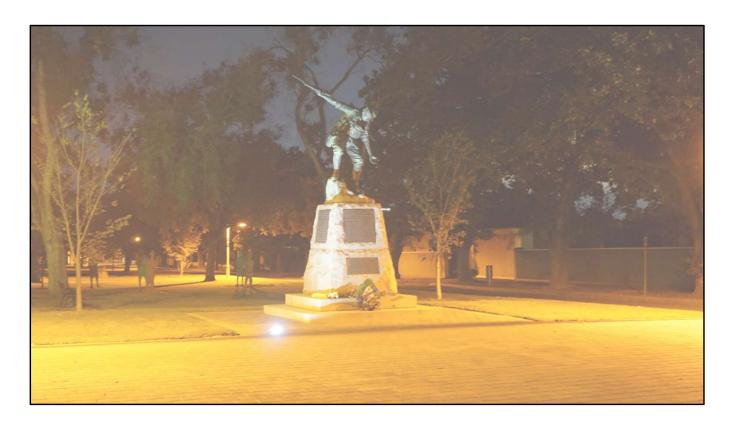
## **Burnside Historical Society**

A Unique Memorial

Burnside Memorial to Fallen Soldiers and the Avenue of Honour Rose Park

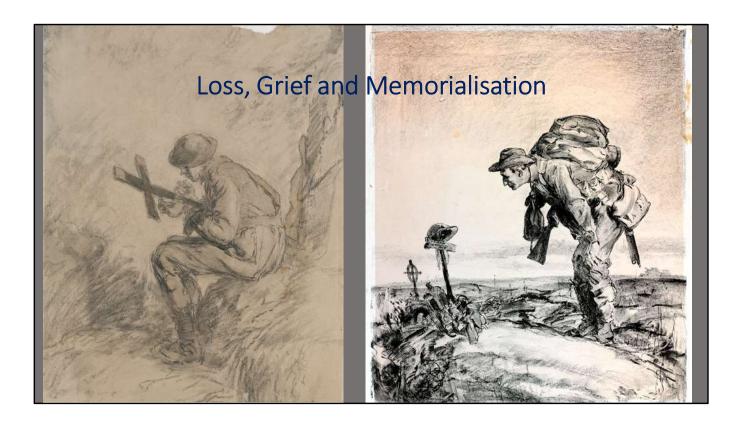


This Memorial, located on the corner of Alexandra Avenue and Prescott Terrace at Rose Park, is without doubt one of the most evocative of the thousands of Memorials that dot Australian cities and towns.

These Memorials are a poignant reminder of the staggering loss sustained by Australian society in its infancy.

But this Memorial has some remarkable connections Through the use of art to project grief loss and the anguish of uncertainty, it confers a powerful sense of selfless dignity and nobility of action on the sprit of those lost in the maelstrom of war.

Paradoxically, cemeteries, our civilian memorials to the dead, are put up by the young to mourn the old, but war memorials are put up to serve the unnatural purpose where the old are left to mourn the young whom they've lost".



The process of memorialising our war dead began while fighting still raged and it continued into the late 1930s.

These images by celebrated war artist Will Dyson are among the most poignant I have seen. On the left a young soldier fashions a cross to mark his mate's battlefield grave, from whatever is available. On the right a soldier moving through one of many sites that were fought over more than once, finds the grave of a friend and contemplates his own mortality.

It was soldiers themselves who began the process of memorialisation, because they did not want what they had been through and the sacrifice of their comrades to be forgotten.

If men were killed outright at the front, they were generally buried where they fell.

Many of these men joined the legions of those "Known unto God" who have no known grave, because battlefield burials and markers were often obliterated or covered over in subsequent fighting. That was to exacerbate the sense of grief and loss among family and communities at home, far removed from the reality of the war and not helped buy the use of the term 'Missing', meaning there was no real closure for the families, sometimes for years afterwards.

Wounded men were evacuated through the supply chain and if they were lucky made it to hospital and recovered in due course. If not and they died of their wounds in intermediate treatment facilities, they were at least identified and their graves less likely to be disturbed..

The big cemeteries came later. After the war, the grisly task of exhumation, identification (or not) and concentration of battlefield burials began under the auspices of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.



