VICTORIA’S WATERING PLACES:
A Survey of Memorial Drinking Fountains and Animal Troughs

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Introduction
Since the middle of last century public drinking fountains for humans, and water troughs for animals, have been constructed in vast numbers in towns and cities. A small number of them have been erected as memorials to honour lives and events. This paper addresses the results of a survey undertaken to identify and assess all such memorials constructed in Victoria. It began in early 1994, with a list of fifty fountains and troughs from the Victorian Memorials Register. Since then, about one hundred further examples have been identified and recorded.

Fortunately, memorial fountains and troughs are readily identifiable and their provenance can be easily researched. They are found only in built-up areas where there is a continuous supply of water. Their inscriptions provide the reason for their existence, and sometimes the name of the designer and builder. As they were erected in the public domain, records of their construction can be found in municipal council archives, and their commissioning was usually reported in the local press.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, intemperance, and the lack of fresh drinking water in the streets of English towns and cities were serious social issues. Philanthropic organizations concerned about the conditions of the poor, maintained that public authorities should control water supplies, so that water was available to all people, not just those who could afford to buy it from private companies. In 1859 the Metropolitan Free Drinking Fountain Association was formed in London to provide a supply of pure water for the poor. Within eight years the name was changed to the Metropolitan Drinking Fountain and Cattle Trough Association, for it was soon realised that the plight of animals was equal to that of humans. The Association was strongly supported by the temperance movement, because this dedicated and influential lobby quickly realised that public drinking fountains were an easy and obvious way of spreading its influence. Suddenly there was a proliferation of drinking fountains and troughs, and the movement to provide water in public places soon spread to Australia.

Drinking fountains and troughs in Victoria - examples and styles
Traces of the earliest known memorial drinking fountain in Victoria, which was erected in 1861, can still be found in the provincial city of Geelong. This fountain, which provided water for both humans and animals, was financed by public subscription and organized by William Jenkins, an ardent supporter of the temperance movement.

It was originally located near the railway station, but was moved to Market Square in 1879, and relocated to its present site in Johnstone Park c.1910. Sadly, this pioneer memorial fountain, which was constructed of Barrabool sandstone, no longer provides water and its curious inscriptions are now lost. Jenkins dedicated the fountain to Captain Cook - this crude stone structure is possibly the earliest memorial dedicated to the pioneer navigator in Victoria.

On one end of the fountain were the words:

Until Australians think it time to provide a better monument, this little fountain is erected, commemorative of Captain James Cook, who was born at Marton, in Yorkshire, 1728, died for England 14th February 1779. Respect the humble tribute and harm it not.

On the other end Jenkins advertised that the Geelong Total Abstinence Society provided ‘sober concerts for the people’ at the Temperance Hall, Little Malop Street, every Monday evening. Jenkins, who was a keen poet, also included the following verse:

Many this day for water vainly cry,
Thousands for want of water pine and die;
But here behold it ready on the spot.
Drink, thirsty mortal! drink, but waste it not;
Drink it in peace, then thankful go your way,
Waste not what you may want another day.

Jenkins proposed that when a constant water supply was available, he would erect fountains dedicated to other famous Englishmen, and, ‘to the various great men who have spent and are spending their days in the development of the mighty island in which we live’.

The earliest known operating memorial fountain in Victoria is also situated in Geelong. This fountain (Fig. 1), erected in 1874, was a farewell gift from the retiring mayor, Councillor Belcher. Imported from Andrew Handyside & Company, Ironfounders, Derby, it comprises a circular cast iron superstructure of five Corinthian columns supporting a roof, and above that, a cupid supporting an elaborate gas lamp. The water outlets are
located within the ‘temple’ formed by the columns and roof above.

The design is based on the Monument of Lysicrates, Athens, constructed in 334 BC. Like the earlier Jenkins fountain, Belcher’s fountain was relegated to Johnstone Park from its original site at the intersection of Gheringhap and Malop Streets, to make way for electric trams in 1912. Fortunately, it was returned to its former street location for its centenary in 1974, and water still flows from its five lion-head spouts.

