



THE AIMING POST

The Royal Australian Artillery Historical Society Of Western Australia Newsletter

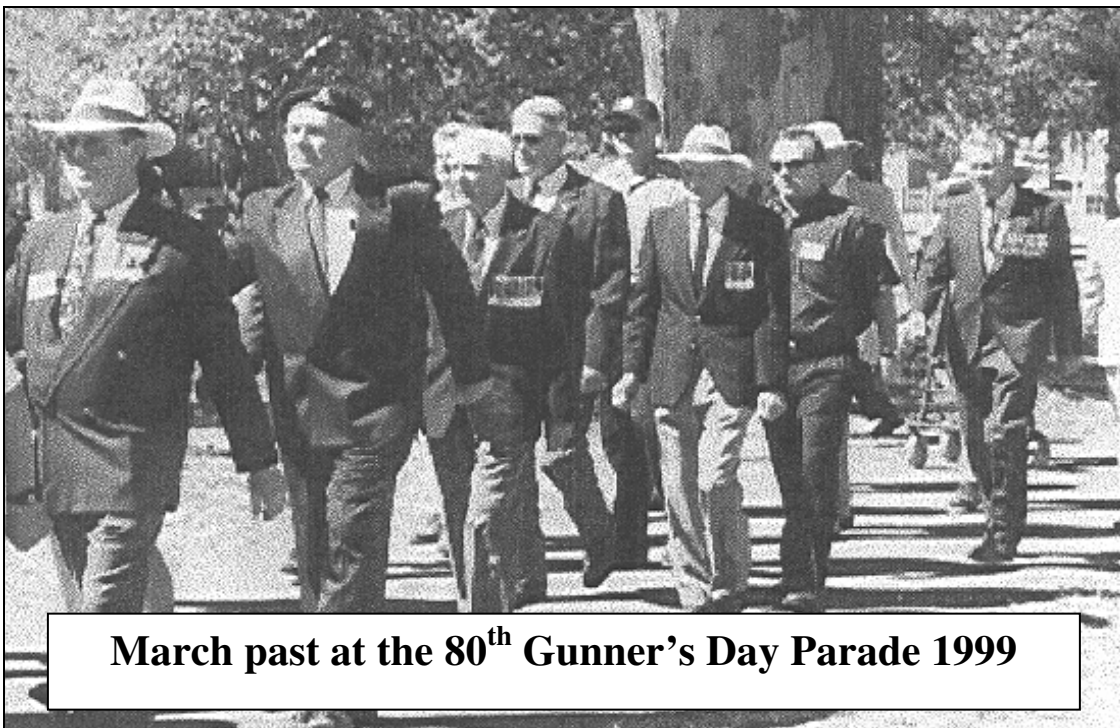
Issue 3/2001

October 2001

Annual Gunner's Day Parade

The 82nd annual Gunner's Day Parade will be held in Guilford on Sunday 4 November 2001. The Reviewing Officer this year will be the Society's Patron, Brigadier R.M. Davis ED. Invited guests are requested to be seated by 2:15 pm. The Parade will step off at 2:30 pm.

Following the wreath Laying Ceremony at the memorial, Bishop Brian Farran will conduct a "Blessing of the Restored Artillery Pieces". The parade and guests will then move to St Mathew's Church for the Service. Afternoon tea will follow in the Church Hall.



March past at the 80th Gunner's Day Parade 1999

The Story of the Poppy

The Flanders poppy has been a part of commemorative ritual since the early 1920s. During the First World War, the red poppies were seen to be among the first living plants that sprouted from the devastation of the battlefields of northern France and Belgium. Soldiers' folklore had it that the poppies were vivid red from having been nurtured in ground drenched with the blood of their comrades.

The sight of the poppies on the battlefield at Ypres in 1915 moved Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae to write the poem *In Flanders Fields*. Flanders poppies also featured prominently in several other literary responses to the carnage of the Western Front. In English literature of the nineteenth century poppies had symbolised sleep or a state of oblivion; this symbolism was carried into the literature of the First World War, but a new, more powerful symbolism was now attached to the poppy - that of the sacrifice of shed blood.

An American, Moira Michael, read McCrae's poem and was so moved by it that she wrote a reply and decided to wear a red poppy as a way of keeping faith, as McCrae urged in his poem. Michael worked for the American YMCA and at a meeting of YMCA secretaries from other countries, held in November 1918, she discussed the poem and her poppies. Madame Guerin, the French YMCA secretary, was similarly inspired and she approached organisations throughout the allied nations to sell poppies to raise money for widows, orphans and needy veterans and their families.

The poppy has also become very popular in wreaths used on Anzac Day. An early use of the poppy on Anzac Day was in 1940 in Palestine, where it grows in profusion in the spring. At the Dawn Service each soldier dropped a poppy as he filed past the Stone of Remembrance. A senior Australian officer also laid a wreath of poppies that had been picked from the hillside of Mt Scopus.