Meanwhile back in Australia, Adelaide was the site of the first Memorial commemorating our collective losses at Gallipoli.

Individual Memorials had been commissioned by families as early as July 1915.

The Dardanelles Cross Memorial was dedicated on 7 September 1915, in Lundie Gardens in the South Parklands. It makes no mention of the terms 'ANZAC' and 'Gallipoli' which were not yet in general use at that time.

Its construction was commissioned by the SA-originated Wattle Day League. **CLICK** 

Re-dedicated on 11 November 2018, it is now located at the northern end of the ANZAC Centenary Memorial Walk on Kintore Avenue, Adelaide (adjacent to the Pathway of Honour).

Like the obelisk memorials in France there are no names listed; there simply would have been too many.



The five AIF Divisions in France each erected Memorials at a location significant to the men, to mark their 'having passed this way', all the while losing friends and comrades.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Division at Pozieres, scene of Australia's greatest toll of loss

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Division at Sailly le Sec overlooking the Somme where they spent the summer of 1918

The 4<sup>th</sup> Division at Bellinglese near the Hindenburg Line, where they finished the War and

The 5<sup>th</sup> Division at Polygon Wood in Belgium scene of the Battle of the same name in September 1917

I have left the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division's until last because our Memorial has a direct link with it.

All, except the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division's were simple obelisks. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division's these days features a large bronze statue of digger in battle order, but wearing the iconic slouch hat. It wasn't always like that though and the story of the original links our Memorial in suburban Adelaide, to this picturesque site in France and several others besides..



About the same time in Australia, came the Memorials in each State.



South Australia's Memorial although by no means the largest has a sobering array of bronze plaques bearing the names of over 3,500 soldiers enlisted in SA, by the units in which they served, who gave their lives on the service of the nation.



Then there were our National Memorials - the National War Memorial in Canberra driven largely by the determination and doggedness of Australia's Official War Historian Charles Bean.

In France another National Memorial was finally opened in 1938 after much debate and argument over who would pay!

The National Memorial at Villers Bretonneux lists the names of the Missing in France; over 10,000 of them, but not all of them. The VC Memorial at Fromelles lists the name of nearly 1200 men with no known grave lost in that infamous action in July 1916.

In 1940 the newly opened Australian National Memorial was strafed and attacked as a likely Observation Post during the course of the Blitzkrieg through France.



Post war Australia was a nation in mourning; with 60,000 dead from a nation of less than 5 million and about 100,000 returned men who bore physical or mental scars Australia itself endured 'post-traumatic stress disorder'.

No remains of WW1 soldiers lost overseas were ever repatriated to Australia.

Grieving families and communities in Australia had to decide how best to publicly commemorate their loss and with no government help had to raise all their own funds.

Two distinctive styles of Memorials emerged – 'Living Memorials' of trees often individually named for local people lost in the war, and the ubiquitous marble statues of a digger in the 'rest on arms reverse' stance to salute the fallen.



Hundreds of these emerged in communities all around Australia.

Community Memorials tend to record the names of those locals who gave their lives in the service of the nation.

Unusually, Australia fielded an all-volunteer Army in WW1 which in part perhaps explains a propensity in many cases to include the names of all those who served, not just those who gave their lives.



Charles Web Gilbert was a Melbourne based sculptor who learned his craft initially as a pastry chef, starting out with icing sugar decorations. He undertook drawing classes and carving in a variety of mediums. He transferred his obvious ability to sculpting in plaster marble and by 1905 direct casting in bronze generating a large number of works.

He worked in London between 1914 and 1917, with one of his works being purchased by the Tate Gallery and other woks at the National Academy. Too old for general enlistment he resumed sculpting. In 1917, after marrying in London, he gained specialist enlistment into the AIF to join CEW Bean's team of journalists and artists to undertake landscape modelling for hat became the original and prototype of what were to become the AWM's famed battlefield dioramas. The Mont St Quentin diorama.

As it turned out he had a strong personal connection with this site. Close personal friends, the Roberts family lost their son Frank in this battle, and the diorama depicts his 9 Platoon 'hopping the bags' on that fateful day

On return to Australia in 1920 he began work on a number of commissioned commemorative sculptures.