Since the appearance of these two early fountains in Geelong, scores of memorial fountains have been constructed across Victoria. Their form and materials, their location and the reason for their being, follow distinct patterns.

The design of the Belcher fountain at Geelong, with the water outlets housed within a small temple-like structure, became a popular style for memorial drinking fountains during the first two decades of this century. Curved and pitched roof forms were common on temple style fountains, and the roof was sometimes capped with an obelisk, statue, bust or lamp. While the Belcher fountain at Geelong was made of cast iron, all later temple style fountains were constructed of stone. Although a few were built of basalt, grey Harcourt granite was the most popular choice as the main material. White marble was occasionally used for decoration, and the columns were often of an imported granite of contrasting colour.

Another design style used for memorial drinking fountains was the canopy style. Here the water outlet was situated on a small standard or in a central bowl, and the whole was covered by a canopy or roof supported on four columns which extended down to ground level. The earliest example of this style is the cast iron fountain erected at Williamstown in 1876 (Fig. 2), in memory of the local clergyman and temperance advocate, George Wilkinson. This elaborate piece of street furniture, which bears the injunction ‘Keep the pavement dry’, was imported from Walter Macfarlane & Company’s Saracen Foundry, Glasgow. The instruction to keep the pavement dry, and the words ‘Drink thirsty mortal! Drink but waste it not’ from the verse on the earlier Jenkins fountain, illustrate how precious drinking water was regarded in the second half of last century.

The most elaborate canopy style fountain is the massive granite composition dedicated to the State Premier, Sir James Patterson, which was erected on the corner of Market Square, Castlemaine, in 1897. Designed by a local architect and erected by a Kyneton mason, this unusual monument with its curious pointed roof decorations, incorporates a trough for horses and two bowls for dogs.
A third distinctive type of fountain, which can be termed a 'bowl' style, appeared soon after the turn of the century. Bowl style fountains are simply a large round or oblong bowl, supported on a simple pedestal, surmounted by a column or obelisk. This style was particularly favoured for First World War memorial fountains.

While most fountains were of the temple, canopy or bowl style, the remainder were simply based on contemporary cemetery monuments, with water outlets and basins added. In a few instances lights were fitted to the top, and often the whole structure extended to a height of about five metres.

After World War II the scale of memorial drinking fountains diminished dramatically. All post war fountains identified to date are simply a stone, brick or concrete pedestal, no more than a metre in height, holding a single basin and water outlet.

Like all monuments, memorial drinking fountains and troughs have been constructed to commemorate either a person or an event. The inscriptions on the early fountains reveal a great deal about the conditions and social values of the time, and they are expressed in terms rarely used today. For example, a Gothic fountain originally sited in the local gardens, but now cramped onto the edge of the Tatura bowling green, carries the inscription:

Erected to perpetuate the memory of Charles William Wilson who won the admiration of the community by the rare integrity of his character by the warmth and breadth of his human sympathies and by his valuable and disinterested services in numerous capacities as a public man.

A fountain dedicated to the local doctor at Mansfield in 1902 bearing the words 'A friend of the poor, esteemed by all', and another, erected in 1908 in memory of an Essendon doctor carrying the inscription 'A skilled physician, a good citizen, a friend to the poor', clearly illustrate the benevolence of the medical profession at a time when social security benefits were unknown.

While most memorial fountains were erected by public subscription, a small number were sponsored by individuals as a gift to the community in memory of a spouse, parent or sibling. Councillor George Levers of the Melbourne City Council was a particularly generous donor of drinking fountains. After presenting fountains in memory of his brother and his father, who preceded him on the council, Levers erected a third, in appreciation to the ratepayers who had returned him unopposed for sixteen years. All three Levers temple style fountains are of grey Harcourt granite with pink granite columns, surmounted by marble busts, by local sculptor Charles Richardson.

Perhaps the most elaborate and beautifully crafted fountain sponsored by a private individual in Victoria is that given by the expatriate pioneer and legislator, William Westgarth. This granite composition, surmounted by a pair of kangaroos and gas lamp, and containing both horse trough and dog basin (Fig. 3), was erected in the Carlton Gardens at the time of the Centennial International Exhibition in 1888. Although one may have expected a politician to include on his gift at least his name or some details of his achievements, Westgarth chose to remain anonymous and his fountain merely carries the message, 'To Victoria from one of her earliest colonists in pleasant remembrance 1840-88'.

