

MEDIA BACKGROUNDER

Animals in war memorial

The *Animals in war memorial* is a joint project between the Australian War Memorial and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA). The memorial commemorates those animals that served alongside Australians in all conflicts. Animals as diverse as horses, dogs, donkeys, camels and pigeons performed many essential duties, such as transport, tracking and carrying messages. Some also lived with the Australians as mascots or companions. To this day, animals continue to play an important role in the work of the Australian armed forces.

The *Animals in war memorial* incorporates as its centrepiece a large bronze horse head, an Australian War Memorial collection item, and the only remaining fragment from the original Desert Mounted Corps memorial. The Desert Mounted Corps memorial was designed by Charles Web Gilbert, worked on briefly by Paul Montford, before being completed by Sir Bertram Mackennal. It was installed in Port Said, Egypt and unveiled in 1932 by Australia's wartime Prime Minister Billy Hughes.

In 1956 the Desert Mounted Corps memorial was destroyed by rioters during the Suez Crisis. The remaining fragments of this memorial were returned to Australia. A new memorial, made by Ray Ewers and modelled on the original Gilbert design, was installed and unveiled by Sir Robert Menzies at Albany, Western Australia in 1964. A second version of this was also installed on ANZAC Parade, Canberra and unveiled by Prime Minister John Gorton in 1968.

The sculptor selected to produce the *Animals in war memorial* was Steven Holland. As well as having experience in reinterpreting existing museum objects, he is an artist who has great empathy for this project, whose previous work has considered the relationship between humans and animals. Holland has studied at the Royal College of Art, London, Canberra School of Art and the Curtin University of Technology and is a former recipient of the respected Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarship.

The design of the *Animals in war memorial* features the bronze horse head positioned upon a tear shaped plinth made of granite. The height of the plinth allows the memorial to be accessible, encouraging visitors to engage with the horse's head in the same way they might have a personal interaction with animals generally. The horse head is a poignant relic, rich in history, drama and emotion. It provides a tangible link to all animals and in this new setting is a sensitive and symbolic memorial for all animals that have served in war.

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18 May 2009