The Burnside Memorial to Fallen soldiers began as the war was drawing to a close.

In 1918, a group of men who appointed themselves the "Rose Park Improvement Association" pledged £200 towards the planting of trees throughout the area, in particular along Alexandra Avenue and Prescott Terrace in Rose Park, the intersection dominated by the Gartrell Church which had itself only been opened in 1914.

July 19th 1919 was set aside for "Official Peace Day Celebrations", coinciding with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles'. and a ceremony was held on a dais at the junction of the streets.

Plaques were affixed to the trees to remember the fallen - it is unknown, in the present day, how an 'association' to the area was declared, but records suggest that those on the roll were either born, schooled or worked in the Burnside area, or their families did.

The choice of trees as a memorial is particularly poignant - a living, evergreen memorial that must be maintained by those that come after.

"An impressive ceremony took place on July 19 (1919), at Rose Park, when

Soldiers' Memorial avenues were planted at Alexandra Avenue and Prescott Terrace in the presence of a large company of spectators, in honor of the soldiers who enlisted from the Burnside district, with a special tree to each of the men who fell.

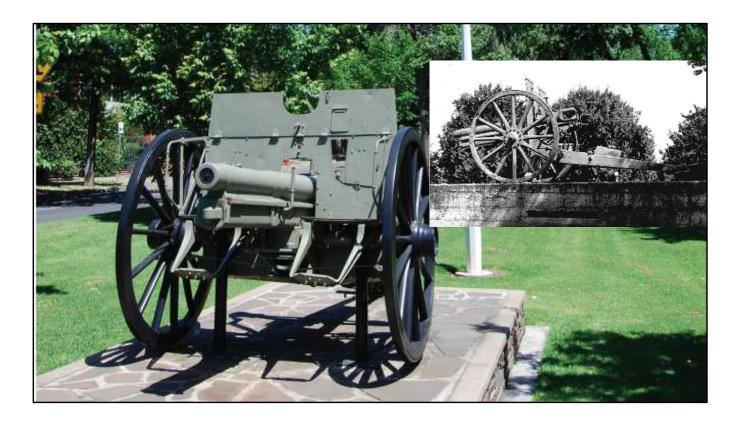
The chairman of the Burnside District Council (Councillor J. A. Harper) presided. His Excellency the Governor was received by the chairman and other members of the council, a guard of honour being formed by the 1st Troop Rose Park Boy Scouts. Selections were played by the Rose Park School Band.

Mr. F Johns (secretary of the Memorial Committee) announced that he had had handed to him 70 patriotic emblems, bearing devices of the Allied nations, which were to be given to the relatives who planted trees that day in memory of the fallen.

They had been presented by Mesdames Leon and Mouchette and were intended as souvenirs of the occasion. Chaplain Rev. G. W. Kendrew offered the dedicatory prayer.

Berthe Mouchette is another interesting personality from the era but sadly she is 'out of scope' for tonight's presentation!

His Excellency planted the first tree, and the Premier, the chairman of the District Council, the Chairman of the Improvement Association, and Colonel Price Weir, D.S.O. also planted trees. Relatives of the fallen men followed, and Troop-leader Albert Ind sounded 'The Last Post.'



Also installed at the same time as the Memorial trees, was the Krupp Field Gun captured by troops of the 32<sup>nd</sup> (SA/WA) Battalion in 1918. This was one of a huge trove of German artillery repatriated to Australia. It is one of a number of guns from the same Battery of 6 that ended up in parks and gardens around the State.

It was relocated from its original position when the statue was installed.

By 1956 (inset) it had endured 35 years in the open and was looking very sad indeed, so it was removed into storage.

It has benefitted from restoration and now marks the beginning of the Memorial precinct on approach south along Prescott Terrace near the Kensington Rd intersection..



Having created the Memorial Avenue of Trees, the good citizens of Burnside wanted something more visible as an embodiment of their desire to honour the Fallen.

They became aware of the work of Charles Web Gilbert and moved to commission a statue in bronze.

Web Gilbert's order book was overflowing, but he accepted commissions from Burnside, Broken Hill and Shepparton among other works, including The Desert Mounted Corps in Port Said Egypt and a duplicate which now graces Anzac Avenue in Canberra.



