South Brisbane Memorial Park: A Memorial to What?

Bill Metcalf

In the centre of the old city of South Brisbane, at the intersection of its two main streets, Stanley and Vulture, one finds a small, triangular park. Its most obvious feature is the grand set of stairs leading up from Stanley Street, near the Ship Inn Hotel. These stairs have a commanding presence, inviting the walker to ascend to an imposing edifice, but at the top they simply end. Part-way up, a couple of metres above street level, a pedestal, 2 metres high and 2.5 metres across, draws the eye upwards; it should be supporting an iconic statue, perhaps 3 or 4 metres high, but there is nothing. I've lived in the South Brisbane area for most of the past 40 years, and the mystery of the grand stairs and empty pedestal of South

South Brisbane Memorial Park, taken from the north-west corner, shows the elaborate set of stairs with the 2.5 metre-wide pedestal, bare of any statue. Photo taken by the author in April 2011.

Brisbane Memorial Park has long puzzled me. What is this park memorialising? If a war, then which war, and why is it not known as South Brisbane War Memorial Park? These are some of the questions my research sought to uncover.

Early History of the Area

The area now known as Brisbane is part of the traditional lands of the Turrbal (mainly on the northside) and Jagara (mainly on the southside) peoples, including South Brisbane.¹ In 1825, the Moreton Bay Penal Colony was established at what is now Brisbane, then slowly closed between 1839 and 1842.² In preparation for opening this land to free settlers, an area was set aside for a township and surveyed within four boundaries. The southern boundary was today's Vulture Street.³ At the same time, Henry Wade surveyed Stanley Quay (now Stanley Street) parallel to the river. Where these two streets meet, a small triangular block of land remained, enclosed on the third side by Sidon Street.⁴

As the Brisbane settlement grew, the area along the south side of the river increasingly became important as the main wharf, commercial and industrial

Survey plan of early Brisbane showing the roughly square original boundaries, with the streets within surveyed to follow the river rather than the external boundaries.

Source: Extract from a map by T Ham & Co, 1865, John Oxley Library, Map 841.16 1865 0025 E c1.

sector. Prosperity and self-confidence, with a healthy dose of jingoism, led to the area separating from Brisbane in 1888 and becoming the municipality of South Brisbane, with an estimated population of 25,000 people. South Brisbane municipality was constituted to include the old South Ward of the municipality of Brisbane and the Division of Woolloongabba, with boundaries extending north-east to Norman Creek and south and west to Cornwall Street and the river.

The South Brisbane Council was nothing if not progressive. It was also possessed by grand visions, and soon erected magnificent Municipal Chambers on the corner of Vulture and Graham Streets, a far more grand building than that to which Brisbane city could lay claim. In a highly competitive spirit, South Brisbane also soon had Queensland's first Municipal Library and Municipal Art Gallery.⁵ All of these features faced the triangular piece of land now known as South Brisbane Memorial Park.⁶

That strategic triangular piece of land, less than a hectare in size, had been surveyed in 1860 into town allotments. On the north-west allotment, closest to the Ship Inn, lived Dr Thomas Pennington Lucas, and it was here that he developed the famous Lucas Papaw Ointment that is still being produced by his descendants.⁷ Other residences included that of Henri Wilson Haseler (Registrar

This photo was taken from the top of the clock tower at South Brisbane Town Hall, looking towards Stanley Street, during the 1893 floods. In the centre is the Ship Inn Hotel. In the left foreground is 'The Cliffs'; the South Brisbane Registry Office is at the extreme right front, with the home of Dr Thomas P Lucas between it and the Ship Inn. All buildings other than the Ship Inn were in what is now South Brisbane Memorial Park.

Source: Photo courtesy of John Oxley Library, photo no. 78099.

of Births Marriages and Deaths), facing Stanley Street, and a grand house called 'The Cliffs', home to the prosperous Markwell family, facing Vulture Street.⁸

The most important and impressive building in this small area, however, was the South Brisbane Fire Station, facing Vulture Street at the intersection with Sidon and Grey streets. This site had been selected because it 'was situated at the back of the dry dock. It led down hill to Stanley-street and Woolloongabba, and by way of Vulture-street to the West End'.⁹ With horse-drawn equipment, it was important to be able to race downhill, rather than uphill, to a fire.

Architects John Nicholson and Alfred Wright had designed the South Brisbane Fire Station, which opened on 5 October 1892, having cost £1375 11s 2d.¹⁰ 'The accommodation provided at the new station was of great advantage to the brigade in turning out to fires, much time being saved.'¹¹ On the ground floor were the Engine Room, Superintendent's Office and Watch Room, with four horse stalls behind. Upstairs there were two balconies plus a single men's sitting

Sketch plan of South Brisbane Fire Station as seen from the corner of Vulture and Sidon Streets. The elaborate tower was never built.

