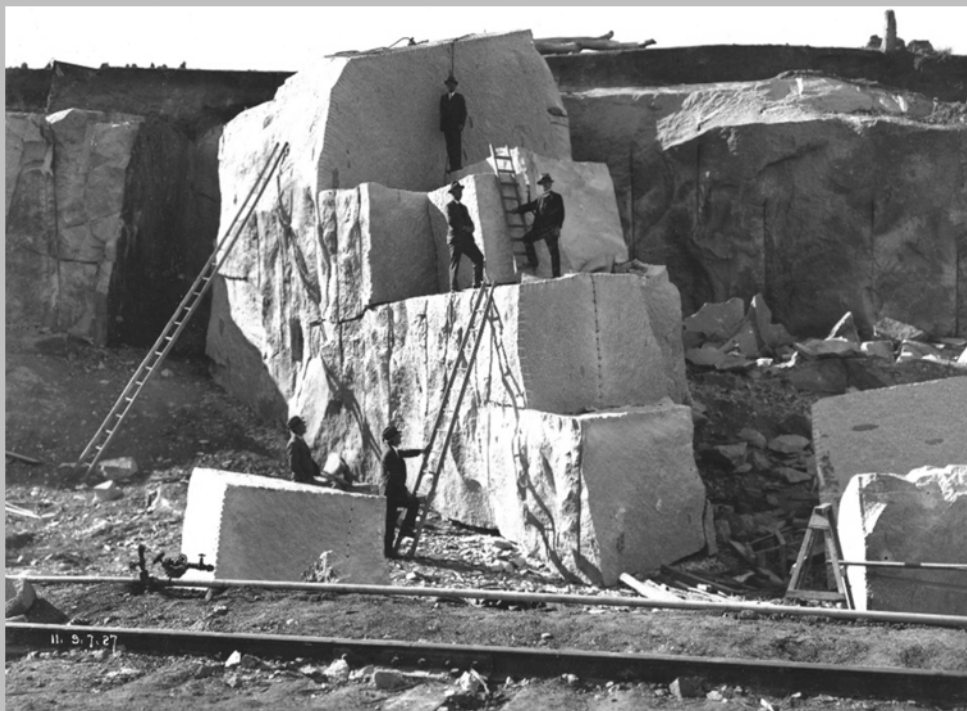
Mackennal set to work on a model of his design in the East Sydney Technical College in Darlinghurst. John Bradfield later described how he was brought on board because the sculptor requested 'the assistance of an architect'.^{vii} The sculptor needed

help in the preparation of drawings for the altar stone and its base. These were required to enable the contract to be placed with Dorman Long & Co for the supply of granite from their quarry at Moruya.

Mackennal left Sydney in March 1927, never to return to Australia. In London he worked on the bronze figures of the soldier and sailor and the laurel wreath which would adorn the altar stone. He left John Bradfield to act in an 'honorary capacity', responsible for the supply and setting of the stonework and the placement of the bronze figures when they arrived from London.

Bradfield later wrote that when he visited the quarry on 9 July 1927 he 'personally selected' the granite for the altar stone and its base. Bert Warner, who worked in the engine room at the quarry, recalled that the quarrymen did cut two stones for the memorial, but believed that this was in case of accidental damage to one of them.^{viii} The photograph taken of masons already at work on the stone suggests that the choice of stone was made before Bradfield arrived, and its selection had more to do with the experienced eye of John Gilmore and his colleagues.

The stone may have been the largest piece of granite dressed at the quarry, but the method used to cut it from the block at the quarry face was the same technique used to cut the dimension stone for the Harbour Bridge's pylons: plug and feather.



LEFT: When John Bradfield visited Moruya Quarry on 9 July 1926 he took with him a photographer from the Public Works Department. Perched high on the block recently blasted from the quarry face, Bradfield looks back at the camera, one foot resting on the ladder. At the bottom of the other ladder, looking up at Bradfield, is Alfred Martin, Dorman Long's second-in-charge in Sydney. Dorman Long had been contracted to supply the stonework. It was from this huge block that the altar stone was already cut.



