

Childers War Trophy



The Remembrance Day ceremony in Childers this year included the official opening of the Isis War Memorial Precinct. Black granite walls, adorned with red poppies, and a lone Digger, record the names of soldiers from the Isis District who went to war, and the names of every theatre of war where Australians fought are etched into the concrete floor. Designed to be a place of education, contemplation and reflection the centre piece of the area is a World War 1 cannon presented to the Isis District in 1922.

Securing the War Trophy for Childers

Following World War 1, the Queensland State Trophy Committee decided to issue war trophies based on the population of 'the township proper'.¹ As only 38 guns were available for distribution across the state, based on this criteria Childers was not considered eligible to receive such a large war trophy for its proposed War Memorial.

In 1918 then Shire Clerk Howard Epps requested 'two at least Field Guns with carriages, with which to adorn the memorial when erected'.² In 1920 the offer of a machine gun was considered by Epps and the Council as 'absurd' and the Council again requested 'at least two guns with carriage and limber be allotted to Childers'.³ Epps argued that Childers was the centre of a large sugar growing area and of the 360 men who enlisted from the area, 56 would never return home. Although the government at the time recognised that accurate statistics were difficult to obtain, it is believed that the Isis District could boast the highest rate of enlistments per capita of any other region in Australia - all volunteers. Epps also argued that War Loan activities in the Isis District had been recognised by the government with an award, therefore the allocation of an appropriate

artifact for the memorial was required.

Some success was obtained on 14th March 1922 when a Field Gun was assigned to Childers, while Maryborough was to receive a Trench Mortar. It was fortunate that either town received the goods which were to be sent by rail to the 'electorate of White Bay'.⁴ However, a letter to Major Treloar from Mr William Trahair from the Australian War Museum, questioned the assignment of such 'a particularly fine specimen of a piece of heavy artillery'⁵ to a small town. Mr Trahair suggested that the gun be assigned to a larger town, possibly Brisbane, to 'avoid any suggestion of special treatment'.⁵

On the 18th August 1922 Mr Trahair was advised by official letter that his suggestion was being considered and he would be advised of a decision. A hand written note on this letter dated 22nd August, states that the reasons for allocating this particular artifact to Childers were explained to William Trahair in a personal letter.

In August 1922 Mr Epps, now the Hon. Secretary of the Isis District Memorial Fund, petitioned the Member of Parliament E.B.C. Corser for land, to build a grand memorial building complete with a cannon to guard each front corner and further trophies to honour the war dead. On 25th April 1926 a Soldiers Room complete with Honour Boards was opened in a building shared with the Isis Shire Council, but hopes of a matching gun did not materialise and the cannon continues its sole vigil. The building was placed on the Heritage Register in June 2000.



The War Trophy

Manufactured in Essen Germany in 1916 by Fred Krupp, the 210mm Howitzer cannon was captured in Flanders by the Australian Imperial Force. After the war it was presented to the Commonwealth Government of Australia by the French Government. The Howitzer 210mm Morser had a firing range of 10,280 yards (9400 metres) with short shells to 11,155 yards (10,200 metres) with long shells and a muzzle velocity of 1158 feet per second (353 metres).



Refurbishment

The Howitzer deteriorated from exposure to the weather over many decades. In the late 1990s the Isis Shire Council, the Rotary Club of Childers, the Lions Club and the Returned Service League, undertook a joint endeavor to restore the gun to the high standard recognised by William Trahair. More than 1000 hours of volunteer labour went into the restoration, and Rotary also constructed a cover over the cannon to provide some protection from the weather. The restored cannon was officially unveiled on the 11th day of the 11th month in 2001.

Isis War Memorial Precinct

Funding made available through the Queensland State Government's Q150 project prompted the Isis Shire Council to again consider establishing a grand war memorial. Consultants were employed to provide plans, and historians gathered information about all service personnel who served Australia in all theatres of war. The project became a joint

effort between the previous Isis Shire Council and the Bundaberg Regional Council, and years of hard work and dreams have now been fulfilled with a fitting memorial to all serving military personnel.

The Philosophy of the memorial project is included on the Bundaberg Regional Council website:⁶

- To consolidate the history of the Shire's involvement in the World Wars and its contribution to Australia's military history
- To undertake historical research including the compilation of a database of service personnel
- To build an appropriate Memorial to shire residents who have contributed to our military history so that family, visitors, residents and other servicemen can appreciate their contributions
- To provide a learning centre for schools, residents and visitors (both Australian and overseas)
- To provide an appropriate venue for military ceremonies such as Anzac and Remembrance Day services
- To enhance the historical appeal of Childers streetscape
- To engender civic pride and encourage tourism.



Mayor, Cr Lorraine Pyefinch, Bundaberg Regional Council, lays a wreath during the official opening of the Isis War Memorial Precinct, 11th November 2009.



The Precinct was officially opened by the Hon Peter Lawler MP, Queensland Minister for Tourism on Remembrance Day, Wednesday 11th November 2009. Bundaberg Regional Council Mayor, Cr Lorraine Pyefinch praised the completion of the Memorial:

The Mayor, Councillors and staff of the former Isis Shire Council should be very proud of the groundwork they did on this Memorial Precinct. The community organisations, especially Rotary, are also to be congratulated. The architects AECOM have designed a magnificent memorial and our Bundaberg Regional Council staff have done an excellent job making it a reality. We thank the State Government for contributing \$225,000 to the half million dollar project. It is certainly a fitting tribute to the service men and women of the Isis and will be for many years to come.⁶



Fitting Tribute

The 210mm Howitzer is one of only two such large guns given to the Commonwealth of Australia as a war trophy and is the centre piece of the Isis War Memorial. Childers was fortunate to have procured such a valuable prize and thanks must be given for the perseverance of the then Shire Clerk Howard Epps who waged a correspondence war with the Home and Territories Department to procure a such a fitting tribute.



References:

- ¹ Correspondence, Secretary to Committee (Queensland State Trophy Committee), to Howard Epps, Shire Clerk, Isis Shire Council, 13th August 1920.
- ² Correspondence, Howard Epps, Shire Clerk, Isis Shire Council, to E.B.C Corser, MLC, 2nd December 1918.
- ³ Correspondence, Howard Epps, Shire Clerk, Isis shire Council, to Secretary, State Trophy Committee, 12th July 1920.
- ⁴ Correspondence, Secretary to Committee (Queensland State Trophy Committee), to E.B.C. Corser, 14th March 1922.
- ⁵ Correspondence, William Trahair, Australian War Museum, to Major Treloar, 14th August 1922.
- ⁶ *Isis War Memorial Precinct to Open*, Bundaberg Regional Council, <http://bundaberg.qld.gov.au/news/2009/11/10/isis-war-memorial-precinct-open>

**Denise Rapkins
Childers Library**