By November 1924, a sense of anticipation gripped Burnside.

"The bronze statue by the Australian sculptor Charles Web-Gilbert, to commemorate the fallen soldiers of the Burnside district, has arrived, and the work of erecting the granite pedestal to carry it has been begun.

The statue is to stand on the site of the captured German Field gun in the Soldiers' Memorial Gardens, Rose Park, near the intersection of Alexandra Avenue and Prescott Terrace. Panels on four sides of the granite base will contain the names of 87 fallen soldiers. The Governor (Sir Tom Bridges) has consented to perform the unveiling ceremony on Sunday afternoon, December 14.

The Register (Adelaide), 15th November 1924.

The bronze figure of a WW1 soldier leaning forward with his left arm extended in the pose of a man about to lift a friend to 'hop the bags' or 'go over the top'. The right arm is extended behind holding out his rifle for balance.

As it happens we can be even more specific - it relates to the Battle of Mont St Quentin, one of the great victories of the AIF, fought between 30th August and 2nd September 1918.

This statue appears to be modelled on a figure in the AWM WW1 diorama of the capture of Mont St Quentin. The designer / sculptor of the diorama and this memorial are one in the same, Mr Charles Web Gilbert, so the likeness is not a coincidence.

This effigy is surmounted on a two-tier granite pedestal, which in turn, is set on a two-tier granite base. The monument is set in brick pavers. Bronze plaques are affixed to each face.

The Memorial is part of an adjacent precinct including the avenues of trees in Alexandra Avenue and Prescott Terrace, at the base of which are brass plates commemorating the 87 men named on this memorial.

An identical sculpture forms part of the Shepparton War Memorial and another Web Gilbert statue is the focus of the Broken Hill Memorial in NSW, entitled "The Bomber". See the link to this ubiquitous sculptor's works which include the now lost original 2nd Division Memorial at Mont St Quentin, France.



Charles Web Gilbert's first major commemorative commission was for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division's Memorial at Mont St Quentin.

It depicted a hatless digger bayonetting the German eagle.

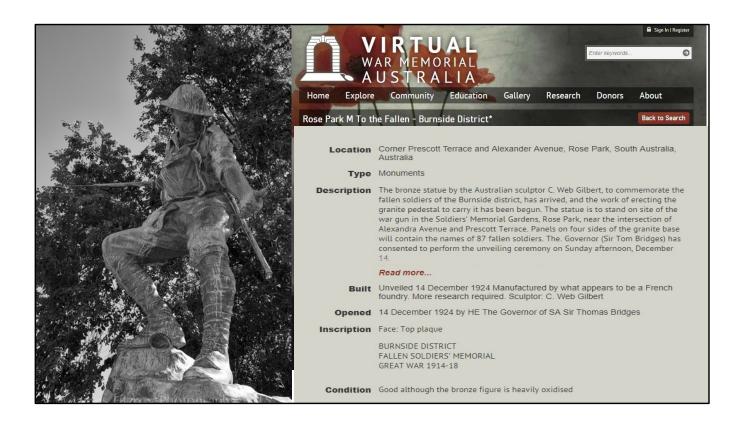
It is presumed that it was cast by the same foundry that produced the other aforementioned sculptures; Parisienne metalwork manufacturing and foundry business. Ferdinand Barbedienne.

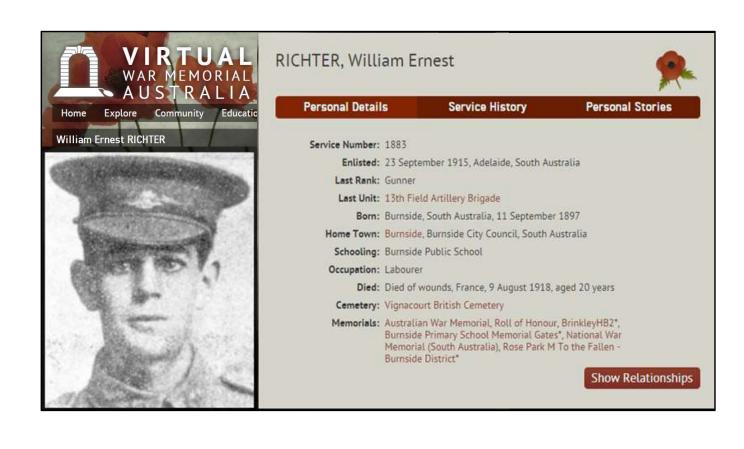
This statue was very popular with the soldiers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division as it symbolised the victory they had achieved at such great cost in the 21/2 years of their service on the Western Front.

