

STATUE OF CAPTAIN SIR ROSS SMITH

Creswell Gardens, King William Road

The bronze statue of Sir Ross Smith was unveiled on 10 December 1927, the anniversary of the landing of Sir Ross and his crew in Australia after the epic flight from Britain to Australia.

Sir Ross MacPherson Smith (1892-1922) was born in Adelaide, the son of a pastoral station manager and his wife. After returning to South Australia from school in Scotland, Ross joined the Australian Mounted Cadets and in 1910 was selected to tour Britain and the USA as the South Australian representative. He then joined the 10th Australian Regiment, the Adelaide Rifles. In August 1914 he enlisted as a private in the 3rd Light Horse Regiment, Australian Imperial Forces. He embarked for Egypt on 22 October and from there was sent to Gallipoli in May 1915. He was invalided to Britain in October but rejoined his regiment in 1916 and fought in the battle at Romani in August 1916.

In July 1917 he volunteered to join the Australian Flying Corps. Smith qualified as a pilot and during the war served mainly with Number 1 Squadron, Australian Flying Corps, a general purpose squadron flying a variety of aircraft in defence of the Suez Canal zone. In January 1918 the squadron was designated a fighter squadron and took part in General Allenby's 1918 offensive against the Turkish in the Wady Fara. By the end of the war, Ross had twice been decorated with the Military Cross and three times with the Distinguished Flying Cross. By the end of the war, his flying experience consisted of bombing raids and photographic flights and as a consequence he was selected to co-pilot a twin-engined Handley Page aircraft in a pioneer flight from Cairo to Calcutta in late 1918.

In late 1919, Ross and his brother Keith responded to the Australian government's challenge to aviators to fly from England to Australia in less than 30 days. The government had offered a prize of £10,000 for the first aviator to do so. The brothers attempted the flight in a Vickers Vimy, with Keith acting as the co-pilot and navigator and two mechanics accompanying them on the flight. They left England on 12 November 1919 in poor and hazardous flying conditions. On 10 December 1919 they landed in Darwin, having travelled a distance of 18,250 km in under 28 days. Both Ross and Keith were immediately knighted.

In 1922 the brothers proposed a round the world flight in a Vickers Viking amphibian. The attempt ended disastrously. While Ross and his long serving crew member, Bennett were test-flying the aircraft at Weybridge near London, the aircraft spun into the ground and both were killed. Ross had not flown for many months and never previously in an aircraft of that type and the committee investigating the accident concluded that the plane crashed as a result of pilot error.

The bodies of Sir Ross Smith and Lieutenant Bennett were brought home to South Australia and Smith was buried on the 15 June 1922 after a state funeral.

The flight of the Smith Brothers had an enormous effect on the community. It must be remembered that it was less than twenty years since the aeroplane had been developed and to cover the distance from Britain to Australia in less than 30 days was seen as an incredible and

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almost unbelievable achievement. The flight profoundly affected Australian's long-standing feeling of isolation from the 'Mother Country'. It acted to link the northern and southern hemispheres and heralded technological advances that have contributed to the modern notion of the 'Global Village'. The achievements of the Smiths and their companions was marvelled at in both hemispheres, but in their home town the Smith brothers were justifiably considered 'heroes'. The unexpected and tragic death of Sir Ross Smith was the cause of great sadness in South Australia. Smith was accorded a state funeral and thousands lined the streets on route to the North Road Cemetery where he is buried.

The statue commemorates both the man and the famous flight. It symbolises the attitudes of the South Australian community to the news of the death of a South Australian born man who was perceived to be a hero.

The history of the move to erect a memorial dates from soon after Smith's death in 1922. The *Register* newspaper conducted an appeal to raise funds for the purpose of erecting a statue to commemorate Smith's life and work. An amount of £1500 was handed to the Lord Mayor, Sir Lewis Cohen. Cohen called a public meeting in October 1922 to establish support for erecting a memorial to Smith. It was estimated that the statue would cost approximately £5000 and consequently the meeting decided to form a committee to raise more money. In 1923 the Executive committee of the Sir Ross Smith Memorial Fund and the Council selected a site for the erection of the statue. The statue would be placed in the Creswell Gardens, between War Memorial Drive and the pathway leading to the Adelaide Oval entrance. The pedestal was erected in 1923 in preparation for the statue.



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A design competition was organised in 1924 and fifteen models were submitted. The first prize was awarded to Mr Frederick Brook Hitch, ARBS, of Queen's Terrace, London. Little is known about Hitch. He does not appear in any immediately available texts on sculptors. This is perhaps explained by the fact that sculptors working in the early decades of the twentieth century with a traditional approach to their craft, do not figure in the literature. Any writing on the topic is devoted to the experimental sculptors working in the new Modernism. It is known that Hitch was born in 1877 and was a pupil of the Royal Academy Schools and the City Guilds Institute.

Adelaide City Council received some rather creative suggestions from members of the public in relation to an appropriate memorial to Smith. Suggestions included an aquarium at the seaside, a large finger with a light at the top placed on Mount Lofty. Thankfully the winning design was a much more seemly memorial to Smith. It takes

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the form of a bronze of Sir Ross Smith in the ordinary flying uniform of a military aviator standing on a pedestal. He is standing on a hemisphere representing the world with one foot planted on Australia and the other on England. On the northern side of Smith is the figure of an airman, designed to represent Flight holding a spray of palm leaves and an atlas. On the southern side of Smith, is an angel representing Intrepidity holding an aeroplane. The four sides of the pedestal contain representations of incidents that occurred during the flight. The memorial cost £5000 and the contract for the construction of the foundations was let to Emmett and Sons. The pedestal was built by the South Australian Monumental Works Company.

City of Adelaide, *City of Adelaide Reference Book*, Corporation of the City of Adelaide, Adelaide, 1983, p 112; Searle, Geoffrey (general ed.), *The Australian Dictionary of Biography, 1891-1939*, Melbourne University Press, South Australia, 1988, pp 654-6; *The Advertiser*, 10 December 1927, p 13; Town Clerk's Docket, 1348/1946; *Register*, 3 October 1927; *Register*, 2 December 1924; *Advertiser*, 23 January 1924; Annual Report, 1923, p 3; Annual Report, 1922, p 3; Annual Report 1927, p 23.

The text in this Information Sheet was copied from the **City of Adelaide Heritage Study**, October 1990, Volume Two, part of a review of the City of Adelaide Plan 1986-1991. The photographs contained in this Information Sheet are a selection of those held by Heritage Services, in digital format.

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The heritage related Principles of Development Control as well as the Precinct specific objectives and Principles of Development Control are contained in the Adelaide (City) Development Plan. These should be referred to in whole when contemplating any development.

Further information on the Heritage Incentives Scheme, an initiative of Council to sponsor timely and appropriate conservation action is available upon request of the Customer Service Centre.