

## ASSESSMENT OF HERITAGE VALUE

### MEMORIAL TO SIR THOMAS ELDER GOODMAN CRESCENT UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE

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#### DESCRIPTION OF THE PLACE

Larger than life-size bronze statue mounted on a granite pedestal which bears a plaque on the front (south) elevation which reads: 'Sir Thomas Elder G.C.M.G. 1817 - 1897.' Elder's achievements are represented in bronze reliefs on three sides of the pedestal.

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#### STATEMENT OF HERITAGE VALUE

This monumental bronze statue and pedestal commemorates the life of Sir Thomas Elder. A founding member of Elder Smith & Co, Elder was one of South Australia's greatest benefactors, leaving bequests for workingmen's homes, the Art Gallery, hospitals and churches. His greatest generosity however, was directed towards the University of Adelaide, and ensured the continuing existence of the University in its founding years.

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#### RELEVANT CRITERIA (Under Section 16 of the *Heritage Act 1993*)

(g) it has a special association with the life or work of a person or organisation or an event of historical importance.

The memorial commemorates the life of Sir Thomas Elder, a notable and well known South Australian. Elder made a significant contribution to the economic development of the State and was a benefactor to cultural and educational activities within the State, in particular the University of Adelaide where his memorial now stands. The statue is the only sculptural memorial to Elder, although other memorials to his life exist in the form of buildings, including Elder Hall in front of which the statue stands and the former Workmen's Homes (Elder Mews) in Frome Road. Sculptural panels on the plinth of the statue depict various aspects of Elder's life: his association with the financing of the university and other cultural institutions and his role in the exploration and development of the northern regions of the State for pastoral activities. The statue is the work of noted British sculptor Edward Alfred Briscoe Drury and is one of three of that artist's commissions in South Australia.

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## BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### Sir Thomas Elder

Thomas, born in Kirkcaldy, Scotland in 1817, was the fourth son of George and Joanna Elder, merchants and ship owners who had a farming background (Bulbeck, p. 117). As early as 1839 the Elder family showed an interest in the new colony of South Australia, when one of Thomas' elder brothers, Alexander, arrived in the colony with a shipload of rum, spirits and other commodities. Alexander began trading between Adelaide and Tasmania, expanding the family's influence, and was later joined by other members of the family.

In 1854 Thomas, at the age of 36, was the last of the Elder family to arrive in Adelaide. He worked with his brother George for a year before George returned to England. Thomas' sister, Joanna, who had also arrived in South Australia during the early 1850s, was to influence Thomas' future by marrying Robert Barr Smith (Bulbeck, p. 118). A partnership between Thomas Elder, Robert Barr Smith, Edward Stirling and John Taylor was formed. After the retirement of Stirling and Taylor, the firm became known as Elder Smith & Co, and was to become one of largest wool handling companies in the world (Peake-Jones, p. 6; Bulbeck, p. 118).

Elder Smith & Co took a risk in 1859 when the company financed the Wallaroo and Moonta copper mines which eventually became the source of vast wealth. Income from the mines enabled the company to acquire huge landholdings in South Australia (including Paratoo, Umbertana, Mount Lyndhurst and Beltana), Queensland and Western Australia, an area of land larger than Scotland (Peake-Jones, p. 6; Cameron, p. 30). It was not just the large scale of this enterprise which enabled the company to survive the droughts of the early 1860s, but also the significant improvements made to the land. Fencing and well-digging programs ensured the viability of these properties, even in the worst years of drought (Cameron, p. 30; Bulbeck, p. 118).

According to Ken Peake-Jones it seems that the success of Elder Smith & Co can be attributed to Thomas Elder's own interests, particularly that of exploration, supporting and financing several expeditions

The amassing of this empire was due in no small part to Thomas Elder's encouragement of exploration . . . he saw the value of camels in Australia's outback, and set up their importation in a scientific and logical manner. His first batch of breeding stock from India included some chosen for speed, some for stamina and some for strength. He established them in a stud at Beltana, together with a staff of Afghan drivers. A hundred of his camels were hired by the government for the construction of the Overland Telegraph, others by Warburton, Giles, Lewis and Lindsay.