Now each year, poppies adorn the panels of the Memorial's Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial, pushed in beside names as a small personal tribute to the memory of any one of the thousands of individuals commemorated there. This practice originates from a spontaneous gesture

made by people waiting to pay their respects at the funeral of the Unknown Australian Soldier on 11 November 1993. After the main service the public were invited to file through the Hall of Memory and lay a single flower by his tomb. To do this they had to queue along the cloisters, beside the Roll of Honour, and at the end of the day hundreds of RSL poppies were found to have been pushed into the cracks between the panels.



The poppy has a particular relevance for the Gunner's Day Parade which occurs a week before Armistice or Poppy Day.

This year as with every year, we remember in particular those comrades who have departed since the last parade.

In Flanders Fields

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunsets glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe;
To you from failing hands, we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break the faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

Gulliver's Travels or (Vice President's Report)

By Ron Jager

Thanks to my relatives in Whakatane New Zealand I was able to attend Anzac Day in New Zealand. I attended the Anzac Day service in a town called Whakatane, which is in the North Island in the Bay of Plenty. The town has a population of approximately 14000 people.

The morning started with all those intending to march, meeting at the Big Game Fishing Club at 0515hrs where the bar had laid out glasses already filled with a measure of Rum with a Milk container adjacent to enable a Rum and Milk cocktail to be produced to the individuals taste. Also a tray of poppies of the same pattern as we wear on Remembrance Day was provided, with each member taking one and placing it in their lapel. It was at this juncture that I found 3 Gunners, identified by their Corps ties. I ended up in conversation with a fellow who had been with the airborne division and it was next to him that I marched.



At 0530hrs the group was summoned to fall in, in the parking area adjacent to the clubrooms and on the orders of the parade marshal moved off. A short distance, and after a right wheel the column was inside the grassed area of the local Marae

After a short service and addresses by the Maori and RSA representatives, the parade was dismissed where all taking part moved into the adjoining hall to be served with a sit-down breakfast. The hall seated about 200 people. Breakfast consisted of Bacon and Eggs and Beer or Tea or Coffee. A role call of all service members present

was something different. I was invited to take part, where in rotation order around the tables, everyone stood up and identified themselves by number rank and corps/service and in my case country.

The civic service was held at the District War Memorial Centre, which was only a short distance away. About the same number of personnel took part in this service, which commenced at 0900hrs. Several speakers addressed the gathering, which consisted of the ex service personnel and a crowd of several hundred. It was interesting to see, that like in Australia, there was a large presence of young people in attendance. At the conclusion of the wreath laying ceremony all those who wished to take part were invited to form up and in twos and threes, placed their poppies at the foot of the cenotaph in a large open, felt lined cross. I thought this was a very touching moment. With the lowering and raising of the flags in conjunction with the playing of the Last Post and Reveille the parade moved off to the march past and dismissal.

The remainder of the day was no difference to Australia that is an adjournment to the RSA to re-fight past battles. I can only add that the Kiwis made me feel most at home and their hospitality was only exceeded by their good looks. PS. Some of the sheep are good looking too. My experience with the Kiwis and the RSA didn't finish at Whakatane, for on the evening of Saturday the 5th of May I ended up at the Otahuhu RSA. Which is just out of Auckland and not far from where we were staying at our motel.

The president, Mr. Theo Brunt, who I called Neil all night, and members made Maureen and myself and my relatives most welcome and helped us enjoy a most memorable night. I ended up with another Gunner and an Engineer in the company of the Infantry members, who were in support of the President, downing several beers and to my memory 3 bottles of port.

The president honoured us by singing the Maori farewell in Maori and also told a joke especially adapted for the Aussies. Maureen and I were given 2 glasses bearing the Club's Logo and I was given an Otahuhu RAS embroidered pocket. Apart from drinking the club out of port, my cousin and I gave a rendition of Waltzing Matilda to those in attendance. I have since been told not to give up my day job. I have left with lasting memories and contacts and addresses to which I will be sending future copies of our Association's newsletters. I can only add that the spirit of Anzac goes on and again say thanks to the presidents and members of the Whakatane and Otahuhu RSAs for making me feel so at home.

