LOVE EVERMORE: THE HISTORY OF THE SPRINGTHORPE MEMORIAL

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Everything about Boroondara (Kew) Cemetery made it an attractive place to visit. It was on the correct side of the city, well out but still reasonably near the tram and Kew station.

To Boroondara on their rare free days went the bereaved, the unoccupied and the curious. After the turn of the century the trippers had an added reason for making the long journey. The Springthorpe Memorial became one of the most popular attractions of its time and remained so for years.

In an era which appeared uncomplicated it offered not only visual excitement but much more important, its background contained a magic combination of great love, great tragedy and great wealth.

Ironically, the memorial has an important place in the history of this city's pursuit of happiness and enjoyment of leisure. Few people, however, would be aware of the circumstances surrounding its building. No name can be seen upon it. None

Figure 1 The memorial is a significant part of Australia's heritage.
of the people directly concerned with its conception is still alive.

Over the last few years, I became concerned that this memorial to a matchless love should not be forgotten. This building is a significant part of Australia's architectural and artistic historical endowment (Figure 1). It stands as a memorial to the beauty of a husband's love for his wife. Possibly the most richly expressive combination of art and architecture in the history of Australian memorial construction, one of its inscriptions reads:

‘Farewell, beautiful and trustworthy wife. Although you were mortal, you have left the immortal grace of your virtue. Here, my dear, you are silent for ever, but my longing bade me construct a memorial matchless in its skill.’ (1)

I have found original manuscript material relating to the construction of the Memorial. This will probably raise as many disputes as it solves. For many years it has been accepted that the Springthorpe Memorial was the original conception of the Melbourne architect, Harold Desbrowe Annear. It would now seem that this was not the case, but that the structure was conceived by Dr John William Springthorpe, and that Annear merely executed the working drawings under precise instruction.

Dr Springthorpe was a very gifted man of wide-ranging interests (2). He married Annie Constance Inglis, a childhood friend whom Dr Springthorpe had always appreciated for her frankness, her cheerfulness in times of trial and her boundless energy. He saw the depth of her love for others when, at the age of 18, Annie willingly nursed her dying sister, Mrs. Barbour, with a selflessness that won his heart. They married two years later on her 20th birthday, 26 January 1887, and within a short time moved into their new home at 83 Collins Street. Full of dreams for the future, they named it Camelot.

They were to be together for only 10 years, but these were full of love and close companionship. Dr Springthorpe considered Annie 'the best of wives'. They were a very popular couple in Melbourne social circles. Dr Springthorpe was a patron of the arts and during these years began to collect Australian art works and to make the acquaintance of many Melbourne artists. One of them, Tom Roberts, asked the striking, red-haired young wife to sit for him and was happy when the couple agreed to accept the painting to hang in their new home. The Springthorpes also became friendly with artists who lived just up the street - John Mackennal and his son Bertram, and John Longstaff. (3).

The Springthorpes had no cause for concern when Annie became pregnant in 1896. They already had two children, Lance and Enid, who had been born with no complications. However, Annie Springthorpe failed to survive the birth of her second son and she died on Wednesday night, 23 January 1897. She was buried three days later in a temporary grave in the Inglis plot at the Boroondara Cemetery. As he watched the coffin being lowered into the ground, Dr Springthorpe promised that he would build a memorial to his wife that would be her 'perfect memory in stone'.

The following Tuesday, Dr Springthorpe wrote to his friend Bertram Mackennal (1863-1931). (4), who had gone to live in England in 1891, asking him if he could begin work on a 'masterpiece of sculpture' in Annie's memory. This would take the form of a group of three figures, the central piece a reclining figure depicting Annie exactly as she had lain in her coffin. A representation of grief would be crouched at the foot of the bier and the figure of an angel would stand at the head. Dr Springthorpe worked on these ideas with John Longstaff who incorporated the11 as the Springthorpe statues were to play a very important part in establishing his fame in his home country. The statues arrived in Australia just before Christmas Day 1900, accompanied by Mackennal and his wife. He also brought with him a number of other works to be exhibited at the National Gallery of Victoria. (5)