Source: Photo in D Watson and J McKay, *Queensland Architects of the 19th Century: A Biographical Dictionary*, Queensland Museum, Brisbane, 1994, p. 133.

South Brisbane Fire Station, 1914, facing Vulture Street, showing horse-drawn equipment and the new Dennis fire truck.

Source: Brisbane Courier, 16 May 1914: 13.

room, married man's sitting room, bathroom, two single men's bedrooms and one married man's bedroom. Just why single and married men needed separate sitting rooms is unclear. The plans included a beautifully designed and elaborate watch-tower 24 metres high, with a lookout 20 metres above ground. In addition, the plans included a separate superintendent's house with three bedrooms, a parlour, a sitting room, a kitchen and a servant's room.¹²

The seven or eight firemen who were stationed there at all times received only 24 hours' leave every nine days, with obligatory attendance at all other times, and this was said to be a particular problem for married firemen.¹³ A reporter for the *Brisbane Courier* claimed that when the alarm rang, horses could be brought from the stable, harnessed to the fire equipment and driven on to the street, fully manned, in 13.5 seconds,¹⁴ but this claim is highly improbable.

South Brisbane Fire Station acquired its first motorised vehicle in 1913, a Dennis truck with hard rubber tyres and an escape ladder.¹⁵ Its four-cylinder petrol engine ran a Gwynne (centrifugal) pump, which was a great advantage because previously fire fighting had depended on water pressure from the Highgate Hill Reservoir, assisted by manual pumps.¹⁶ Motorised and horse-drawn vehicles were both used until 1919 when the last horse was sold.¹⁷

During World War I, the city of South Brisbane, like most other areas of Australia, became caught up in the 'fad' to create memorials to local men who had fought and died overseas. Ken Inglis, in *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape*, calls this 'The War Memorial Movement'; it was a social, political and cultural movement that gripped much of Australia from the last days of World War I until the early 1930s.¹⁸

What is a war memorial and what are its functions? According to James Mayo, in *War Memorials as Political Landscape*:

The war memorial — a statue, a place, a building, or a combination of these and other things — is ... a social and physical arrangement of space and artefacts that keep alive the memories of those who were involved in a war. As an artefact, a memorial helps create an ongoing order and meaning beyond the chaotic experiences of life.

Mayo goes on to point out that 'dedicating a park as a war memorial is a straightforward way to set aside place and time to commemorate the past, and monuments and weapons are embellishments to that purpose'.¹⁹ In other words, a war memorial — particularly a memorial park — has a much more important function than merely memorialising war: it helps 'to form the community's identity'.²⁰

The celebration of military victories and, occasionally, acknowledging defeats has had a very long history and prehistory. Australia's first war memorial was a pillar erected in 1850 by soldiers stationed in Hobart to honour their comrades, 'who fell in the service of their Queen and country during the campaigns in New Zealand, 1845–46'.²¹ Inglis points out that 'until recent times the war memorial signalled the rewards of battle far more eloquently than its human costs. The victors exult in architecture, sculpture and inscription'.²² This focus on war and victory has changed, however, according to Queensland's most prolific and best-known war memorial researchers, Shirley and Trevor McIvor of Toowoomba, who assert that war memorials 'are not in praise of war, they are in honour of people'.²³

Because the small, triangular area referred to above was surrounded by South Brisbane's Municipal Chambers, the South Brisbane Library, the Art Gallery and a public hall, prominent businesses such as the Dry Dock and the Ship Inn Hotel, as well as South Brisbane's grandest house, 'Cumbooquepa', and also overlooked the Brisbane River and Old Government House, it was well suited to the creation of a war memorial. As Inglis points out, 'the best site was the most prominent and accessible. The park and the central intersection were the most common locations for memorials of a monumental character'.²⁴ In 1917, the South Brisbane Council started to buy up blocks within this triangle in order to establish some sort of park.²⁵ The council first described this as a 'Soldiers Memorial Park' in November 1918, but it was unclear what sort of memorial this area would become or what it would house. In 1920, after the influenza pandemic had passed, interest picked up in developing this area as a war memorial.²⁶

However, this interest was not universal among citizens, with objections coming from both the left and right of the political spectrum. One conservative South Brisbane alderman argued that 'the memorial park is all tommy-rot. Commercial houses should be built on the site and not a park'.²⁷ As Ken Inglis points out:

for anybody whose mind had been turned by the catastrophe of 1914–18 towards some variety of socialism or pacifism, the very enterprise of making and using war memorials could appear unhealthy. Lovers of peace tended to turn away from them with a sigh or a shudder.