Coorow Commemorative Ceremony

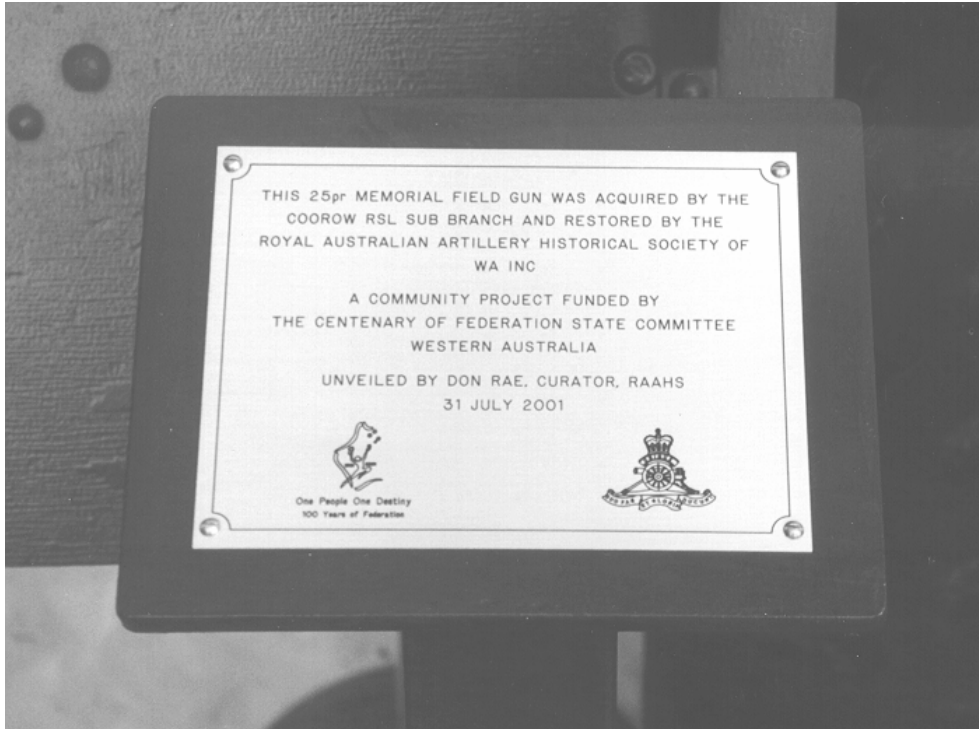
Some eighteen months ago, the Society's Workshop Team undertook the restoration of a WW2 25pr Gun Howitzer originally owned by the Coorow Sub-Branch of the Returned & Services League of Australia. When delivered to the Workshop, the axle, hubs and wheels were missing and the Gun Firing Platform had rotted away. The Coorow Heritage Committee had inherited the Gun and the RSL Hall and was anxious to convert the Hall into a District Museum with the Gun as the focal point.

Fortunately, the Heritage Committee was not prepared to leave the Gun exposed to the elements and constructed a "Nissen Hut" enclosure for its protection adjacent to the Hall. In so doing they have created a precedent that will be used by the Society in its dealings with other similar organisations seeking our assistance in restoration tasks.



Restored 25 pounder in its new display shelter adjacent to the RSL Hall in Coorow. RAAH of WA photo

On 31 July 2001, forty seven years to the day the Hall was originally opened, a similar ceremony was conducted to which Members of the Society were invited. Eight Members journeyed to Coorow where they were made welcome by the Heritage Committee and treated to traditional Country Style Morning Tea. Among the invited guests was the Country Vice President R&SL, Mr Alan Gronow, APM and the Three Springs District Sub-Branch President, Mr. John Thorpe, OAM.



Mrs Alison Doley, Chairperson Coorow Heritage Committee, conducted the formal proceedings and called on the Society's Curator, Don Rae, to officially unveil the Gun.

After the Ceremony, our Members and other invited guests were treated to Lunch in the Heritage Hall, following which the group returned to Perth. All agreed that a lasting friendship has been established with the Coorow residents who were delighted with the restoration of "Their Gun". Credit for this major task rests with the Workshop Team under the guidance and leadership of Kevin Hamilton and Harvey Everett – both of whom attended the Coorow Ceremony.



VALE - A.D. (Bill) Holder

Sadly we mourn the passing of A.D. (Bill) Holder. A foundation member of the society, Bill provided us with an immense amount of information on artillery matters. His contribution to the RAAHS and that of the Rottnest Island Board will long be remembered. His "hands-on" involvement and recollection of historical aspects was a hallmark of his interest in all things of a gunner nature. A serving gunner prior to WWII, Bill served with distinction and style and will remain in our memories as one of the real characters of the gunner fraternity. Bill we thank you and salute you.
UBIQUE



VALE - Dudley Morrison Mackie

Was a member of 3 Field Bde pre-war and enlisted in AIF on the outbreak of WW2. Joined 2/7 Aust Field Regiment RAA and served in Palestine, Syria and the Middle East. He was commissioned in the Middle East and participated in the Battle of El Alamein. Later, after return to Australia, he served in the Borneo Campaigns.

He was a successful businessman during the post war era. He joined the Society in November 1988 and headed up the Photo Archive Section. He was a dedicated member who devoted much energy in Society matters.