Edgar Bertram Mackennal was to become the leading British public sculptor of his day and the Springthorpe statues were to play a very important part in establishing his fame in his home country. The statues arrived in Australia just before Christmas Day 1900, accompanied by Mackennal and his wife. He also brought with him a number of other works to be exhibited at the National Gallery of Victoria. (5)

During January and February 1901, Mackennal supervised the siting of the statues within the memorial. The first Mackennal marbles to reach Australia, these may well have been the largest marble group that he had worked on to that date.
Their delicacy of form and fluency of line displays a French influence as does 'Circe'. They were acclaimed at the time as 'the finest piece of memorial statuary in the southern hemisphere.'

Mackennal's expression of grief carved into the flowing lines of stone is powerful. The figure huddled at the foot of the bier has no strings to her lyre for sorrow has silenced her music. Yet in death there is the triumph of immortal life, and so a smiling angel reaches to place the victor's wreath upon Annie's head (Figure 2).

No matter how good the quality of Dr Springthorpe's ideas, however, he was not a trained architect. A qualified person was needed to prepare the working drawings for his memorial temple, to assess the practical engineering details and to control the on-site construction. John Longstaff was friendly with a young architect, Harold Desbrowe Annear. They had met around the mid-1880s while Longstaff was studying at the National Gallery school and remained friends until Annear's death in 1933.

Annear's work shows no indication that he was influenced by the Greek Revival style as an architectural form before or after building the memorial. The only other classically-influenced structure he designed was the Federation Arch over Princes Bridge in 1901, and that was more or less a copy of the Roman triumphal arch. Many words have been written concerning Annear's magnificent interpretation of the Greek Revival style in the Springthorpe Memorial, but as Dr Springthorpe wrote on 7 December 1900, just before the structure was completed: 'The Greek Temple is An-
near's execution of my design.' Dr Springthorpe was very definite about what he wanted and so, caught between the horns of Springthorpe's shortage of money and his grief-prompted desire for profound symbolism, it is probable that Annear would have found very little room for creative freedom in this project.

Dr Springthorpe's medical qualifications tend to disguise the fact that he was a scholar of the classics; part of his Arts degree had been in languages, he was fluent in classical Greek, and familiar with the works of the Greek philosophers. It is not surprising that a Greek temple was the most perfect form he could think of as an expression of his profound grief for the loss of his wife, each part of it to have some meaning. His design transforms what was a utilitarian religious structure into a sculptural, symbolic work of art that suffuses the sadness of death with the immortality of beauty.

The building took place in two stages. The first stage was the erection of the temple itself, which was basically completed in January 1901, in time for the fourth anniversary of Annie's death. The second stage - finishing touches and landscaping - was completed by January 1907.

Originally much grander in concept, the structure in its present form is surrounded by 12 tapering columns between which are fixed nearly 100 bronze Greek spears that point upwards in symbolic defence against intruders. The columns are of mica-flecked granite so deep green that it appears black. This stone could only be found in Labrador, from where it was shipped in blocks to Aberdeen, Scotland, to be polished into pillars 10 feet high and two feet in diameter at their widest point.

Dr Springthorpe's desire for symbolism even extended to numbers. Each face of the Memorial, for example, multiplies three and seven to be 21 feet long. The bier is seven feet long and there are three steps up to it. Each side has nine lines of inscription. He regarded three as a mystic number, seven as a heavenly number and nine as a perfect number. Six and seven were also numbers that apparently belonged especially to Annie, hence the doubling of six for the 12 columns.