Many locals from the left of the political spectrum regarded war memorials as 'relics of barbarism'.²⁸

Nevertheless, in May 1920, a large public meeting in South Brisbane City Hall suggested raising £10,000 for a war memorial 'worthy of the city'. John Gaffney, the former mayor of South Brisbane, and publican of the adjoining Ship Inn

Hotel, chaired the committee elected to raise money and establish this memorial park.²⁹ At a subsequent public meeting, proposals were passed that the memorial park being established opposite the Town Hall deserved a suitably grand War Memorial Hall.³⁰

Significantly, on Armistice Day 1920, prominent local artist and architect George Addison released plans for South Brisbane War Memorial Hall to be on this land, facing Vulture Street. He particularly wanted this design to complement 'Cumbooquepa' — which he had also designed — across Vulture Street.³¹ It is unclear who paid for these plans for the Memorial Hall, and whether Addison drew them up 'on spec' or donated his time, as did other architects.³² Addison's grand building was estimated to cost about £6000, with another £2000 for landscaping, but it was unclear where the money would be found.³³ Addison's magnificent War Memorial Hall promised to be one of the most prominent buildings in Brisbane, with commanding views over the river and city, approached by a broad flight of steps from the tramline on Stanley Street, and with a bandstand on one side and a kiosk on the other, all surmounted by a huge copper turret.³⁴

In producing his monumental design, Addison would have been well aware that the Queensland Institute of Architects had railed against 'the deplorable artistic character' of many war memorials, and conscious of the directive from the Federal Council of the Australian Institute of Architects to avoid the 'stiff, stock figure of the soldier' and to be more creative and imaginative. In fact, Addison had been actively involved in trying to ensure that War Memorials were artistic and aesthetic rather than purely functional and mundane.³⁵

Addison's South Brisbane War Memorial Hall was said to be 'not only a memorial, but also a public benefit'.³⁶ However, whether a 'proper' memorial could also have a utilitarian function was hotly contested, with some arguing that 'sacredness' would be destroyed by having such a hall used for entertainment purposes, while others countered that such usage would increase the appreciation of the memorial

South Brisbane Memorial Hall as sketched by GHM Addison in 1920

Source: Brisbane Courier, 11 November 1920: 7.

and of the sacrifice of those soldiers whom it was meant to commemorate. Perhaps, many argued, 'the world had enough monuments to the dead; let the commemoration be devoted to the living'.³⁷

While Addison's War Memorial Hall would be costly to build, it was often found to be easier to raise donations for 'useful' buildings because donors 'knew that they were providing a public resource as well as a memorial'.³⁸ The problem in South Brisbane, however, was that there was already a large and well-used public hall — the South Brisbane Library Hall — just across Stanley Street,³⁹ and another large public hall — the Princess Theatre — only two blocks away.⁴⁰

For reasons that are unclear, Addison's plans for South Brisbane War Memorial Hall and associated landscaping were put on hold, while South Brisbane City Council engineer James Struthers Louttit drew up his own plans to create a memorial park, without including or excluding Addison's War Memorial Hall. According to Louttit's plans:

The main feature will be a circular lawn, about 90ft [27 m] in diameter, situated nearly in the centre of the block, approximately level, and surrounded by a pathway or drive, 10ft [3 metres] wide, from which will radiate other pathways of a similar width to the four corners of the park ... [T]he ground between the edge of the lawn and the street alignment [will be] terraced off in easy slopes, and planted with grass ... A flight of concrete steps will be built at the corner of Stanley and Sidon streets ... From its highest point a magnificent panorama is obtained.⁴¹

In 1921, interest in creating a memorial park to include Addison's War Memorial Hall appeared to be waning, at least among South Brisbane's aldermen, with heated debate over whether or not to erect any hall on the land being acquired for a memorial park.⁴² Some aldermen argued against building Addison's War Memorial Hall because 'it would be a tremendous expense; the building would never be finished and the council would eventually have to come to the rescue'.⁴³ Nevertheless, numerous 'Soldiers' Memorial Fund' volunteers continued collecting donations by various means.⁴⁴

In May 1921, South Brisbane City Council, in a very heated session, narrowly voted against allowing Addison's War Memorial Hall to be built in South Brisbane Memorial Park, simply because they did not have the finances to cover such an expense — in fact, the acquisition of the land was stretching council's budget.⁴⁵ In this, the council might well have correctly read the sentiments of their electors because research showed that people generally favoured 'monumentality' over 'practical use', or 'display' over 'usefulness'.⁴⁶ The decision against building Addison's War Memorial Hall was challenged vehemently by a significant minority over the next four years, but never successfully.⁴⁷ As Inglis points out: 'The making of Great War Memorials in Australia was a quest for the right way, materially and spiritually, to honour the soldiers'.⁴⁸ South Brisbane aldermen ultimately opted for an open park rather than one with a sombre War Memorial Hall.

In 1922, the last freehold block of land⁴⁹ was purchased for the memorial park. On 17 April, the *Brisbane Courier* announced: 'The work of demolishing the premises on the ground will be commenced next week, and will be carried out by unemployed "diggers"'.⁵⁰ The funds for their employment came from a federal government 'make-work scheme': 'Men no sooner out of uniform than out of work,

The stairs under construction at the north-west corner of South Brisbane Memorial Park in 1923. Only the bottom two tiers have been built, and the large pedestal has not yet been erected but the loose stone blocks show that it is under construction.