Dudley passed away suddenly on 9 October 2001 and was cremated on Saturday 13th October 2001. The service was attended by many of his Service and Society colleagues.

UBIQUE

The Royal Australian Artillery Historical Society notes with gratitude that both Bill and Dudley agreed to be interviewed as part of our oral history program. Their interviews add to our appreciation and understanding of all those who served and will remain an enduring legacy and memorial.

Customs of Commemoration



The annual Gunner's Day Parade calls to mind the customs of commemoration associated with these services. The following extracts based on information from the Department of Veteran's Affairs and the Australian War Memorial web sites reminds us of the origins of these traditions.

Sounding "The last post"

"The last post" is the trumpet or bugle call sounded in barracks and other military installations at 10 pm each night to mark the end of the day's activities. It is also sounded at military funerals and commemorative services to indicate that the soldier's day has drawn to a final close.

A period of silence

Silence for one or two minutes is included in the Anzac ceremony as a sign of respect. It offers a time for reflection on the significance of the whole ceremony. Observation of the two minutes silence occurred at 9 am in Adelaide, 1916, on the first anniversary of the landing. Edward Honey, an Australian journalist living in London during the First World War, is credited with originating the idea. He published a letter in the *Evening News* of 8 May 1919 appealing for five minutes silence among the celebrations of the first anniversary of the Armistice (11 November).

"The rouse"

After the one-minute silence, flags are raised from half-mast to the masthead as "The rouse is sounded. Traditionally "The rouse" called soldiers' spirits to arise, ready to fight for another day. Today it is associated with "The last post" at all military funerals, and at services of dedication and remembrance.

"The reveille"

In major ceremonies "The last post" is normally followed by "The rouse", except at the Dawn Service, when "The reveille" is played. Ordinarily, "The reveille" is played only as the first call of the day, while "The rouse" may be used at any time. Historically, "The reveille" woke the soldier at dawn, and the name of the ceremony is mentioned in sixteenth century books on war. Until a hundred years ago, "The reveille" was performed on drum and fife. Today a solo bugle or trumpet does the job.



"Flags at Half Mast"

The tradition of lowering flags to half-mast as a sign of remembrance is believed to have its origins on the high seas. As a sign of respect or honour for important persons, sailing ships would lower their sails, thus slowing the vessel and allowing for the VIP's own vessel to come alongside and him to board if he so desired. Lowering of sails was also used to honour VIPs who were reviewing a naval procession from the land. In time only the ship's flags were lowered in a symbolic gesture. This practice was also adopted on land.
(AWM Photo)

"Rosemary"

Rosemary is an ancient symbol of remembrance. Since ancient times, this aromatic herb has been believed to have properties to improve the memory. Even today, rosemary oils and extracts are sold for this purpose. Possibly because of these properties, rosemary became an emblem of both fidelity and remembrance in ancient literature and folklore. Traditionally, sprigs of rosemary are worn on Anzac Day and sometimes Remembrance Day, and are usually handed out by Legacy and the RSL. Rosemary has particular significance for Australians as it is found growing wild on the Gallipoli peninsula.

Bickley Battery Interpretation

Based on an article by Robert Glyde

Bickley Point on Rottnest Island was chosen as the site for the 6-in gun battery, which was intended to deny access to Gage Roads via the South Passage. This channel, south of the island, would permit vessels of shallow draught to enter the anchorage. The battery was equipped with 6-in guns, which in conjunction with the 9.2-in battery at Oliver Hill, could assist in the counter bombardment (CB) task.

A contract for the construction of the battery was prepared, calling for two gun emplacements, three magazines consisting of those for No.1 and No.2 guns and a reserve building in the battery area. Two gun shelters were to be constructed as well as the Battery Observation Post (BOP), the Close Defence Observation Post (CDBOP) and an artillery store. All this was estimated to cost 11,600 pounds. The Battery Plotting Room (BPR) was added at a later date. It was originally planned to consist of the BPR and the Fortress Plotting Room (FPR). The building plan was modified to provide for the BPR only and the FPR was constructed in the Oliver Hill Battery area.

The original plan for the battery had called for three guns. The layout was such that the CDBOP alongside the guns, and the main lighthouse, obstructed the arc of fire in some sectors and the third gun, which was described as a reserve gun, would have overcome some of the obstruction problem. There were probably three factors that prevented the installation of the third gun. The site at Bickley was very limited in area and it would have been difficult to place the third unit. There was shortage of the long-range 6-in guns for coast defence purposes. There were also the economic difficulties in providing the facilities for the third gun during a period of severe financial restrictions.