LEFT: Two masons work on the altar stone while a third, the Italian Fioravanti Cuducio, hammer over his shoulder, takes a breather. In the background John Bradfield, second from the left, and Alfred Martin, one leg astride the rail track, look on. The shallowness of the upright piece of granite encased in scaffolding beside them suggests it was earmarked for the base of the memorial. In addition to the altar stone, twenty-three pieces of granite were fashioned to provide its base.

Archie Davidson, the foreman at the quarry face, drew the lines along which he wanted the granite to fracture. On such a large block of dislodged granite, holes were drilled to take steel bearers, and planks placed across these to make a working platform. Then the drillers got to work. *‘The driller would bore holes dead on these lines that were predetermined by Archie Davidson, and these holes would be about 4 inches apart and about 4 inches deep and about three-quarters of an inch in diameter. Each individual man had a box of plugs and feathers. These feathers were pieces of steel fashioned by the smiths out of particularly hard steel. Into each hole the driller would place two feathers and a plug. Those feathers were fashioned in such a way that they were thicker at one end and thinner at the other. The operator would put the thickest end down in the hole, and he would insert the plug, and it would be a nice fit. When he got all these feathers and plugs arranged in these holes, he would tighten them up with his hand hammer. Then he would pick up a six pound hammer with a long handle on it, and he would go to work on those plugs. By tapping them uniformly along that line, always coming back to the first plug that he struck, he then started through again. Keep going like that, and it was amazing to see that the effect of those plugs resulted in the granite being split as deep as ten or twelve feet straight down.’*^{ix}

Reg Saunders, who was an apprentice at the quarry, remembered that because of its size – estimates of its weight ranged from 17 to 20 tons – all stages of the preparation of the altar stone including the inscriptions were carried out near the quarry face.

Before the surfacing machine got to work, masons used a mix of hand tools – hammers and punches –

and pneumatic tools to work on the marginal draughts around the edges of the stone. These acted as reference points to the operator of the surfacing machine. The Scots called these machines ‘*dunters*’ from the Scottish word ‘*dunt*’ which means a heavy blow. The *dunters* were too powerful to be used on the stone’s edges. They were used to work off the surplus granite between the marginal draughts, and then the operator fitted what was called a four-cut to the nozzle of the *dunter*’s pneumatic pipe. The four-cut consisted of four blades, and the action of these gave the stone its fine finish.

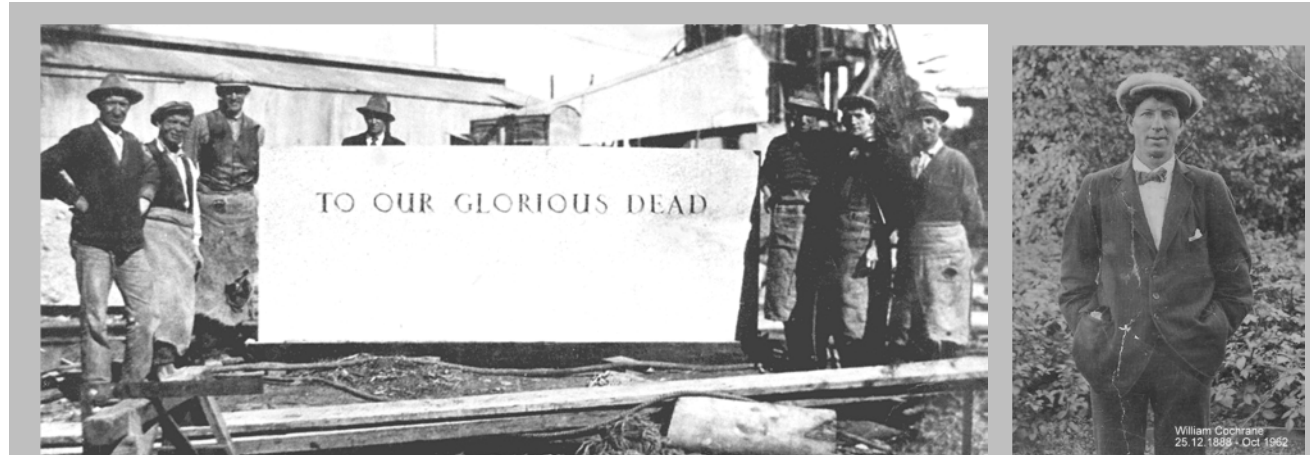
Lastly Mackennal’s inscriptions were added to the stone: ‘*Lest we forget*’ and ‘*To our glorious dead*’. Mackennal had chosen not to include the dates of the Great War. He argued that the uniforms of the sculpted sailor and soldier would make that unnecessary.