Sadly, Gilbert's frenetic pace took its toll on his health and he succumbed to cardiovascular disease at Fitzroy on 3 October 1925, aged just 57, before the unveiling of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division Memorial.

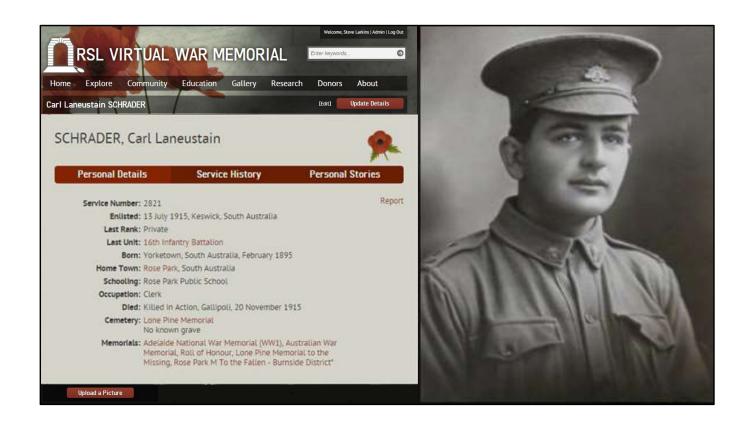
However, the Memorial was relatively brief in any event, because it failed to find favour with the invading Nazis in 1940 and was scrapped; melted down to make German war materiel.

The current less dramatic statue was erected in 1971.

