The BOP was situated at Lookout Hill about three quarters of a mile west of the battery position. This facility was required to enable the battery to meet the CB requirements, as was the BPR also to the west of the battery. One might ask why the two Observation Posts. The CDBOP was manned at night by the Gun Position Officer, who fought the guns from this point

because the range of the guns was limited by the distance a target could be illuminated at night by the coast defence searchlights. Dependant on many factors, the searchlights probably had a range of not more than 8000 yards. The CDBOP was equipped with two instrument pillars, which were fitted with Depression Rangefinders enabling the coverage of 360 degrees.

Initially the battery was equipped with two 6-in Mk XI guns No.s 2286 and 2290. These had previously been installed on temporary mountings at Fort Swanbourne pending the completion of that facility to take the 6-in MK VII guns, which had become available from Fort Forrest. They were shipped to Rottneest in September 1938. The two guns were mounted on temporary mountings at Rottneest pending the completion of the permanent emplacements.

At some later stage these guns were replaced by Mk XI guns No.s 2328 and 2309. It was reported that the original two guns were worn and were only suitable for sites of less importance than Fremantle, which at the time of World War Two had the same classification as Sydney. The replacement guns had both been re-tubed between the wars and therefore could operate to their full potential. They were amongst some 25 naval guns released for use in the coast defence role. Most of them were on modified naval mountings, which permitted 20 degrees of elevation, giving a range of 18600 yards. A myth grew up that at least one of the guns was from the HMAS "Sydney" of "Emden" fame however Admiralty records show this was not true.

Unlike most of the 6-in batteries around Australia, Bickley Battery had a 360-degree capability. Following experience in Singapore the guns were fitted with a lightly armoured shield attached to the rear of the main shield. This moved around as the guns traversed providing the gun crews with some protection from low flying strafing aircraft. They did interfere to some extent with the gun movement. It was not known to what extent this problem was overcome following an examination by RAEME personnel who made certain recommendations. Most batteries, being on the mainland with a task of less than 360 degrees, were bunded at the rear and had some overhead cover.

The searchlight arc at Philip Point was obstructed by Philip Rock so the Fortress Engineers blew away the rock to almost water level. In the early stages of World War 2 Bickley Battery was not manned on a 24-hour basis. It was only when troop convoys or large transports such as the "Queen Mary" were in Gage Roads that the battery was on watch continuously. This changed when the Japanese entered the war.

Bickley Battery remained operational until 1946 when it was placed in "long term storage". This term generally meant that the barrel was withdrawn from the mounting cradle and placed on blocks alongside the mounting, after the breech block and other moveable equipment was removed and placed in secured storage. In 1963, as with all the other coast artillery facilities, Bickley Battery was dismantled and the equipment sold off to the scrap merchants. The gun barrels proved too much for the scrap merchants to handle and after cutting gun No. 2309 in half, the two barrels were buried on site and abandoned.

In 1980 an Army team recovered the barrels and sent them to 5 Base Ordnance Depot at Midland for restoration and preservation. Gun No. 2309 was welded together and was handed over to the Rottnest Island Authority. It is now on display at the Kingstown Barracks complex. Gun No. 2328, which was still complete, was handed to the Army Museum then at "Dilhorn" Mt Lawley. It was displayed at the site until the Army Museum moved to the Fremantle Artillery Barracks.

Following negotiations with the RAA Historical Society of WA, the piece was handed over to the Society for display at the Leighton Battery Heritage Site. The barrel was fitted to a concrete pedestal and today it looks out over the waters it helped to protect all those years ago.

The Rottnest Island Authority with the assistance of 13 Brigade Field Engineers and Green Corps has recently completed a range of conservation works at the Bickley Battery, which makes it once again accessible for visitors. The original railway line leading to the Battery was used as the foundation for a compacted limestone path. The path was laid on the sleepers between the rails. This solution preserved the original line and provided a cost effective edging for the path. Barbed wire entanglements, wire netting camouflage and protruding revetments were made safe with minimum removal of original materials. A collapsed section of the roof of

an underground bunker was repaired and the metal fittings of the CDBOP were stabilized. The sappers undertook most of this work.

Green Corps extended the initial paths to provide further access to the main features of the battery and a trail to the searchlight engine room and to the beach for a circular tour back to Kingston Barracks. Brushing and other remedial work was undertaken to prevent further blow out and erosion around the battery location.

The Rottnest Island Authority is currently finalizing the interpretive signage for the Bickley Battery. When emplaced this signage will permit a self-guided tour of the installation including the magazines, gun platforms and CDBOP. Society member Bill Holder, as one of his last contributions to the preservation of gunner heritage, provided material for many of these interpretive signs.