When the altar stone arrived at Sydney Harbour on 1 August 1927 it took a team of eighteen horses – another source has twenty - one hour to drag it and its base pieces up to Martin Place, where John Bradfield and Alfred Martin were on hand to supervise its placement. Its foundations had already been excavated and concreted to street level.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* claimed that at every stage, from the quarrying of the stone to its placement in Martin Square, only those men who could produce their discharge papers from the AIF were employed, as had been agreed with Alfred Martin.^x In fact the preparation of the stone at the quarry had been largely the work of Scottish quarrymen and masons, many of whom were ex-servicemen, but it was an Italian, Fioravanti Cuducio, who was selected to accompany

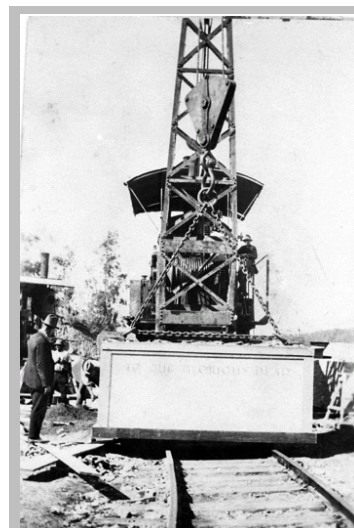
it to Sydney. Cudicio had arrived in Sydney from Genoa in November 1925, recorded on the passenger lists as 'farmer, aged 39', but the following month this farmer joined the Operative Stonemasons' Society of New South Wales. His English would have been limited and no doubt infected with a good dose of the Doric dialect of the north-east of Scotland, so it says much for his skills that he was entrusted with the delicate operation of removing the

dog knobs from the stone's sides in Sydney. These granite protrusions enabled the cranes at the quarry, at Sydney Harbour and in Martin Place to lift and manoeuvre the stone into place. A photograph of the stone being set appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* but the quality is too poor to reproduce but in it the crane dog knobs are clearly visible.^{xi} Cudicio's task was to ensure that no trace of them remained to mar the appearance of the altar stone.



ABOVE LEFT: Their job done, a group of masons gather around the altar stone. Beside this photograph in Christine Greig's *'Not forgotten: Memorials in granite'* Bill Benzie and Joe Wallace are credited with the stone's inscriptions. Bill Benzie had originally taken his family from Aberdeen to Auckland but joined his fellow Aberdonians at Moruya for the duration of the Bridge contract. Joe Wallace was one of the thirty masons recruited from Aberdeen in 1926. Also named are George Allan and Tom Pittendreigh. They were amongst the earliest arrivals from Aberdeen in 1925. On the extreme left is Fioravanti Cudicio who would accompany the stone to Martin Place. Reg Saunders, who was an apprentice at the quarry when the stone was being prepared, remembered that William Cochrane

(ABOVE RIGHT) from Auchterarder in Perthshire, Scotland, was the operator of the surfacing machine which gave the stone its smooth finish.



LEFT: The weight and dimensions of the stone meant that all work was carried out at the quarry face. Bert Warner, who worked in the engine sheds, wrote of the operation to move the finished stone to the quayside: *'The block weighed eighteen tons, and our mobile crane could only lift fifteen tons, so it took a bit of juggling.'* John Gilmore can be seen looking on, no doubt nervously.