Source: *Queenslander*, 15 December 1923: 28.

yesterday's heroes and today's unemployed, were diggers now for the foundation of monuments to themselves and their dead comrades.⁵¹ These unemployed 'diggers' laid out the park according to Louttit's plans, and built the prominent steps ascending from the corner of Stanley and Sidon streets. Part-way up these steps, they erected the huge pedestal referred to earlier.⁵² Somehow, a German field gun captured in World War I was acquired and installed in Memorial Park, facing Vulture Street near its intersection with Stanley Street.⁵³

Not accepting South Brisbane City Council's directive not to include Addison's War Memorial Hall — even though Addison was dead — various groups continued to raise money for a South Brisbane War Memorial Hall, organising events including flower shows, football matches and cycling gymkhanas.⁵⁴ The council then changed Louttit's plans to include a bandstand in the middle of the park, which would leave no room for a War Memorial Hall.⁵⁵

To complicate matters, opposition arose from East Brisbane residents of South Brisbane city, who claimed that the real South Brisbane War Memorial had already been established in Mowbray Park, so this one under discussion was an imposter.⁵⁶ Other irate citizens condemned the 'unpromising' site chosen for the memorial park because of the amount of soil and rock that needed to be moved — plus the fact that the dirty, smoky and noisy Dry Dock lay between it and the river.⁵⁷

In early 1923, money was running short, with little left for 'the projected bandstand ... fountain at the head of the steps on the Stanley street and Sidon terrace

corner, or the gates with Grecian columns. The ultimate cost will be about £10,000.⁵⁸ Soon afterwards, council admitted it only had enough money for the next fortnight's wages, and although 'the bulk of the formation work had been done ... the beautifying still remains'.⁵⁹

Within this acrimonious and almost bankrupt scene, Australia's Governor-General, Lord Forster, officially opened South Brisbane Memorial Park on 6 August 1923, with a military guard of honour, band and trumpeters added to the pomp and ceremony.⁶⁰ The park was unfinished, the fire station and adjoining superintendent's house still occupied the south-west corner, and there was no sign of Addison's War Memorial Hall. Lord Forster diplomatically stated that he could 'see enough to realise that when it was completed it would be a place of great beauty'.⁶¹

The *Telegraph* newspaper observed that while South Brisbane had opened its memorial park, Brisbane was lagging: 'The South Brisbane Memorial Park may not be so large as the people of South Brisbane would like, but it is something achieved, it is conspicuous, and it may easily be made beautiful.'⁶² Competition between nearby towns over war memorials was common, with Inglis giving the example of Maryborough, where 'an obelisk with five statues, costing £2300 and installed in 1922, was a rejoinder to Bundaberg's marble soldier on a column, unveiled the previous year at a cost of £1650'.⁶³

In 1924, South Brisbane City Council pressed ahead with landscaping and other work — but without sufficient money to start a War Memorial Hall or even to commission a statue for the monumental pedestal halfway up the grand stairs.

Australian Governor-General Lord Forster opening South Brisbane Memorial Park on 6 August 1923
Source: Daily Mail, 7 August 1923: 25.

It was common for groups promoting war memorials to lay a foundation for a statue before they had the money to complete the project, as a way of raising donations.⁶⁴ The *Brisbane Courier* observed that:

much beautification work has been undertaken at the Memorial Park. Many palms have been planted and the slopes have been covered with couch grass, the appearance being distinctly pleasing. A fine approach to the park has been constructed with tiers of concrete steps.⁶⁵

Meanwhile, many South Brisbane citizens continued to press for Addison's War Memorial Hall to be built, even though the council had neither the money nor political inclination to do so.⁶⁶

In 1924, the Queensland government passed legislation to amalgamate South Brisbane city, with its 40,000 residents, into a much larger Metropolitan Brisbane. This amalgamation came into effect on 1 October 1925, with South Brisbane Memorial Park still far from finished. This merger ensured that the park would never house Addison's War Memorial Hall because the newly elected aldermen of Metropolitan Brisbane sought to use whatever funds they could muster to promote Anzac Square, between Adelaide and Ann streets.⁶⁷ A book published in 1925 to mark the passing of South Brisbane City paid tribute to the memorial park as 'the most prominent of all the South Brisbane Council's parks':

Formerly a series of barren cliffs, this spot has, by terracing, grading and artistic treatment, been converted into a picturesque spot, from the grassy slopes of which citizens are able to enjoy a commanding view of Brisbane and of several stretches of the river, with the panorama of hills in the background right round to Mt Cootha [sic]. Several thousand pounds have been spent in the acquisition and treatment of this park, which was secured to become South Brisbane's memorial to her fallen soldiers.⁶⁸

In 1926, South Brisbane residents proposed that 'ornamental gates be added to the War Memorial park ... [and a] pergola as a crowning feature', and complained that 'no funds are available for a statue on the pedestal on the steps facing Stanley-street'.⁶⁹ Such a statue — most likely of a soldier — could have taken many forms, as found across Australia:

standing at attention, at ease or easy, on guard, blowing a bugle, throwing a grenade, helping a seen or unseen comrade, relaxing with tunic collar undone, holding a rifle with or without fixed bayonet, at the right side, thrust forward, across body, slung over shoulder, [or] resting upside down in the funereal position.