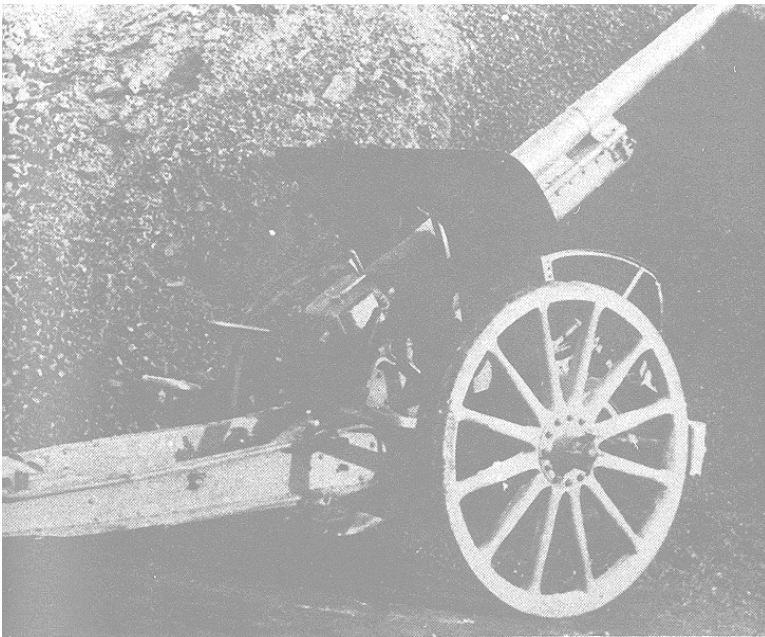
The project shows what can be accomplished on a limited budget with a little lateral thinking, effective partnerships and good research and design. Congratulations are extended to the Rottnest Island Authority and all staff and volunteers involved with the project and the excellent results achieved in conserving our artillery heritage.



6" Mk 11 barrel No. 2309 at Kingston Barracks, Rottnest Island

Update – York Trophy Gun

Readers will remember the series of articles by Bob Glyde from 2000 to early 2001 describing Trophy Guns. According to Australian War Memorial records there were 33 Feld Kanone (Field Guns) and Feld Haubitze (Field Howitzers) allocated to Western Australia for monument guns. Their calibres varied from 75 mm to 150 mm. Eight of these were 75 mm FK03 Model sold to the Turkish Government. Today in Western Australia only five 77 mm Feld Kanone M96 or an updated variation of the model remain.



The Aiming Post article in February 2001 provided details of one of these weapons, No 5948 displayed at the York War Memorial Park. Fried Krupp of Essen manufactured this gun in 1916. Documents indicate that the gun was captured by 28 Bn at Villiers Bretonneaux on 12 August 1918. It was allocated to the York Council

The Melbourne inspection report indicated there were signs of damage by shellfire to the trail, shield and barrel but in general the gun was in good condition. It was painted in camouflage colours.

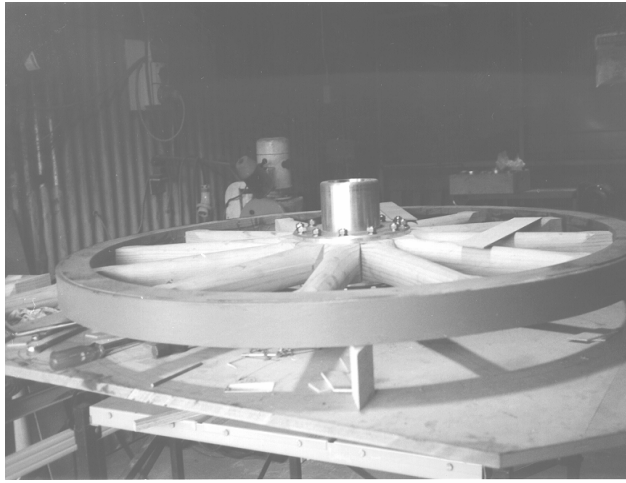
Sadly time had taken its toll and a condition report mid 2000 indicated the following:

*It is in poor condition and all movable parts have been removed. .
The weapon has no wheels, its axles rest on two concrete plinth.
Whereas the other four guns are in relatively complete condition with breechblocks, etc, this gun appears to have been stripped of any moveable parts.*

In July 2000, the gun was placed in the hands of the Society workshop personnel who were given the task of restoring the gun to display condition and endeavouring to prevent further deterioration. The extent of the deterioration and the challenges facing the Society were only fully realised when the weapon was examined at Karrakatta. Conscious of the heritage value of the gun and its fragility work was undertaken with care and after extensive research. As the following photo shows disassembly and stabilisation has been completed. It was indeed a process of discovery with many exciting turns along the way.



A major challenge facing all conservation or restoration work of guns of this period are the wheels. Outdoor display and indifferent maintenance quickly leads to rot and the wheels are then removed as being unsafe. Nothing looks more forlorn than a field piece sitting on blocks or resting on the ground without wheels. Sometimes when this occurs the hubs and tires are retained but often they too disappear over time. The result is then either the installation of wagon or other unsuitable wheels or an ugly concrete support.