The Westgarth fountain, crafted in Aberdeen at a cost of 360 pounds, took three months to complete. The granite
Figure 3: William Westgarth’s gift to Victoria “in pleasant remembrance”, to mark the Centennial International Exhibition, 1888. (Source: Kangaroo-Images Through the Ages, RM Younger, Hutchinson Australia, 1988, p.134)

kangaroos supporting the lamp, and the brass emu head water spouts were based on plaster models made at the London zoo. According to a contemporary press report a small compartment below the kangaroos for the storage of ice, enabled the ‘running of iced water on a moderate scale’.

In stark contrast to the elaborate Westgarth fountain, which was a gift to commemorate the first century of white settlement in Australia, are a group of simple aluminium fountains sponsored by Caltex Oil (Australia), to mark Australia’s bi-centenary in 1988. Caltex believed that the provision of water, through a drinking fountain, was a symbolic recognition that the lack of potable water across the country had been a major obstacle to the early development of the continent. Of the two hundred fountains Caltex offered to local councils across Australia at least a dozen can be found in Victoria.

Mention has previously been made of the influence of the temperance movement on the provision of drinking fountains. The Womens Christian Temperance Union of Victoria has provided a number of fountains over a long period. A large temple style fountain was erected in Melbourne to commemorate the visit of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York in 1901, and a bowl style fountain was unveiled in Ballarat during the following year in memory of the recently deceased Queen Victoria. Both fountains bear the Union’s maxim ‘For God, home and humanity’. A few more utilitarian fountains were sponsored by the Union during the 1950s and 1960s. One installed at Mildura in 1955 carries the message ‘Water is best’.

War Memorials

Drinking fountains were often selected to serve as war memorials, but over time their numbers decreased in favour of alternative forms of memorial. Of those surveyed to date, ten relate to the war in South Africa, twenty to the Great War and only one for World War II. According to a recent national survey of over one hundred South African war memorials, 11% took the form of drinking fountains.

The South African war memorial at Box Hill is especially important - in addition to the names of the men who fought in the Boer war, it also records the names of two Able Bodied Seamen who, together with another 570 men from Australia, sailed to China to assist the British suppress the Boxer Rebellion. This fountain, in the form of an obelisk supporting two lamps, is the only known memorial to the Boxer Rebellion in Victoria.

Temple style and bowl style fountains surmounted by obelisks, were commonly used for memorials to the Great War. The temple style fountain in memory of the ‘Bentleigh Boys’, featuring a relief carving of a gun, and the memorial at Ballan, with a carved image of a young soldier, illustrate the quality of memorial chosen by both suburban and rural communities to honour their heroes.

By the end of World War II, public attitude to the commemoration of lives lost in conflict had changed, and ‘living memorials’ in the form of halls, hospitals, swimming pools and community centres were preferred to monuments in stone and bronze. Consequently, only one memorial drinking fountain relating to the Second World War has been identified to date.

Not all war memorial drinking facilities relate to soldiers, sailors and airmen. In 1926 the Purple Cross Service of Victoria, which voluntarily provided veterinary supplies for horses in the First World War, erected a granite trough as a tribute to the horses used in the war (Fig. 4). A small bronze plaque bears the poignant words:

_He gains no crosses as a soldier may, no medals for the many risks he runs, he only, in his puzzled, patient way, sticks to his guns._

Another important memorial trough is located at Mansfield. It is rare, because it carries the words 'The Metropolitan Drinking Fountain & Cattle Trough Association, Westminster, London', and is the only trough erected in
Victoria under the auspices of the Association. It was placed there in 1914 in memory of James Fitzmaurice by his sister. According to the Association’s records it was constructed locally, to one of the Association’s standard designs, at a cost of one hundred pounds.