It is most likely, however, that a statue would have depicted a private soldier 'at ease', and that was precisely what Addison had sought to avoid.⁷⁰

The influential *Architects and Builders Journal* praised South Brisbane Memorial Park:

an artistic park has been created on the rocky slopes ... A sum of about £80 is still in hand, and it is proposed ... to erect ornamental gates at the entrance to the park, fronting Vulture street ... a large double swing gate and two smaller gates. The Brisbane City Council has also shown an interest in the matter, and the design, when completed by Mr R.M. Wilson,⁷¹ will be submitted to the Mayor.⁷²

This gate was installed, but it was later removed during the widening of Vulture Street in 1985–86.⁷³

In 1927, a new South Brisbane Fire Station was built at the corner of Main and Vulture streets, Woolloongabba, then in 1928 the old Fire Station and house were removed and the land was finally available for park purposes.⁷⁴ As an unfortunate omen, however, Brisbane City Council used much of this newly available land to widen the corner of Grey and Vulture Streets before including the leftover bits into South Brisbane Memorial Park.⁷⁵ Much more of this park subsequently has been excised to widen roads and sidewalks. Nothing could more clearly signify that this was no longer the centre of a city, but only part of a transport corridor to and from the centre of the new, metropolitan Brisbane city.

Promoters of Addison's War Memorial Hall finally seem to have given up, with one bitterly claiming that the ANZAC Club in South Brisbane would now 'be regarded as the South Brisbane War Memorial'.⁷⁶

In 1929, 'the work of completing the Anzac Memorial Park, South Brisbane, rendered possible by the demolition of the former South Brisbane Fire Brigade headquarters' was underway.⁷⁷ The new bits of the memorial park were beautified with plantings of 'blue lantana, trees and palms', while 'hibiscus and acalypha are beginning to cover the ugly face of the cliff'.⁷⁸

Throughout the 1930s, South Brisbane Memorial Park occasionally made it into the newspapers, with complaints including two seats in the park being 'in such a dilapidated state as to resemble a relic of the ruins of Pompeii',⁷⁹ and that

The earliest (May–June 1928) known aerial photo of South Brisbane Memorial Park, with 'Cumbooquepa' in the background and South Brisbane Municipal Chambers halfway up the left side. The Fire Station has been removed, although the superintendent's house remains.

Source: Photo by Frederick W Thiel, courtesy of Somerville House Archives.

serious vandalism was taking place there.⁸⁰ This was seen as desecration because, as one researcher observed, Memorial Parks 'become hallowed ground, and any blemish, such as trash or graffiti, is a sacrilege'.⁸¹ Occasionally, South Brisbane Memorial Park was presented in a romantic light,⁸² but more often it was viewed as a seedy area of Brisbane, with recurring concerns about 'the prevalence of an undesirable class of women' frequenting the area.⁸³

Locals requested some 'memorial tablet, archway, or gates'⁸⁴ to make this more obviously a war memorial park rather than just a park. It was claimed that there was not even a sign to indicate that this was a memorial park.⁸⁵ Complaints continued to arise that South Brisbane Memorial Park had never been completed by Brisbane City Council, even though funds had been raised to that end, because that money had been diverted towards creating Anzac Square.⁸⁶

During World War II, many buildings around South Brisbane Memorial Park, such as the old South Brisbane City Hall, parts of South Brisbane Library, 'Cumbooquepa' and the Dry Dock, were used for military purposes, and the memorial park became a place for covert dalliances and fights. When the war ended, South Brisbane locals again tried to raise the status of the memorial park by moving the cenotaph there from Anzac Square. Under the heading 'Suggested War Memorial Site to Dominate City', an optimistic resident argued:

If Brisbane's war memorial is to be an inspiration it must be a masterpiece of architecture, standing conspicuously on a site overlooking the city ... The memorial park site in Vulture Street [should] be used instead of extending Anzac Square to Queen Street ... This ideal site is within a mile of the GPO as the crow flies.

Steps of granite and marble [should] be built at the base the full width of each of the park's three street frontages, and narrowing as they rise to a platform on which the Anzac memorial now opposite Central Station be re-erected and redesigned to reach say 70 to 80 ft [20-24m] height.

Such a memorial ... would be seen from many miles away and would be a truly inspiring and wonderful structure.