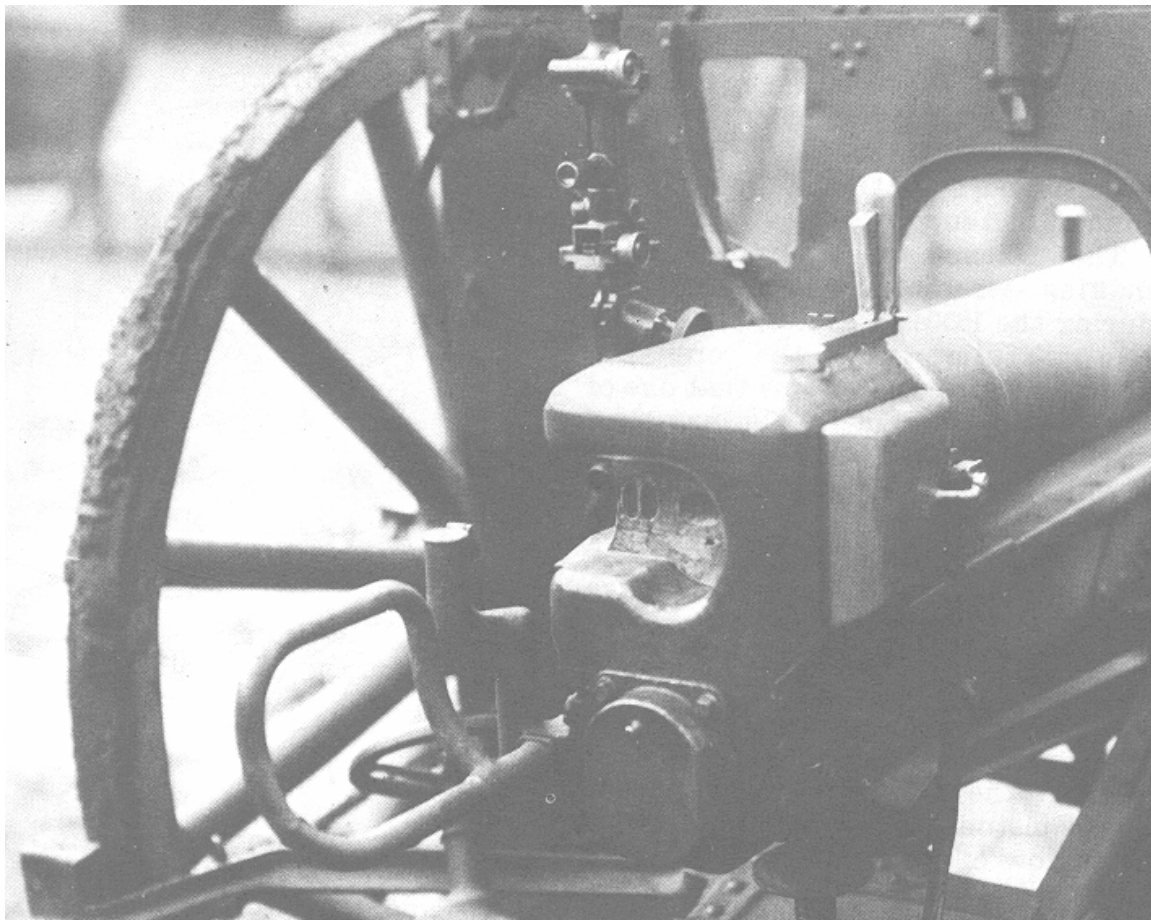
For the conservation of the York gun, the decision was made to replicate the original wheels of the 77mm gun as closely as possible. As all the original fittings had been lost this meant turning hubs, fabricating tires and shaping the wood, tasks, which Kevin Hamilton and Harvey Everett accomplished with their usual skill and innovation.

The results represent a formidable achievement of craftsmanship, which closely match the original wheels in dimensions and detail. The wheels will enable the York gun, when completed, to be displayed in a befitting manner respecting its status as both trophy and memorial.