Before leaving the subject of memorial horse troughs, mention must be made of the hundreds of Bills’ troughs scattered throughout Australia. These precast concrete troughs were the bequest of George and Annis Bills of Sydney. George died in 1927, and ironically, the troughs he and his wife generously gave in the interest of animal welfare, were installed just as horses were being rapidly replaced by motor vehicles.

Conservation Issues

Generally, memorial fountains and troughs have survived remarkably well. Only a handful of references have been found to fountains which have been discarded, or not rebuilt after being damaged or knocked down by a motor vehicle. The extremely high survival rate no doubt results from the fact that most were constructed from durable material, such as granite or basalt. But while their basic fabric has survived, slightly less than half of those constructed before the end of the First World War can supply water.

Once the water outlets or the supply pipes embedded within the structure became unserviceable, some councils took the cheapest and easiest course by abandoning the memorial fountain as a source of water, and constructing a more utilitarian fountain nearby. Only in one case has a council installed new pipework unsympathetically on the outside of the fountain, rather than dismantling the stonework to replace the original pipework.

Metal drinking cups attached to the fountains with chains were an important feature of all drinking fountains constructed before the 1920s. Although no cups survive, many pre-1920s fountains still retain the eyelets to which the drinking cup chains were attached. On one fountain in Brunswick, the remaining eyelets have been reused to chain down a recently installed brass tap unit for added security. It is possible that the drinking cups were outlawed as a result of the influenza epidemic which swept across the country in 1919. Since the 1920s bubbler style water outlets have been universally used.

A considerable number of memorial fountains have been relocated from their original sites. Most were moved out of the centre of streets or street intersections because they were a hazard for the increasing motor traffic. Many were relocated into nearby parks. Some, like the temple style fountain at Mornington, erected in memory of the pioneer and benefactor Alexander Balcombe, have lost much of their significance through being relocated out of their original context. This fountain, originally situated in the middle of a busy intersection near the post office, was relocated into a pedestrian mall some distance away during the 1970s. Its plaque, which states that its original location was the site of Balcombe’s station, leased from the Crown in 1843, is of course now irrelevant and quite misleading. The significance of this memorial has been further diminished by the installation of an unsympathetic wrought iron roof structure in place of the original stone roof, its placement within a pool, and conversion of the drinking outlet into an ornamental spray.

The fountain at Kew, commemorating the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria’s reign in 1887, is another example where the significance of a memorial has been diminished by removing it from its original site. This three sided fountain was specifically designed to complement the three way street intersection at which it originally stood. Ironically, it was moved to its present park location in 1924, to make way for a circular temple style First World War memorial.

At least one memorial fountain has been rebuilt in such a way that without detailed research it is impossible to tell if it is still in its original condition. Although the temple style fountain erected in Brighton in memory of the wife of Premier Bent appears complete and original, photographic evidence reveals that its original tall circular columns have been replaced with shorter square columns.
Who made these changes, and who is responsible for the maintenance and conservation of these unusual memorials? The answer to both questions is the local municipality. With the exception of a few fountains constructed on private land, all other fountains and troughs were erected in public areas controlled by councils. Although the fountain or trough was sponsored by an individual or group, it was handed over to the community on condition that the council would maintain it and pay for the water used.

By and large, councils have conserved the fabric of the memorials, but unfortunately, many have failed to preserve the memorial in the working order that was originally pledged. Perhaps this is excusable in the case of the horse troughs, because their users no longer ply the roads. With the recent state-wide amalgamation of municipal councils, there is a danger that the question of the maintenance and conservation of these small but important items of cultural heritage will be given a low priority. It is hoped that this survey will publicise the existence and relative significance of these unusual memorials, and that it will serve to remind councils, and others, of their responsibility to appropriately conserve the memorials entrusted to them.

For the past five years Robert Green has been employed as an architect with Heritage Victoria, the conservation unit of the Department of Planning and Development, which services the Historic Buildings Council.

Endnotes
2 The Geelong Advertiser, 12 February 1861.
4 Geelong Region Historic Buildings and Objects Study, sheet 236.
5 E Graeme Robertson, Ornamental cast iron in Melbourne, Georgian House, Melbourne, 1967, pp.176, 185.
6 Unsourced news cutting courtesy Nina Stanton.