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Peake-Jones, p. 6

Elder Smith & Co continued to succeed, with numerous stores, offices and agencies throughout Australia and overseas. In 1888 the company became Elder Smith & Co Limited and continues to this day under the name of Elders (Bulbeck, p. 118).

Sir Thomas (appointed KCMG in 1878 and GCMG in 1887) spent 43 years in South Australia and became one of this state's greatest benefactors. He was a member of the Legislative Council in 1863-79 and 1871-78, but otherwise led a reclusive life out of the public eye. He established a substantial property at 'Birksgate', Glen Osmond as well as a 'Scottish baronial' style mansion, 'The Pinnacles' (later known as 'Carminow'), near the Mount Lofty summit where he died in 1897 (Pike, p. 134; Peake-Jones, p.9). South Australia had lost one of its greatest benefactors but was

fortunate that so able and generous a man made the state his home. His lack of a public image made his full stature hard to assess. A canny Scot, well educated, balanced and cultured, he chose to influence rather than command, to oil the wheels rather than drive the machine.

Peake-Jones, p. 9

Apart from the legacy of his vast pastoral company, Elder left many other indications of his generosity. He was an ardent support of the Art Gallery and bequeathed the Gallery £25,000 'to be spent in the purchase of pictures only' (Advertiser, 31 October 1998, Weekend, p. 5). The Elder Bequest was the first major endowment to an Australian art gallery. He donated the rotunda (which bears his name) to the Adelaide Zoo and also supported the Botanic Gardens. His will included bequests to the Anglican community for a cathedral and to the Methodists for Prince Alfred College. He left £25,000 for the foundation of workingmen's homes, enabling the trustees to erect 48 homes in Thebarton and at the southern end of Frome Road. (Pike, p. 134; Bulbeck, p. 120). But by far his greatest generosity had been focussed on the university.

The university was the 'largest single recipient of his largesse, which amounted to £103,000' (Cameron, p. 29). In 1874 his financial support helped to establish chairs in mathematics and general science and between 1883 and 1897 he donated £31,000 to the Medical School. Elder donated £21,000 for the School of Music and Elder Scholarships to the Royal College of Music in London. The school of music was changed in 1897 to the Conservatorium of Music and was the first such in any Australian university (Bulbeck, p. 120). Although credit for funding the foundation of the university should be given to W W Hughes, Elder's continuing generosity and support ensured the continued existence of the institution. His influence was therefore the first to be officially recognised by the university.

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### The Statue

A statue committee was established in 1898 with Sir Samuel Way (then Vice-Chancellor of the university) as the chair. A bronze memorial was considered to be appropriate, although Australian sculptors were spurned by Way who desired 'to have a work by some competent English sculptor of reputation.' (*South Australiana*, p. 106). After much correspondence between Adelaide and the Agent-General in London, Alfred Drury was commissioned to undertake the work for £900 (Cameron, p. 31).

Edward Alfred Briscoe Drury (1856-1944) studied art at the Oxford School of Art and at South Kensington under Dalou and Lanteri. He later worked with Dalou in Paris, who had a great influence on his work, and under J E Boehm (Waters, p. 98; <http://www.speel.demon.co.uk/artists2/drury.htm>). Drury was a sculptor of figure subjects, creating his work mostly in bronze and marble. His success was reflected in the range of public sculptures he was commissioned to produce, including 'the stone sculpture groups on top of the former War Office on the Victoria Embankment, four enormous figures for Vauxhall Bridge, and the reliefs and figures of the main entrance facade of the Victoria and Albert Museum.' ([www.speel.demon.co.uk/artists2](http://www.speel.demon.co.uk/artists2)). Drury was exhibiting at the Royal Academy from 1885, elected an ARA in 1900 and RA in 1913. He died in December 1944 (Waters, p. 98).

The University faced long delays in the completion of the Elder statue after refusing Drury's request to increase the original fee. By October 1902 the pedestal was completed and in place. Way, finding the delays unacceptable, wrote to London threatening no further commissions from South Australia, but his words had little effect. Coronation statues of King Edward VII were given priority over 'colonial' memorials (Cameron, p. 31).

