

Memorials, pylons and granite

by Bill Glennie

No sooner was the Great War ended than thought was given to how best to memorialise those who did not return. In a letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald* in July 1919, one member of the public, Vera Lambert, linked the idea of remembrance to the proposed Harbour Bridge, suggesting the bridge would be ‘*a memorial worthy of being regarded as a national tribute to the birth of Australia into nationhood*’. John Bradfield, the Chief Engineer of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, also tapped into the public mood for the need to memorialise the dead. In 1924 he included in his report on the tenders submitted to construct the bridge a drawing of the winning design as it might appear on the Bridge’s opening night, illuminated to represent the Sun and Crown, the badges of the Australian Imperial Force, as ‘*a fitting tribute to our soldiers*’.



Meanwhile in villages, towns and cities throughout Britain and the Dominions war memorial committees were established to prepare plans, raise funds and recruit sculptors and architects to commemorate the war dead. In Britain the standard was set by the design of Sir Edward Lutyens for the national war memorial in London: a cenotaph – an empty tomb – set on top of a tall stepped pylon. The influence of its plain and stark design stripped of unnecessary ornamentation can be seen in the Harbour Bridge pylons.

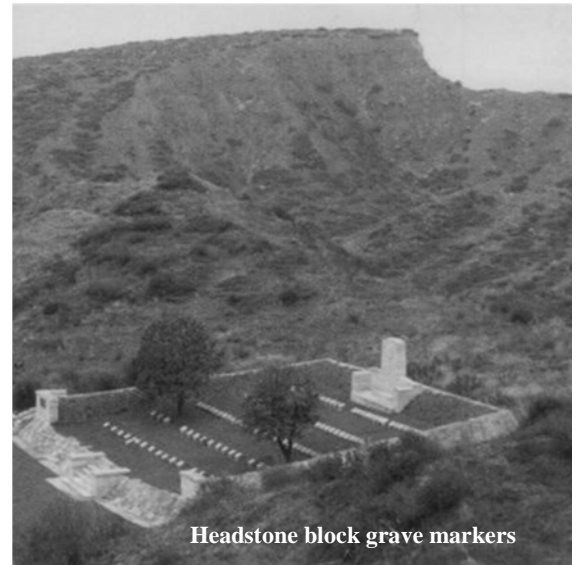


London War Memorial



Sir John James Burnet

The Glasgow architect, Sir John Burnet, was influenced by Sir Edward Lutyens. Burnet was sent by the Imperial War Graves Commission to design memorials and cemeteries in Gallipoli. There he worked closely with two Australians: Lieutenant Cyril Hughes, who had worked tirelessly over the winter of 1918-1919 locating cemeteries and abandoned graves, and Lieutenant Gordon Keesing, a New South Wales architect who had been working on memorials dedicated to the AIF in France and Belgium. Burnet recommended that most of the small cemeteries rediscovered by Hughes and his team should remain in their original positions, and isolated graves or those at risk from erosion or landslide



Headstone block grave markers

should be moved to the nearest cemetery on secure ground. Burnet was responsible for recommending the use of headstone blocks, rather like low reading desks, as grave markers in the Gallipoli cemeteries, these being practical in a landscape prone to earth tremors and erosion. These grave-markers are unique in Great War cemeteries. Many Australians will be familiar with Burnet’s fifty-foot high Lone Pine memorial. It was frequently referred to as a pylon by contemporaries, appropriately enough in the light of Burnet’s later work on the architectural features of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. On it are inscribed the names of almost 5,000 Australian men whose remains were never identified. More Australian names are commemorated on another of Burnet’s



Lone Pine

working on Ailsa Craig, an island ten miles off Scotland's Ayrshire coast. Ailsa's bluish granite, commonly used for curling stones, was being quarried for the floor and altar of Scotland's National War Memorial in Edinburgh Castle which took the form of a Hall of Memory.

Scottish National War Memorial



According to family tradition, Gilmore's wife, Mary, noticed an advert in a newspaper which had been wrapped around butcher meat for a Quarry Manager in Moruya, New South Wales, where the granite for the Harbour Bridge's pylons would be quarried and dressed. In November 1924, following a successful interview in London, John Gilmore and his family arrived at Moruya.



Helles Memorial

Gallipoli memorials, the obelisk – also frequently referred to as a pylon – at Cape Helles.

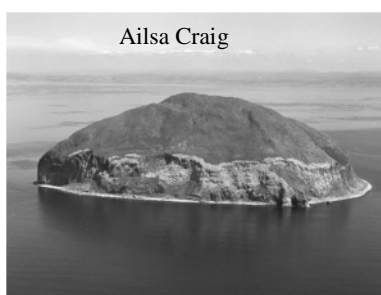
Burnet's cenotaph for Glasgow, his home town, is made of granite from Kemnay Quarry in Aberdeenshire.