The Springthorpe Memorial is roofed by a magnificent, stained glass dome through which the sun's light washes Mackennal's statues in hues of rose and gold. It was crafted by August Fischer, who was also responsible for the tiling work, at his studio in Watson Place off Flinders Lane. No stained glass was made in Australia at this time. R J Albert has suggested that the original glass may have been manufactured by Hartley Wood and Sons in Northumberland, England. (8) On the other hand, Jenny Zimmer has pointed out to me that the American Tiffany influence in the colouring and style of the glass suggests its manufacture there (Figure 3). (9)

In any case, the glass would have been originally hand-blown into a cylinder which was then cut, and rolled into sheets for easy transportation. Fischer would have constructed a domed form of either wood or plaster, and would then have cut, shaped and leaded the glass pieces into a series of triangular panels over this. Apparently it took Fischer a great deal of experimentation to achieve the delicate colour gradation and shading, and to gauge the correct tensions needed to hold the separate 'petals' together within the arched panels. The Tiffany-influenced colour shading and petal-like panel design make this dome unique; as the few leadlight domes left in Australia tend to use panels of solid colour rather than continuously shaded colour.

The stained-glass panels were fitted into a copper-coated iron framework cast by James Marriott, the official metal worker to the Governor of Victoria. It is possible that Marriott was helped by a friend, Thomas Stokes, who was an engraver, plater and designer in metal, and whose company still exists in Victoria. Marriott executed the large ornamental streetlamps outside Parliament House in Melbourne. He cast all the metal work for the memorial, including the barred gate, the water-spouts, the rows of spears, the now-absent chains which edged the paths, the sundial and the solid bronze letters that form the Greek inscriptions around the lintels.

These lintels of Harcourt granite are part of a superstructure weighing 100 tons, situated above a floor composed of mosaic tiles in patterns of royal blue and malachite. The tiles were made by the Mitcham Tile Company under the supervision of Mr E Walker. Their colouring and laying was supervised by August Fischer. The small mosaic tiles enclose panels of larger Venetian red tiles that serve as tables for inscriptions, the lettering of which was formed by placing solid stencils
Dr Springthorpe spent the best part of three years selecting and drafting the inscriptions around the memorial. Beginning with the east side and going in a clockwise direction, the sides of the building represent 'loss', 'memory', 'separation', and 'reunion'. English inscriptions are based on the words of poets like Whitman, Wordsworth, Browning and Rossetti. The verses inscribed on the floor of the north side, for example, are based on Rossetti's poem, the Blessed Damozel:

The blessed damozel leaned out
From the gold bar of heaven;
Her eyes were deeper than the depth
Of waters stilled at even;
She had three lilies in her hand,
And the stars in her hair were seven.

The reclining statue of Annie Springthorpe holds three lilies between her folded hands. Rossetti said of his poem that he wanted to 'give utterance to the yearning of the loved one in heaven' (10) for those she had left behind.

The inscriptions in classical Greek were arranged by Dr Springthorpe with the help of his friend Professor Tucker, then head of the classical languages Department at the University of Melbourne. They were written in this language for reasons of privacy and dignity, for Dr Springthorpe wanted his gift to his late wife to be dedicated in a special way.

'I want to write (them) in heart's blood', he wrote on 14 July 1898, 'yet avoid exaggeration and overstatement ...I want the cold, but pure marble to bleed true tears.'
At the beginning of this article I quoted the passage on the southern exterior wall; other passages on the outside are in similar vein of the traditional Greek elegiac lament. The lines around the interior echo something of the feeling of those from Rossetti; they are from the Gospel of John, chapter 14, verses 1-3, and they read clockwise from the west side:

Let not your heart be troubled.
In my Father's house are many rooms.
I go to prepare a place for you.
Where I am, you also will be.

A G Ballantyne won the tender to construct the Memorial. A leading stonemasonry firm of the period, they had offices on the RMIT corner of La Trobe and Swanston Streets, and a monumental masonry workyard opposite the Jewish entrance to the Melbourne General Cemetery in Carlton. They later used their work on both the Springthorpe and the Syme Memorials in their advertising. Looking today at the excellently preserved workmanship in both those structures, one cannot blame them for their pride.