The memorial, complete with the bronze statue of Elder, cast by Burton of London, was unveiled on 29 July 1903 by the Governor, Sir George Ruthven Le Hunte (*Advertiser*, 30 July 1903, p. 6d). A description of the memorial is given by Cameron

Sir Thomas was placed facing away from the university he had so generously endowed. He stands rather pompously with one hand clasping his lapel, a position which has prompted other student pranksters to add painted swords to his apparel. The 12 feet (3.7m) high pedestal of Aberdeen granite was the gift of an anonymous donor and cost £266. The panels are more interesting than the statue. On the western panel a female figure holds a model of the Mitchell Building and is flanked by a mother with baby, and the figure of Medicine. This is meant to symbolise the giving of today's children to the care of the university, producing the esteemed professionals of the future. The eastern panel represents the muses with Painting, Music and Literature in the foreground and Sculpture peeping from behind. A winding camel train on the northern panel, an appropriate reminder of Elder's practical assistance in the exploration of the colony, is probably the least successful.

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Cameron, p. 35

Drury was subsequently given two other commissions in South Australia. In 1916 the statue of C C Kingston in Victoria Square was unveiled, and Sir Samuel Way would have been pleased to see that his memorial on North Terrace, unveiled in 1924, was also Drury's work.

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## REFERENCES

*Advertiser*, 31 October 1998, Weekend, p. 5, 'Elder Statesman of Bequests'

Bulbeck, F. P. 1998, *Some Plaques and Memorials of South Australia*, Author, Adelaide

Cameron, S. 1997, *Silent Witnesses: Adelaide's Statues and Monuments*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, p. 29

Peake-Jones, K. 1998, 'Sir Thomas Elder G.C.M.G., 1818 - 1897', in *Geonews*, v. 5, no. 1, March/April 1998, pp. 6 -10

Pike, D. 1979, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 4, Melbourne University Press, pp. 133-134

Queale, M. & Di Lernia, N. 1996, *Adelaide's Architecture and Art: A Walking Guide*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town

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*Advertiser*, 30 July 1903, p. 6d

*Register*, 30 July 1903, p. 8a

Waters, G. M. 1975, *Dictionary of British Artists, Working 1900 - 1950*, Eastbourne Fine Art, Eastbourne.

<http://www.speel.demon.co.uk/artists2/drury.htm>

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## APPENDIX 1

### Description of the Panels by Mr H P Gill (*Advertiser*, 30 July 1903, 6d)

The chief panel faces the west, the main building of the University. The chief figure (female) holds a model of the University, and represents the genius of the University, who receives endowment from a figure (male) on the right, whilst an amorini offers her flowers; beyond these figures and between the two principal is a female holding a cup with a serpent emblematic of the medical profession, and the panel is balanced by the figure (maternal) on the left, who holds in her arms and embraces her child. Here the sculptor shows the serene spirit of culture, whose opportunity in this new land has been created by the benevolent liberality of our leading men; to Culture is offered the flowers of the earth; and to her care are brought the children of the present, who are the hope of the future; the figure of Medicine typifies that the School of Medicine which is here and elsewhere looked upon as a great force in the work of the University.

The panel which faces east comprises five female figures, and represents the Arts. In the centre stands Literature with an open book; on her left is Music with the violin; on the right Painting, with the palette; in the background are Sculpture and another figure. These cluster around Literature, and from their yearning towards her express clearly the artist's conception that literature was the first of all the arts, as it still is the first in every University, and it is to Literature that the exponents of the sister arts of Music and Painting turn for inspiration. The University already embraces the art of music; how soon or how long may it be ere the artists' dream be realised and the University's sphere widened to embrace the fine arts of painting and sculpture?

The third panel faces north, and represents a camel train upon its journey over the arid country; and the artist has seized the opportunity of bringing into this panel, denied him in the others, various planes of distance. As the team passes across the view, and winds away through the land from the south towards the north (the abode of the sun, who rides the heavens), the diminution of the animals in the receding planes of distance affords a powerful contrast in scale and modelling, compared with the two camels in the immediate foreground, and renders this panel strong and powerful, a fit conception and a proper and adequate panel to grace the pedestal which lifts aloft the statue of him who had the foresight to see the value of, and the energy and capacity to carry out, the introduction of the ship of the desert to the regions of this State which had previously been almost closed to the people of his adopted country.