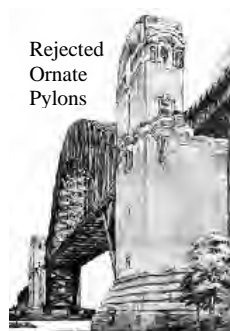
Glasgow Cenotaph

Kemnay granite was preferred for public buildings and monumental work. John Gilmore, Archie Davidson, George Allan and several other granite men who worked at Moruya had associations with Kemnay quarry. It is possible – no more than that – that some of the men who worked on Burnet's Glasgow Cenotaph helped prepare the granite for the Harbour Bridge pylons at Moruya.

In the aftermath of the Great War, when the granite industry in Scotland was experiencing a slump, the demand for granite memorials offered a brief respite. In 1924 John Gilmore was



Ailsa Craig

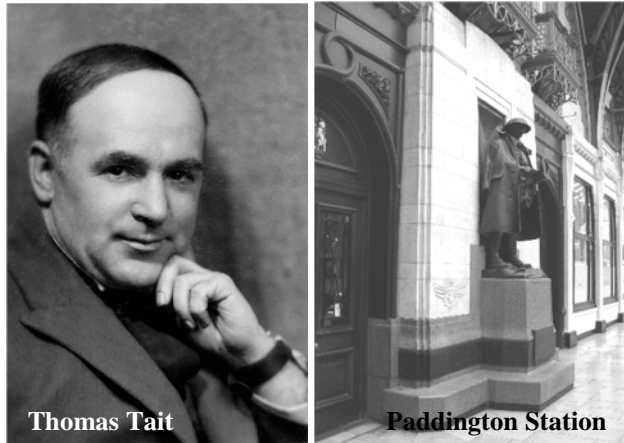


Rejected Ornate Pylons

believed it showed both the arch and the pylons to best effect. Although Bradfield rejected it he did accept Burnet's simplified pylon design. Bradfield also rejected Burnet's suggestion that concrete – 'the new stone' – would be a better choice than granite – which was just as well for the economy of Moruya.



Burnet left the fine detail of the pylons to his partner, another Scottish architect, Thomas Tait, who was

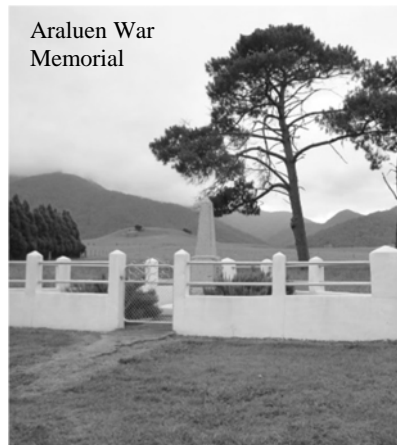


Thomas Tait

Paddington Station

also involved in war memorial design. Every day commuters arriving in London's Paddington Station pass Tait's memorial to the men of the Great Western Railway Company who died in the Great War. Tait worked on the marble setting for the bronze statue of a soldier designed by sculptor, Christopher Jagger. This bronze statue was cast at the same foundry in south London used by Sir Bertram Mackennal for the bronze soldier and sailor who adorn Sydney's granite memorial in Martin Place. The art deco simplicity of the setting would find its way on to the Harbour Bridge pylons.

In an address to the Moruya Rotary Club in October 1959 John Gilmore described the Sydney Cenotaph, *'entirely dressed and lettered at Moruya'*, as *'the biggest job during the whole seven years'* of the life of the quarry. Less well known is another war memorial prepared at Moruya. A photograph of Araluen War Memorial and an unnamed mason standing next to it can be found in Christine Greig's



Araluen War Memorial

'Not forgotten: Memorials in granite'. The memorial which stands in a rural setting west of Canberra was unveiled in March 1931 and is recorded as being a donation from the Moruya Quarry.

Many of the men who worked at the Quarry – Australians, Scots and Italians – had seen service in the Great War and had survived.



Shown above are Bill Benzie (left) and his brothers. He served in an artillery regiment in the war. Bill Benzie and his family left Aberdeen for Auckland in 1922 where he worked for Parkinsons, the biggest monumental yard in New Zealand. But the granite grapevine got to work and on hearing of the burgeoning community of Aberdeenshire men at Moruya Bill took his family there in early 1926. He and Joe Wallace inscribed the lettering on the Sydney Cenotaph.

Sadly neither Sir John Burnet nor Thomas Tait visited Australia to see the pylons. But in 1938 Tait was appointed in overall charge of the Empire Exhibition in Glasgow. In the Australian Pavilion was a thirty foot long model of the Harbour Bridge with ferry boats and liners passing under it and cars and trains crossing it. The Bridge's four monumental pylons, inspired by war memorial design as far afield as Glasgow and Gallipoli and designed and produced by architects, quarrymen and masons who had worked on these, were viewed by over six million visitors, and surely included Thomas Tait.