Selling the land in the heart of the city comprising Anzac Square [would] provide funds for a new memorial.⁸⁷

In 1952, more of the land occupied by South Brisbane Memorial Park was used to widen Vulture Street and ease congestion at its intersection with Stanley Street. The *Courier-Mail* reported in May of that year that: 'When completed the resumption will allow for three lanes of traffic outbound from Vulture Street.'⁸⁸ A reporter subsequently commented facetiously that 'Memorial Park ... is having a face-lift. Brisbane City Council bulldozers and workmen have lifted hundreds of tons of rock and earth from the highest part of the one acre park area to enable Vulture Street to be widened.'⁸⁹ This 'face-lift' excised about another 10 per cent of the park's area.

In 1954, parts of South Brisbane Memorial Park were ploughed to plant flowers to 'make it one of the best in Brisbane',⁹⁰ in preparation for the Royal visit of 9-11 March. The memorial park was floodlit during the visit in an attempt to impress the Queen,⁹¹ but there is no evidence that she noticed.

South Brisbane Memorial Park, from above Vulture Street, having the top several metres of rock and soil removed to allow the widening of Vulture Street in 1952.

Source: Photo taken 8 May 1952, courtesy of Annabelle Lloyd, Brisbane City Council Archives.

In that same year, it was proposed to change the name from Memorial Park to Chandler Park, but this was adamantly opposed by locals, so council dropped the idea.⁹² Council's reconstruction of the park included the replacement of the World War I German gun that had been installed in 1922, but that was now 'showing signs of deterioration', with a water fountain.⁹³

In 1958, the *Sunday Mail* ran an article lamenting the lack of a monument on the memorial park's pedestal, and hoped that a statue 'of some distinguished military man some time in the future' would be placed there.⁹⁴ Fifty-three years later, this pedestal remains bare.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the area around South Brisbane Memorial Park deteriorated into a semi-deserted slum. The railway lines were removed from South Brisbane Coaling Wharves in 1960, the Woolloongabba Locomotive Depot closed in 1967, extensive land resumption for the South-East Freeway tore the heart out of the nearby Woolloongabba shopping precinct in 1968, the Woolloongabba Rail Yards closed in 1969, the South Brisbane wharves closed and demolition began along the riverfront to create Clem Jones Park (now Southbank), South Brisbane Dry Dock closed in 1970, the South Brisbane Library closed and in 1973 the building was vandalised, the coal wharves were demolished in 1974, and the final nail in the coffin of this area was the closure of the iconic Ship Inn Hotel in 1979.⁹⁵

In 1986, South Brisbane Memorial Park was again reduced in size to widen Vulture Street, then more was taken from the Stanley Street side to provide access

to Expo '88 and its iconic monorail. Finally, in the first decade of this century, further land was excised to widen Vulture Street again to facilitate the South-East Busway tunnel. South Brisbane Memorial Park today comprises only about two-thirds of its original area.

After the hype of Expo '88, the South Brisbane area again fell into a slump, with much of the area fenced off as its future use was hotly contested. Once Southbank Parklands opened in June 1992, however, the area started to pick up and South Brisbane Memorial Park became better cared for, more used and more widely enjoyed.

A Memorial to What?

Today, what remains of South Brisbane Memorial Park is in a fortunate position, overlooking the Maritime Museum and the Brisbane River, and flanked by Griffith University's Queensland College of Art and the Ship Inn Hotel to the west, and the Griffith Film School to the east.⁹⁶ On the south, it faces two of Brisbane's iconic heritage buildings, 'Cumbooquepa' and the old South Brisbane Town Hall, both owned by Somerville House, a private girls' school.

The wrought-iron entranceway, removed from Vulture Street, now graces the top of the grand stairs, and the side pillars, inscribed '1914' and '1918', remind us of World War I. There are three other reminders of war in the park: a small sandstone monument with a symbolic drinking fountain for horses;⁹⁷ a plain grey monument;⁹⁸ and a rather nondescript World War II gun that, rather bizarrely, is aimed at one of the small memorials.⁹⁹

In a seminal study of war memorials in Queensland, Dr Judith McKay defines a 'war memorial' as 'an external monument or internal plaque relating directly or indirectly to war and which is primarily *commemorative* rather than *functional*'.¹⁰⁰ By this, one could argue that four war memorial elements exist in the South Brisbane Memorial Park: the two monuments, the gun and the gateposts with their wrought-iron arch. War memorial ceremonies are rarely held in the park, however, and most people whom I have asked do not think of this park as having any war memorial function.

South Brisbane Memorial Park is best thought of now as a memorial to the old city of South Brisbane. It was created through the enthusiastic boosterism of its citizens and council, and its vicissitudes reflect the story of this part of Brisbane over the past century. It now serves as a small green respite in the highly urbanised Southbank area. As Mayo points out, war memorials are often used as 'a borrowed landscape to serve another purpose'.¹⁰¹

South Brisbane Memorial Park also serves as a living memorial to the changing fortunes of South Brisbane, reflecting how this area has changed from being at the heart of a vibrant city to being a mere appendage — and even an impediment — to two major streets, before recently becoming central to the bustling and trendy recreational, tourism and tertiary education precinct of Southbank.