RIGHT: John Gilmore is again to the fore, his arm raised below the stone as it is lowered on to the steamer. In an address to the Moruya Rotary Club in 1959 he admitted that he gave a huge sigh of relief when the well-packaged stone was safely loaded, as did the captain of the steamer



The formal dedication of the stone took place on 8 August 1927 in the presence of Sir Dudley de Chair, the State Governor, and Jack Lang. Now everyone awaited the arrival from London of Mackennal's bronze figures to complete it.

Even before their arrival there was controversy. On 8 September 1927 the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that *'In some quarters objection has been taken to the design of the Martin Place Cenotaph, on the grounds that the bronze figures, a sailor and*

soldier, are not correctly poised. It was argued that instead of standing easy they should be at attention, arms reversed, and heads bowed'.^{xii}

To settle the point, the Memorial Committee cabled Sir Bertram Mackennal in London: 'Point raised in Press whether attitude figures standing easy on guard correct. Opinion has been expressed both should be at attention, reversed arms, head bowed. Kindly favour us with your views'. Mackennal's



response was short and to the point: 'Memorial not a tomb. Figures not mourning. Guarding altar of remembrance'. He had not designed a memorial which represented a tomb, a point previously made in the *Sydney Morning Herald*: 'The memorial will contrast strongly with the general design of war memorials, which, in nearly every instance, are based on the cenotaph or column idea. The design is an original one, and, according to Sir Bertram Mackennal, there is no other memorial of its kind in the world.' Yet

despite Mackennal's and the *Herald's* efforts, the memorial in Martin Place would still be referred to as a cenotaph, from the Greek meaning 'empty tomb'.

Bradfield was on hand for one last duty: to oversee the placement of the ten-foot high bronze figures of an AIF soldier in field service uniform and an RAN sailor in landing rig when they arrived from London in February 1929.

There was, however, one sour note. Bradfield's role in overseeing the preparation and erection of the memorial had been so prominent that some press reports referred to him as its designer.^{xiii} Mackennal was not best pleased when he read one such report

and fired off a cablegram to Bradfield from London: 'Astounded to read in Australian papers you designed Anzac memorial. Please write papers and deny this statement'. An embarrassed Bradfield, who earlier that same year had been embroiled in a very public spat with the British engineer, Ralph Freeman, over the design of the Harbour Bridge, was forced on the defensive. He cabled Mackennal claiming that he had communicated with the editor of the *Herald* the day following that newspaper's reference to him as the memorial's designer, but the editor of the *Herald* stated he had received no such message, so no denial had been published. Over the following days Bradfield took to the pages of the *Herald* to clarify his role. He had played no part in designing the altar stone or its base, and had only helped Mackennal prepare the necessary drawings to enable the contract to be placed with Dorman Long, and these, he added, 'were signed "Approved" by Sir Bertram Mackennal and by myself'.^{xiv}

Whatever criticisms were levelled at the memorial – and there were a few – there were many who commented favourably on the 'perfect smoothing' of the altar stone and the simplicity of its design: 'It stands forth without a touch of scroll or flourish or border or ornamentation of any kind'.^{xv} The *Sydney Morning Herald* agreed, describing it as 'the simplest, yet the most surprisingly effective monument that could be devised'.^{xvi} After inspecting it, the members of the Memorial Committee, declared themselves most satisfied with the way in which the contractors had done their work. The stone used was flawless, and experienced masons had declared that they had never seen a finer piece of work.^{xvii} Meanwhile those responsible for the memorial were back on task, producing flawless work for the Harbour Bridge.

ⁱ *Moruya Examiner*, 25 June 1927

ⁱⁱ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 February, 1926

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Construction and Local Government Journal*, 31 March 1926

^{iv} *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 March 1926

^v *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 March, 1926

^{vi} *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 July 1929

^{vii} *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 April 1929

^{viii} *Memoir*, Bert Warner

^{ix} *Memoir*, Reg Saunders

^x *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 August 1927

^{xi} *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 August 1927

^{xii} *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 September 1927

^{xiii} *Queensland Times*, 8 August 1927; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 February 1929

^{xiv} *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 August 1929

^{xv} *Queensland Times*, 8 August 1927

^{xvi} *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 August 1927

^{xvii} *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 August 1927