Such excellence of construction and materials, though, was worth money and it appears that Dr Springthorpe embarked on this project underestimating the amount it would eventually cost him. Initially, he allowed around 2000 pounds for construction costs, but figures rapidly escalated. By the time the building itself was completed in January 1901, costs had risen to more than 5000 pounds and Dr Springthorpe was heavily in debt as a result. He was carrying an overdraft on the building itself, which had cost him $10,000. (11)

Although the Springthorpe Memorial is very beautiful, the design of this building as it now stands seems impractical in terms of its elevation and exposure to the elements. In its original form, however, it was surrounded by a hedge and a memorial garden landscaped by W R Guilfoyle, curator of the Botanic Gardens, extending over the entire triangle of land. This garden included roses planted from cuttings sent by many of Annie's friends to Dr Springthorpe for this purpose. A rectangular reflecting pool with marble edges and sky-blue tiled floor stretched back from the triangle's apex. Two statues were commissioned from Web Gilbert to be placed on stands in this pool, but Dr Springthorpe eventually declined delivery of them. Then, after his death, it was found that the land transactions had been finalised only for an area about 100 feet square around the memorial structure itself, so most of the triangle reverted to the Cemetery Trust.

After their installation, it was immediately obvious to Dr Springthorpe that the pure white Mackennal marbles would have to be protected from staining and from the large crowds that came to view the memorial, and so Marriott designed a huge glass case for them. The frame-work was of black-stained teak and each side was a single sheet of glass weighing 250 pounds. Some time after Springthorpe's death, however, this case was removed as condensation due to ground-water seepage stopped the statues from being seen.

Unfortunately the statues were then vandalised, one figure losing an arm. The marble is no longer white, much of this discolouration being due to iron filings from the adjacent tram tracks which blow across and settle on the statues. Rain has caused rust to seep into the porous stone. Some further thought is undoubtedly needed on the preservation of these significant sculptures before further damage occurs.

The Springthorpe Memorial appears to belong to a dream rather than to practicality. As Dr Springthorpe wrote on 9 January 1899, it stands as a symbolic 'trumpet call to a memory, to all true loves to the end of time'. It defies the Gothic traditions of Australian memorial construction of the period. No other dream of this nature in Australia has been realised in this manner - transforming the reality of mortal death into a dream of immortal beauty.

Notes

1 This is a translation of the Greek inscription on the south side of the Memorial, kindly supplied to me by Ken McKay of the University of Melbourne's classical studies department.
2 Dr Springthorpe was the first Melbourne University student to successfully take arts and medicine simultaneously and, in 1882, he was the first Australian elected to the Royal College of Physicians in London. During the course of his extremely busy career, he was a member of the Melbourne Hospital Board, an editor of the Australian Medical Gazette, a founder of the Australian College of Dentistry and the first Dean of the Melbourne University Faculty of Dentistry, and a founder of the Victorian Trained Nurses’ Association.

He was recognised as an innovator in the treatment of tuberculosis, influenza, typhoid and epilepsy. Dr Springthorpe was also involved in the field of mental health; during World War One he pioneered the treatment of shell-shocked and traumatised Australian troops while he was stationed in England at the Third Australian Auxiliary Hospital. In the years following the war, he became interested in child health and was a founder of the Tweddel Hospital for Babies and School of Mothercraft. He died in 1933, aged 78.

3 Sir John Longstaff, as he eventually became, was born into a farming family in Clunes, Victoria in 1862. As noted, while attending the National Gallery School in the mid-1880s he met Desbrowe Annear who remained his close friend. He was the winner of the National Gallery’s first travelling scholarship in 1887 and painted successfully in England, France and Spain. While in Paris in 1893, he made friends with Bertram Mackennal. He returned to Melbourne between 1895-1901. During this period his studio was not far away from the Springthorpe’s home and he became their friend. He was painting Dr Springthorpe’s portrait at the time of Annie’s death. From 1901-1911 he painted in London and lived close to Mackennal. He returned to Australia in 1911 where he consolidated his reputation as a prominent portrait painter. Knighted in 1928, he won the Archibald Prize four times and painted up until his death in 1941. He is probably best known for his works ‘Breaking the News’, ‘Lady in Black’, ‘Gippsland, Sunday Night, February 20th, 1899’, and ‘The Arrival of Burke, Wills and King...’