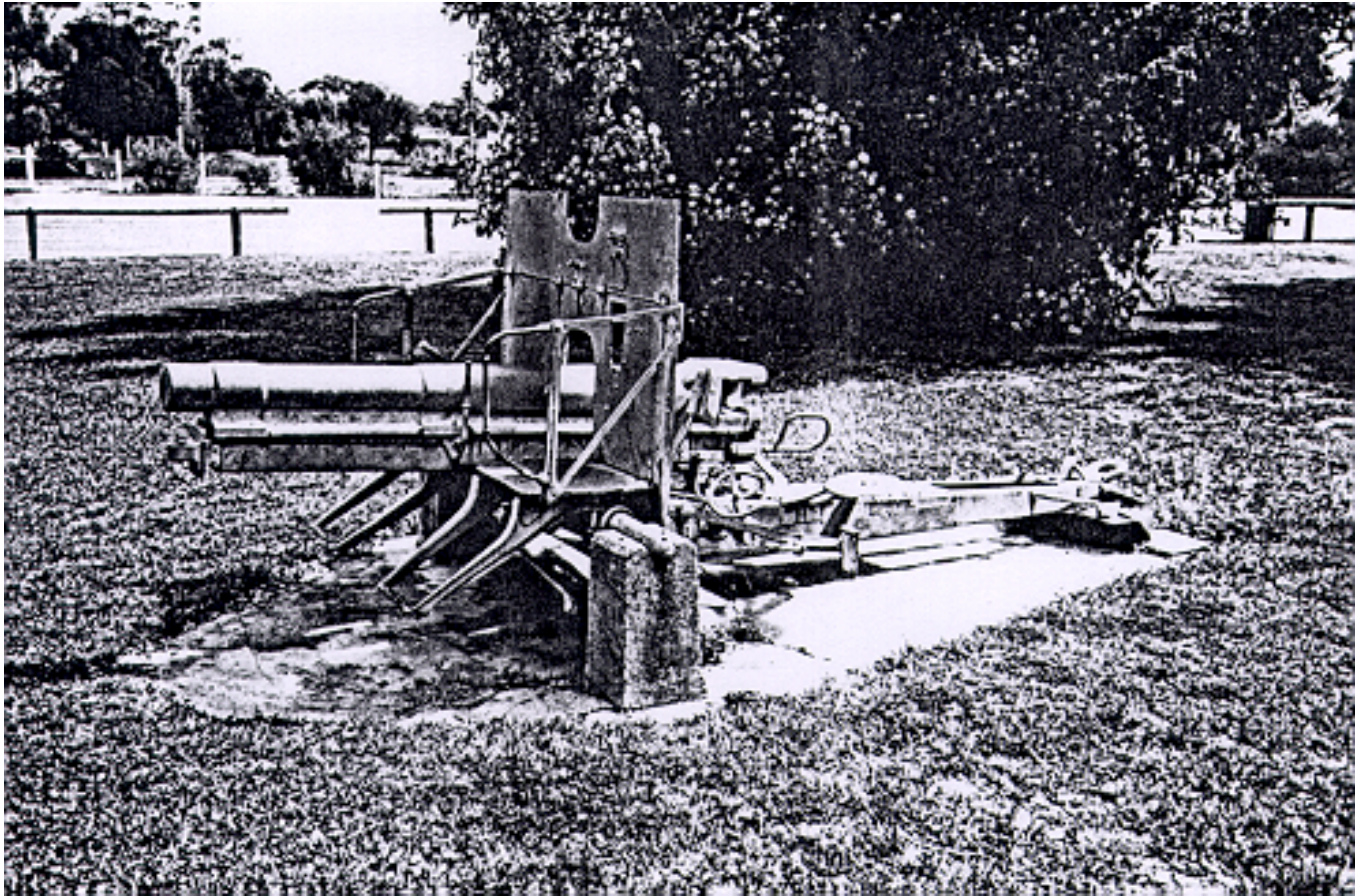


Further challenges remain. The recuperator and recoil housing will require extensive re-fabrication and then the piece will require reassembly. The project overall has provided the workshop team with the confidence and skills to take on demanding restoration and conservation tasks of this type.

Through dedication and craftsmanship, the sacrifices and service of earlier generations will be remembered and respected in the form of trophies and memorials worthy of the sentiment in which they were originally emplaced.



Details of a Krupp manufactured 77mm gun showing state of the art innovation in sliding breechblock, integral firing mechanism, recoil system in a cradle below the barrel and panoramic sight for indirect fire.



77 mm Krupp Field Gun allocated as a War Trophy to the Town of York showing its condition before removal to the RAAHS of WA Workshop for conservation.

RAAHS of WA Photo



NOTICE BOARD

BUSY BEES

The next busy bees at Buckland Hill are scheduled for:

27 OCTOBER

24 NOVEMBER

LEIGHTON BATTERY OPEN DAYS

The Leighton Battery Heritage Site is open on a regular basis on the first Sunday of every month except January from 10 AM to 3:30 PM with tours of the tunnels every half hour.

Groups are welcome at other times by prior arrangement. Please contact the Society for booking details.

The Aiming Post is published by the Royal Australian Artillery Historical Society of WA (Inc) as a service to its members. It has an additional role of making information and material relating to Australia's artillery and defence heritage available to individuals and groups who share the Society's objectives.

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