

REGISTER ASSESSMENT REPORTS.A. HERITAGE ACT 1978

ITEM NO:

DRINKING FOUNTAIN - MEMORIAL TO JAH GARDNER  
ELDER PARK  
ADELAIDE

Statement of Cultural Significance

A marble drinking fountain erected in 1887 to commemorate the death of JAH Gardner who was killed whilst fire-fighting on 24 December 1886. The memorial was paid for by public subscription.

Relevant Criteria

A memorial important to the understanding of the fabric of nineteenth century Adelaide society, and its response to tragedy.

Significant Interest

1. Historical : demonstrates an important theme in South Australia's history, the commemoration by nineteenth century society of those who were perceived to have died tragically and unselfishly in the service of the public and it illustrates the parochial response to tragedy as emphasised by the isolation and relative parochialism of this Colonial capital.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that this item be included on the Register of State Heritage Items.

MANAGER  
STATE HERITAGE BRANCH

Date:

Item No:

Memorial to JAH Gardner  
Elder Park  
Adelaide

#### ANALYSIS OF SIGNIFICANT INTEREST

##### Historical

A memorial erected to commemorate the fireman JAH Gardner who was killed whilst fighting a fire in Rundle Street on 24 December 1886. The statue was erected in 1887 and consists of a marble fountain set within a small structure with columns. It was paid for by public subscription.

The background to the erection of this drinking fountain is a curious one. It was erected to perpetuate the memory of a fireman, killed whilst fighting a fire in shops in Rundle Street on Christmas Eve in 1886. The erection of a marble drinking fountain seemed an appropriate memorial for a man burnt to death. However it was not the only memorial erected to Gardner, nor was Gardner the only one to die that night. In all, Gardner's memory is perpetuated by a headstone at the Mitcham cemetery where he was buried and a life size portrait donated to the Adelaide Fire Brigade. This would seem to suggest that Gardner occupied a prominent or powerful position in the fire brigade or perhaps that he was very popular or died as a result of an act of outstanding bravery. This is not the case.

A fire in Rundle Street started at about 8pm on Christmas Eve when the street was busy with shoppers. Four premises in all were burnt: Castle drapery shop, two shops owned by Cunningham and the Academy of Music. The fire started in the Academy which had been previously destroyed by fire and on a regular basis. When the fire was noticed the brigade was called. Three firemen, John Gardner, Albert Clark and another man entered one of the burning shops with their hose. When the hose tangled, the third went out of the building to find the fault and during this time the building collapsed, trapping Clark and Gardner inside. Clark was evidently still alive and was found quickly, pinned under some debris. To free him, a rope was tied around him and the crowd attempted to pull him free. Apparently he was in so much pain that they stopped and found a softer rope, which they then proceeded to use to pull him out. Incredibly he was reported as being able to walk when freed and was taken to the nearby Globe Hotel. However he was soon transported to the Adelaide Hospital where he died. Gardner's body was not found until 2.30pm on Christmas Day. He was, said the paper, "burnt, blackened and disfigured."

Clark was a well known and well liked young man. Gardner on the other hand, had only been in the colony for two years, and a member of the Head Station Brigade for 18 months. He was a single, seafaring man whose mother lived in Ireland. He had some relatives in Parkside and was simply described as reliable and steady.

Soon after the deaths, friends of Clark's held a meeting "respecting a monument". It was said that "Gardner had few friends and acquaintances to bring forward his claim to similar recognition." As a result, the South Wanderers Cricket Club, after a trip to Port Victor, decided to raise some money for a monument and started with a concert. The Gardner Memorial Fund was established and plans were made for an adequate memorial. The fund was obviously successful, arguably more successful than Clark's. One article commented that "it was a pity that the funds were not made a joint affair under the circumstances."

The fountain on the City Bridge Road (now King William Road) near the Rotunda, was opened on 10 October 1887. Its care was handed over from the Memorial Committee to the Mayor. The fountain and fixtures cost £100 and was described to be in a "chaste gothic style". It was constructed of white Kapunda marble, and is 9 foot 8 inches high on a 4 foot square base. The bases are composed of West Island granite and there are four taps and a basin to the fountain proper, above which is a canopy supported on four columns of blue Kapunda marble. The canopy was hewn out of one block of marble and weighs over three tons. The fountain was the work of Mr Herring of West Terrace and the plumbing was provided by Mr Harrison.

Frederick Herring was born in Adelaide in 1851 and died in 1916. He was well known as a monumental mason/sculptor and the proprietor of West Terrace marble works established by members of his family in the 1860s. Herring was apprenticed to the family business as a young man. According to his obituary, he was an enterprising man whose work kept pace with the times. He made sculpture a feature of his business and received commissions from wealthy South Australians. Herring opened marble quarries on land he owned at Angaston and was a staunch advocate of the use of local materials. Apparently he was the only craftsman when giving evidence at a Royal Commission on Federal Tarrifs, to declare that local marble was of commercial and workable value. Herring died at the age of 65 on the 13 November 1916. It is not known what became of the business.

#### References

City of Adelaide, City of Adelaide Reference Book, Corporation of the City of Adelaide, Adelaide, 1983, p. 118.

The Register, 27 December 1886, pp. 5-6.

The Adelaide Observer, 26 February 1887, p. 39.

The Observer, 15 October 1887, p. 33.

The Observer, 18 November 1916, p. 34.

96.4.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

Representation on Register

There are three monuments included on the Register of State Heritage Items in the City of Adelaide.

Integrity

Not altered.

Circumstances

Under no known threat.

Site Record

Memorial to JAH Gardner

Elder Park

Adelaide

Item No:

AMG Reference

Description

Marble drinking fountain with canopy.

Boundary

Land Description

Land unallotted outside Town Acres.

LGA

Adelaide

Owner

Adelaide City Council

Use

Condition

Good

Other Assessments

None

Heritage Status

Nil

Photographs

Report by

Adelaide City Council