Notes

- 1 R Kidd, 'Aboriginal History of South Brisbane', *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland*, Vol. 17, No. 11 (2001): 463–4.

- 2 It had been established at what is now Redcliffe on 14 September 1824, but moved to what is now Brisbane in the following March.
- 3 The western side was today's Boundary Street, South Brisbane and West End, projected to intersect Boundary Street, Spring Hill (the northern boundary). The eastern boundary was today's Wellington Road, Kangaroo Point and East Brisbane, with the river serving as the boundary between where it meets Wellington Road and Boundary Street, Fortitude Valley.
- 4 The peculiar layout of streets within central Brisbane arose because, while the four boundaries were laid out without reference to the river, the internal streets were laid out on a grid, roughly aligned to the South Brisbane Reach of the river.
- 5 These were at the corner of Stanley and Dock Streets, and remain today as Griffith Film School.
- 6 FJ Brewer and R Dunn, *The Municipal History of South Brisbane* (Brisbane: H Pole & Co Printers, 1925).
- 7 W Metcalf, 'Dr Thomas Pennington Lucas: Queensland Scientist, Author, Doctor, Dreamer and Inventor', *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland*, vol. 19, no. 5 (2006): 788–804.
- 8 Information gleaned from various Post Office Directories.
- 9 *Brisbane Courier*, 18 October 1888: 6.
- 10 D Watson and J McKay, *Queensland Architects of the 19th Century: A Biographical Dictionary* (Brisbane: Queensland Museum, 1994), pp. 5–6.
- 11 *Brisbane Courier*, 27 April 1893: 4.
- 12 *Brisbane Courier* 4 May 1892: 6.
- 13 *Brisbane Courier* 9 November 1915: 3.
- 14 *Brisbane Courier* 4 May 1895: 6.
- 15 *Brisbane Courier* 28 June 1913: 4.
- 16 K Calthorpe and K Capell, *Brisbane on Fire: A History of Firefighting* (Brisbane: Ken Capell, 1997), p. 126.
- 17 Calthorpe and Capell, *Brisbane on Fire*, p. 231.
- 18 K Inglis, *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2008), pp. 117–87.
- 19 J Mayo, *War Memorials as Political Landscape* (New York: Praeger, 1988), pp. 1, 20.
- 20 Mayo, *War Memorials as Political Landscape*, p. 6.
- 21 Inglis, *Sacred Places*, p. 15.
- 22 Inglis, *Sacred Places*, p. 14.
- 23 S McIvor and T McIvor, *Salute the Brave* (Toowoomba: University of Southern Queensland Press, 1994), p. 7.
- 24 Inglis, *Sacred Places*, p. 129.
- 25 *Brisbane Courier*, 21 May 1921: 7.
- 26 Inglis, *Sacred Places*, p. 124.
- 27 *Brisbane Courier*, 7 June 1921: 4.
- 28 Inglis, *Sacred Places*, pp. 6, 133.
- 29 *Brisbane Courier*, 29 May 1920: 5.
- 30 *Brisbane Courier*, 10 September 1920: 8.

- 31 George Henry Male Addison, born in Wales in 1857, arrived in Australia in 1883 and came to Brisbane in 1886, where he was very active in artistic and bohemian circles. He died in 1922 after a protracted illness. Watson and McKay, *Queensland Architects*, pp. 5–6.
- 32 Inglis, *Sacred Places*, p. 124.
- 33 *Brisbane Courier*, 10 September 1920: 8, and 14 October 1920: 7.
- 34 Plans found in *Brisbane Courier*, 11 November 1920: 7.
- 35 Inglis, *Sacred Places*, pp. 144, 139, 275.
- 36 *Brisbane Courier*, 26 October 1920: 8.
- 37 Inglis, *Sacred Places*, p. 131.
- 38 Inglis, *Sacred Places*, p. 127.
- 39 This public hall, built in 1902, is today the 'sound stage' of Griffith Film School, and occasionally still serves as a public venue.
- 40 The Princess Theatre still exists and is used for theatrical productions and church services.
- 41 *Brisbane Courier*, 8 July 1922: 19.
- 42 *Brisbane Courier*, 15 February 1921: 6.
- 43 *Brisbane Courier*, 1 March 1921: 6.
- 44 *Brisbane Courier*, 13 April 1921: 11.
- 45 *Brisbane Courier*, 11 May 1921: 9.
- 46 Inglis, *Sacred Places*, p. 137.
- 47 For example, *Brisbane Courier*, 23 February 1922: 4.
- 48 Inglis, *Sacred Places*, p. 122.
- 49 The land on which the South Brisbane Fire Station stood came under the control of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade Board on 1 July 1921.
- 50 *Brisbane Courier*, 27 April 1922: 4.
- 51 Inglis, *Sacred Places*, p. 128.
- 52 *Brisbane Courier*, 5 January 1923: 15.
- 53 *Queenslander*, 5 August 1922: 21.
- 54 *Brisbane Courier*, 2 September 1922: 6. Addison died on 6 February of that year.
- 55 *Brisbane Courier*, 26 September 1922: 6. This bandstand was never built.
- 56 *Brisbane Courier*, 17 October 1922: 4.
- 57 *Brisbane Courier*, 19 October 1922: 13.
- 58 *Brisbane Courier*, 5 January 1923: 15. The bandstand, the fountain and the Grecian columns were ever built.
- 59 *Brisbane Courier*, 17 March 1923: 4.
- 60 *Brisbane Courier*, 6 August 1923: 6; *Daily Mail*, 6 August 1923: 19, and 7 August 1923: 25.
- 61 *Brisbane Courier*, 7 August 1923: 7.
- 62 *Telegraph*, 6 August 1923: 8.
- 63 Inglis, *Sacred Places*, p. 123.
- 64 Inglis, *Sacred Places*, p. 126.
- 65 *Brisbane Courier*, 20 March 1924: 7.
- 66 *Brisbane Courier*, 10 May 1924: 17.
- 67 Anzac Square resulted from a 1916 initiative to create a large war memorial park, with a monument, in the centre of the city of Brisbane. Originally, the square was to include the whole area bounded by Ann, Edward, Adelaide and Creek Streets, but this plan proved too

