

WOMEN'S WAR MEMORIAL GARDENS - THE CROSS OF SACRIFICE

Pennington Gardens, King William Road

To mark the anniversary of the landing of the ANZAC forces on Gallipoli in 1915, Tuesday, 25 April 1922 was declared a public holiday. The chief event of the day was the procession of returned soldiers through the streets of Adelaide. The procession gathered at Pennington Gardens to witness the unveiling of what was called the Women's War Memorial. The memorial was erected by South Australian women in remembrance of those who died in the War. It was commented in the *Advertiser* at the time that "It has become almost a trite saying that during the war 'the women played their part' ...Men died amid the battle din, and their valiant deeds were blazoned abroad; the women suffered behind closed doors, weeping silently and alone. Now the war is a thing of the past, but they have not forgotten the loved ones who fell."

When the question of erecting war memorials to the First World War arose in England it was decided that there could be no more fitting emblem than the cross to perpetuate the memory of the soldiers who fell. The Cross erected by the women of South Australia follows a design by the English architects, Arthur Blomfield and Sir Edwin Lutyens who designed a modern cross that was used throughout England for the purpose of commemorating those who died in the First World War.

The Cross erected by the women of South Australia followed this model. It is 38 feet high, with a cross arm of 8 feet in width, resting on a stepped base of 16 feet in width at the bottom. There are four steps. From this rises a tall column made from Tea Tree Gully grained freestone. The *Advertiser* commented:

It is a magnificent piece of workmanship and reflects the highest credit on the contractor, Mr. Walter Torode, and the quarrymen and stonemasons who were responsible for preparing and erecting it.

Every effort was taken to ensure that the Cross was perfect. Alfred Wells was the consulting architect. Another step and a tessellated pavement were added to the base of the monument after its initial opening. Attached to the southern face of the Cross is a sword, made of gunmetal, which is 12 feet in length. Embraced within the base of the Cross, the names of a large number of soldiers are recorded and on the base of the monument, the following words were inscribed. "To the glory of God and the imperishable memory of the men who gave their lives in the great war, 1914-1918. A tribute from the women of South Australia."

The *Advertiser* commented that the Cross is set in what will be a beautiful garden, cruciform in shape in which circular hedges of olives have been planted. Flower beds have been laid out and cypress trees and ornamental shrubs have also been planted. In the south eastern corner of the garden it is intended to erect a Stone of Remembrance.

The amount of £3000 was raised to erect the memorial on land granted by the Council and it was commented that it was likely that another £1000 would be needed to finish the project.

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Nine or ten thousand people including Adelaide's most prominent citizens witnessed the unveiling of the Cross of Sacrifice on 25 April 1922. Brigadier General Leane unveiled the memorial with the words, "I unveil this memorial, erected in honour of those great men of our Empire, and of the Allied armies, who gave their lives for freedom in the great war." With that, the Union Jack flag that had covered the monument, was removed and a minute silence followed.

Leane commented in his speech that the memorial commemorated "the splendid loyalty and assistance that had been rendered by the women to the Empire and her soldiers, not only while they fought, but also since their return." He further commented that ANZAC day "marked the birth of the Australian nation" and eulogised about the bravery and sacrifice of the Australian soldiers. At the close of the speech women laid wreaths at the base of the Cross, before the procession walked to the Parade Grounds where Victory Medals were distributed to those men who had embarked before 30 June 1916.

Adelaide City Council granted a site for the erection of the Women's War Memorial in 1919. Previously the Committee had proposed another location for the memorial - in the vicinity of the Art Gallery. The Committee consulted the English authorities who suggested that the atmosphere would not be appropriate. The desired character of all war memorial was places of peace and tranquillity. The plan was modified and submitted to Council for approval. The execution of the design for the garden necessitated the removal of a path through that part of the Parklands and the removal of several trees. The plan for a "garden of remembrance" was approved by Council in March with some minor modifications. The garden was designed by Herbert Baker, in conjunction with Blomfield and Sir Edwin Lutyens who had designed the Cross of Sacrifice and the Stone of Remembrance.

The significance of the memorial is clearly associated with Australia's response to the sacrifices made and the legends born in the First World War. It is interesting that although Leane commented that the nation of Australia was born on Anzac Day, it was the Union Jack that covered the Cross prior to its opening. Much has been written about the effect of the War on the Australian psyche, and although it appears to have prompted some feelings of nationalism the speech made at the unveiling of this memorial reveals the strength of the perceived link with Britain, and that South Australia was still firmly part of the British Empire.

The memorial simply marks the loss felt by all South Australians and was erected to forever commemorate the dead and express the community's gratitude and respect three years after the close of 'the War to end all Wars'.

Erected in a quiet corner of the beautiful gardens which stretch from the Torrens northward to Pennington-terrace, and just south of that thoroughfare, on the eastern side of King William-road, is a magnificent memorial, the outward and visible evidence of the love enshrined in the heart of every mother, wife, sister, and sweetheart for those who fell in freedom's cause.

The memorial, situated on the axis of the Cathedral was designed to represent an open air cathedral, the walls of which were formed by an olive hedge. The garden area is approximately 300 feet by 75 feet. It features the Stone of Remembrance placed in the 'apse', at the eastern end, with a pathway leading to the Cross of Sacrifice at the western end. The

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enclosure contains two pathways which form a cross. The remaining area is planted with lawns and flower gardens in a geometrical style. The flower beds were originally proposed to be in the shape of graves, but on request the Committee widened the beds.

The memorial was designed to be a tranquil and peaceful place, set in a quiet glade in the Parklands. The enclosed nature of the garden and its screening from the surroundings prompts the desired response. It is an attractive memorial set within a restful and peaceful garden. In reporting the opening ceremony, the *Advertiser* commented that the “whole design was beautiful in the extreme and will constitute an imperishable memorial to South Australia’s brave sons.”

The Advertiser, 26 April, 1922, p 8; *The Advertiser*, 25 April 1922, p 7; ACC, Annual Report, 1923, p 36; ACC, Annual Report, 1920, p 6; ACC, Annual Report, 1919, p 9; ACC, Annual Report, 1922, pp 26 and 42.

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