4 Eventually knighted for his work, Mackennal was the first Australian to be elected an associate of the Royal Academy in London, and later the only Australian to become a full member. He had gained his interest in sculpture from his father, John Simpson Mackennal, who was primarily an architectural and plaster modeller and whose work can be seen at its best inside the Victorian Parliament House. The young Mackennal trained at the National Gallery School with Frederick McCubbin and Tom Roberts and when he went to England concluding his studies, he shared a studio there with Roberts. While studying at the Paris Academie, he also became friends with Rodin and the French stylistic influence can be clearly seen in his sculpture when comparing it with contemporary English and Australian work.

In 1888 he returned to Melbourne to work on allegorical panels on the facade of Parliament House, and he set up his studio above a barber’s shop at 307 Swanston Street. Unable to find sufficient work, and encouraged by the actress Sarah Bernhardt, Mackennal returned to Paris in 1891 where he and John Longstaff had adjoining studios. In 1894, he moved to London and set up his studio at Clifton Hill, in St. John’s Wood, which was where the Springthorpe statues were carved from Italian Carrera marble. Renowned for its fine grain and pure whiteness, this stone was used by Michelangelo for his best works.

Apart from two brief excursions to Australia, Mackennal remained in England for the rest of his life, and it was from there that he finally gained acceptance in the country which had refused to recognise him initially. That Australia in turn may not have forgiven him for going to England may be one reason why he is largely forgotten today. Some of his major Australian works include a statue of Queen Victoria in Ballarat; a bust of Dame Nellie Melba now in the National Gallery; the Shakespeare Memorial in Sydney; the Cenotaph in Martin Place, Sydney; and the bronze, Phoebus Driving the Horses of the Sun, (60 feet long, 19 feet high and weighing 18 tons) above Australia House in London.

5 They included his inadvertently notorious, lifesize bronze figure, Circe. After being successfully exhibited in Paris, the statue had become the subject of controversy in 1894 when the hanging committee of the London Royal Academy decreed that the reliefs surrounding the plinth of the statue were not in accordance with the committee’s standards, and suggested that they might corrupt the public. A diplomatic solution was reached by covering the plinth from view with draperies of red baize. If you want to make up your own mind, the work stands in the National Gallery in Melbourne with the base uncovered.
6 'In Memoriam Statuary Group', *Punch*, 21 February 1901, P.217.

7 Born in Bendigo in 1864, Annear began working in 1883 with the architect William Salway, who had one of the largest practices in Melbourne at that time. After Annear had qualified in 1889, he designed two houses at 163-5 Domain Road, South Yarra, after the Romanesque/Gothic style and he planned the Eastern Telegraph Cable Station at Flinders (1893-1958).

After his work on the Springthorpe Memorial, Annear turned primarily towards functionalism in his architecture. He built many large houses in the South Yarra-Malvern area, most of which have since been the victims of 'progress' in the guise of apartment blocks. His own house, 'The Eyrie', survives at Eaglemont and incorporates many of his original ideas. He also designed the memorial chapel and cloisters at Geelong Grammar School around 1920, and the Church Street Bridge across the Yarra in 1922. He died from a combination of stress and diabetes in 1933.

8 Mr R. Albert is a stained-glass craftsman and restorer who lives and works in Linton. He restored the glass dome over the memorial. His comments to me on the origin of the glass are contained in a letter dated 2 February 1987.

9 Jenny Zimmer is the author of an authoritative book on the history of stained glass work in Australia. She lectures at RMIT.


The phrase 'Angel-watered lily' that appears on the bier is derived from Rossetti's poem 'Mary's Girlhood', see above, p.509.

11 Some comparison of this figure can be made when Dr Springthorpe bought a large home on extensive grounds in Murrumbeena, in 1908, which he called 'Joyous Guarde.' It cost him 3500 pounds - after alterations.