ambitious. In 1928, plans were finally settled and work began on Anzac Square. Governor Sir John Goodwin officially opened Anzac Square on Armistice Day 1930.

68 Brewer and Dunn, *The Municipal History of South Brisbane*, p. 112.

69 *Brisbane Courier*, 22 January 1926: 6.

70 Inglis, *Sacred Places*, pp. 157 and 60.

71 Ronald Martin Wilson was a local architect who worked with his father, Alex Wilson. See Watson and McKay, *A Directory of Queensland Architects*, pp. 209–10.

72 *Architects and Builders Journal of Queensland*, vol. IV, no. 44, 10 February 1926: 55; and *Brisbane Courier* 22 January 1926: 6.

73 Judith McKay Collection, University of Queensland Fryer Library, Acc: 880606, Box 7.

74 *Brisbane Courier*, 4 April 1928: 26. The land on which the South Brisbane Fire Station stood was under the control of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade Board, and that Board had come under the control of Brisbane City Council in 1925.

75 *Brisbane Courier*, 4 July 1928: 6.

76 *Brisbane Courier*, 12 September 1928: 7.

77 *Brisbane Courier*, 30 May 1929: 13.

78 *Brisbane Courier*, 9 August 1929: 18.

79 *Brisbane Courier*, 3 March 1930: 3.

80 *Courier-Mail*, 4 April 1936: 14.

81 Mayo, *War Memorials as Political Landscape*, p. 4.

82 *Courier-Mail*, 28 October 1933: 18.

83 *Brisbane Courier*, 18 July 1922: 9.

84 *Brisbane Courier*, 16 January 1932: 17.

85 *Brisbane Courier*, 11 February 1932: 13.

86 *Brisbane Courier*, 11 February 1932: 13. Anzac Square, with cenotaph, was not completed until 1930.

87 *Telegraph*, 15 February 1946: 5.

88 *Courier-Mail*, 10 May 1952: 5.

89 *Courier-Mail*, 2 July 1952: 2.

90 *Courier-Mail*, 12 January 1954: 3.

91 *Courier-Mail*, 25 February 1954: 3.

92 Later, a Chandler Park was created along the Brisbane River at Indooroopilly.

93 *Courier-Mail*, 26 April 1954: 5, and 30 August 1954: 3.

94 *Sunday Mail* 2 March 1958: 30.

95 W Metcalf, 'The Ship Inn Hotel: A Story of South Brisbane and Southbank', *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 2007: 31–49.

96 The first section of this building was built in 1881–82 as the South Brisbane Post and Telegraph Office, but it spent most of its chequered career as the South Brisbane Municipal Library and Art Gallery.

97 Inscribed with: 'Honour and Glory of our fallen comrades, World War II, 1939–1945. Erected by 2/31 Battalion AIF'. This plaque has no date on it, but was probably installed in 1954 (*Courier-Mail*, 30 August 1954: 3).

90 Inscribed on the front with: 'To the Memory of the Fallen: World War I 1914–1918 / World War II 1939–1945 / Korea / Malaya / Vietnam', and on the back with: 'Lest We Forget / R.S.S. & A.I.L.A. / South Brisbane Sub-Branch'.

99 This was installed in March 1986. See *Courier-Mail*, 11 March 1986: 16.

100 J McKay, *Lest We Forget: A Study of War Memorials in Queensland* (Brisbane: Returned Services League, 1985), p. 1.

101 Mayo, *War Memorials as Political Landscape*, p. 7.