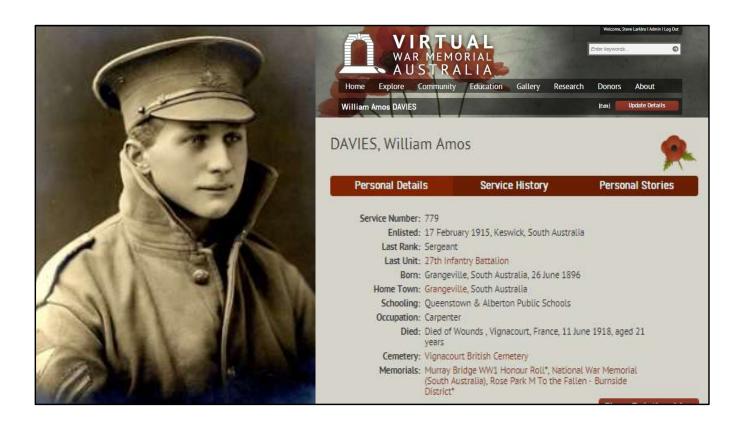






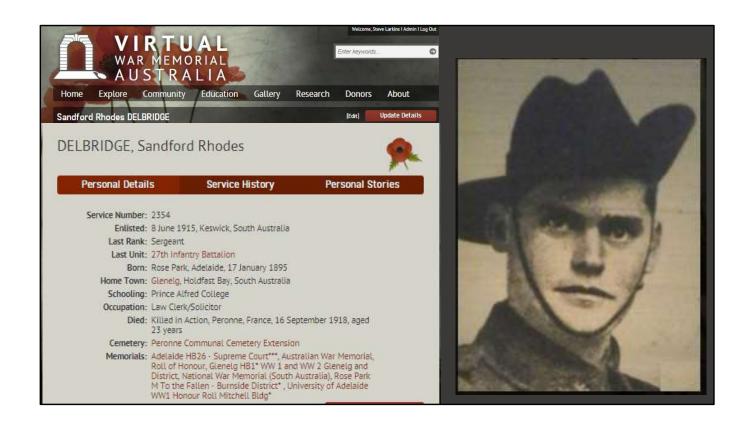


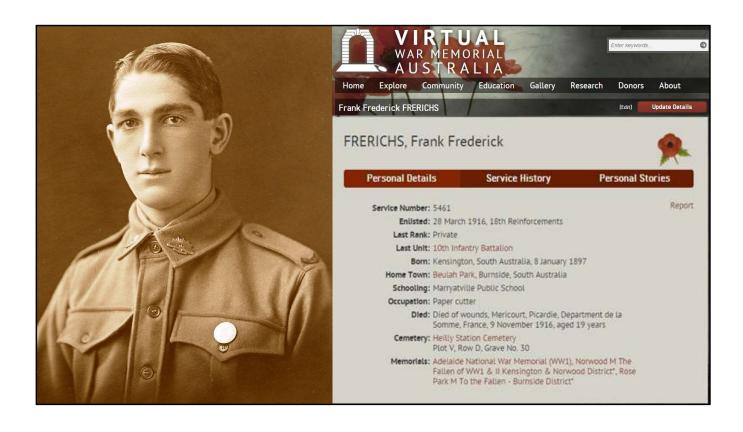


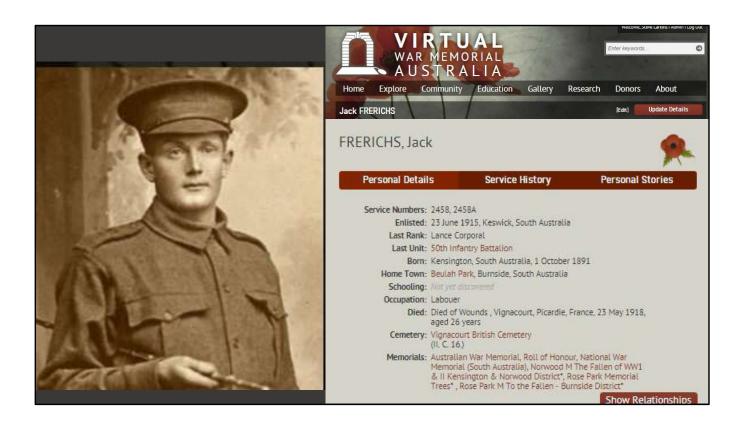


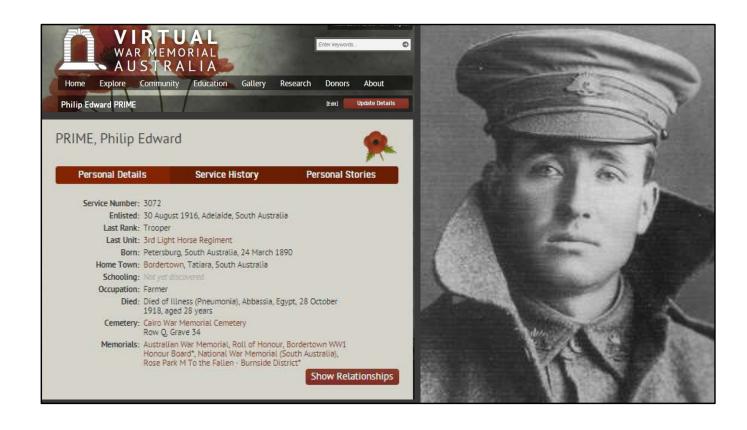






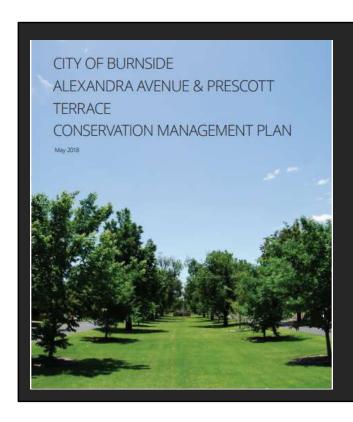












Post Script

A research group began in 2021, of which there are some members with us tonight, who had the task of uncovering names of fallen soldiers of the Burnside District who are yet to be recognised on a District memorial. Their research found 22 names that had yet to be recognised. The group has come forward with a proposal to install a new section in the Memorial precinct recognising these fallen soldiers, most of which were born in the Burnside area and who were killed in the course of their Great War service, who are not listed elsewhere in the precinct. If you are interested in seeing the list of names proposed to be added to this section, please contact Michelle Toft, Historical and Cultural Officer at the City of Burnside.