### Description of the Panels by Miss M A Overbury (*Advertiser*, 30 July 1903, 6d)

The panels are emblematic of the arts, enterprises and charities to which, by gift and bequest, Sir Thomas Elder largely contributed. The first has for its leading figure a stately woman type of our Alma Mater, as the little model she carries in her hand denotes. To her joyous offers its flower, and from her venerable learning receives due requital. Science is recognised by her lamp, while Charity, a sweet maternal figure, caresses an infant. A striking effect both of contrast and balance is noticeable in this panel, and the heads are full of character and distinction. The companion panel also includes five figures, representative of the arts, endowed by the late knight-Music and Singing, linked in embrace, occupy the centre; while Painting, with a head almost virile in type, fills the right hand side; a softer face

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beside perhaps embodies the sister art of Drawing, as Sculpture, to whom the artist has given finely moulded but strenuous features, and strong sinewy hands, appears on the extreme left. The pose of the central figure is full of elastic grace; and here again the artist has shown a true sense of balance in the contrast afforded by the rigid lines of the songbook she holds, with the long flowing lines of her robe. The result strikes us as not less natural than scholarly. Panel No. 3 is altogether different in scale as well as style from the other two. Except the rising sun, there is nothing of the symbolic or ideal in the scene, which sets forth almost pictorially the start of a camel train across the shadeless and waterless Australian deserts. A stalwart bushman bestrides the rear camel of the baggage train; eight or nine other camels on ahead are already under way, and toiling apparently in heavy sand. The rear rider strikes one as somewhat large for the camel or somewhat small in relation to the whole panel; perhaps, however, form the nature of the subject this could hardly have been avoided. The general effect is lifelike and telling, and the panel will doubtless commend itself to many a northerner; while it serves to commemorate the impetus given to Australian exploration and intercommunication by the opening up of camel traffic, which we owe to the enterprise of the grand old South Australia whose effigy it will adorn.

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## SITE RECORD

**MEMORIAL TO SIR THOMAS ELDER  
GOODMAN CRESCENT  
UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE**

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**FORMER NAME:**

**DESCRIPTION OF PLACE:** Bronze statue mounted on granite pedestal.

**DATE OF COMPLETION:** 1903

**REGISTER STATUS:** **Description:** Nominated  
**Date:** 15 September 1998

**CURRENT USE:** **Description:** Memorials - Built/ Statues / Plaques / Trees  
**Dates:** 1903 -

**PREVIOUS USE(S):** **Description:** Memorials - Built/ Statues / Plaques / Trees  
**Dates:** 1903 -

**ARCHITECT:** **Name:**  
**Dates:**

**BUILDER:** **Name:** Alfred Drury  
**Dates:** 1903

**SUBJECT INDEXING:** **Group:** Monuments and Memorials  
**Category:** Memorials - Built/ Statues / Plaques / Trees

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA:** **Description:** City of Adelaide

**LOCATION:** **Unit No.:** n/a  
**Street No.:** n/a  
**Street Name:** Goodman Crescent/North Terrace  
**Town/Suburb:** University of Adelaide  
**Post Code:** 5005  
**Region No.:** 1  
**Region Name:** Adelaide City

**LAND DESCRIPTION:** **Title Type:** CT  
**Volume:** 4113

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**Folio:** 127  
**Lot No.:**  
**Section:** 693  
**Hundred:** Adelaide

**AMG REFERENCE:**

**Zone:** 54  
**Easting:** 281080  
**Northing:** 6132950  
**Map Sheet No.:** 6628-42-h  
**Map Scale:** 1 : 2,500

**OWNER:**

**Name:** University of Adelaide  
**Address:** North Terrace  
**Town/Suburb:** Adelaide  
**Post Code:** 5005

**PHOTOGRAPH:**

**Film No.:** 2143  
**Neg. No.:** 17-23

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