

ERECTED BY THE WOMEN OF QUEENSLAND
IN MEMORY OF THOSE WHO LOST THEIR LIVES
THROUGH THE GREAT WAR ~



1914 - 1918



A WOMEN'S TRIBUTE TO WAR

HISTORIAN JUDITH MCKAY TELLS THE STORY OF DAPHNE MAYO'S QUEENSLAND WOMEN'S WAR MEMORIAL AS RECORDED IN TWO MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS IN THE FRYER LIBRARY.

In 1925 Brisbane's 'girl sculptress' Daphne Mayo returned to her home city in triumph, having completed her training at London's Royal Academy with the award of a gold medal. The timing of Mayo's return was crucial to her future success. In that year, nineteen suburban councils were amalgamated to form Greater Brisbane, creating one of the world's largest municipalities and bringing the city new prestige and wealth. The first lord mayor, William Jolly, was keen to transform the city into a worthy capital and major civic projects were being planned, including a new, £1 million city hall and a state memorial to World War I, the latter to occupy a newly-created Anzac Square. The time was ripe for Mayo's sculpture to enhance Brisbane's new civic architecture.

From 1925, when Daphne Mayo confidently opened a studio in Ascot Chambers, the city's first 'skyscraper', she was never short of work and was soon to create some of Brisbane's grandest monuments. Her first architectural commission was for a frieze and pilaster capitals for the new Tattersall's Club (1926), soon to be followed by a tympanum and stations of the cross for the Church of the Holy Spirit, New Farm (1929-30), and, grandest of all, a tympanum to grace the entrance of the new city hall (1927-30). Given her skill in architectural work, Mayo was an obvious choice for the sculptural embellishment of the state war memorial, particularly for a distinct women's contribution to the scheme.

Daphne Mayo standing beside the Queensland Women's War Memorial, 1932, carved in Helidon freestone and measuring 130 x 610 x 6cm, Anzac Square, Brisbane. UQFL119, Photo Box 3, Folder 10, Fryer Library, The University of Queensland Library

Queensland Women's Memorial



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193

Preliminary clay model for Daphne Mayo's Queensland Women's War Memorial, as shown on the memorial committee's letterhead. UQFL444, Box 1, Series 4, Folder 7, Fryer Library, The University of Queensland Library

The Queensland Women's War Memorial originated in 1929 with the Brisbane Women's Club, which had been formed two decades earlier as an off-shoot of the Queensland Women's Electoral League, its members being middle-class women interested in public welfare and reform. The project's instigator was the club's then president, Flora Harris, daughter of the well-known local suffragist Elizabeth Brentnall and herself a leading advocate for women.¹ Flora Harris convened the club's memorial committee while her daughter, Noela, acted as secretary; her papers recording her involvement are preserved in a collection given to Fryer by her grand-daughter.² Other club members at the time included such notables as Freda Bage, foundation principal of The University of Queensland's Women's College, and Josephine Bedford, philanthropist and pioneer of the Children's Playground and Crèche and Kindergarten associations in Queensland.

Sadly, the Brisbane Women's Club launched its campaign for the £1000 needed for the memorial in October 1929, just as the Great Depression struck; the resulting stringencies made the goal unattainable for almost three years. The campaign began with an appeal to women and women's organisations throughout the state to donate at least one shilling, and this was followed by a series of fund-raising dances, bridge parties and musical performances in Brisbane and beyond. In September 1930 a spectacular Old World Dress Pageant was held in the newly-opened City Hall, raising £273.³ Originally the memorial was to be a panel cast in bronze and a cascading fountain, but by November 1930 only half the necessary funds had been raised so it was reduced to a carved stone panel and a drinking bubbler.⁴ The memorial was finally unveiled by the governor's wife, Lady Goodwin, on 24 March 1932, by which time the memorial committee was still unable to discharge its debts so it organised a fete. The so-called Family Fair was held in the City Hall the following month, raising another £250 and enabling the committee not only to meet all the memorial expenses, totalling £1011/13/-, but also to donate warm clothing to unemployed returned servicemen.⁵

Though Flora Harris and her committee consciously chose a woman sculptor for the memorial, they did not seek to highlight the service and sacrifices of women in the war but, rather, to honour all Queenslanders who had given their lives. Hence they rejected Daphne Mayo's original scheme as described in her papers in Fryer—of four processional figures representing a serviceman, a servicewoman, an industrial worker and a 'woman keeping the home front going'⁶—in favour of a more military scheme. This was to represent all branches of the Australian Imperial Force, from artillerymen and signallers to sailors and airmen, and was to be officially checked for its accuracy.⁷ So the memorial became an overwhelmingly masculine procession of warriors who accompany a horse-drawn gun carriage; the sole woman represented, a nurse, can hardly be seen. In the words of a contemporary description, the figures were

in an earnest and purposeful march, pressing forward with eagerness and intent, as they follow their Unseen Leader through Battle to the Great Beyond.⁸

The procession was probably inspired by a recent British precedent: the bronze friezes by Alice and Morris Meredith-Williams in the Scottish War Memorial, Edinburgh, which also represent various branches of the military and advance with the same solemnity. Interestingly, among Daphne Mayo's papers are several articles on this much-admired memorial, including an article from the *Brisbane Courier* of 31 December 1927, published soon after its opening. In her memorial Mayo has added a tribute to her own family's grief. The soldier at the head of the procession is a likeness of her only brother, Captain Richard Henry McArthur Mayo, who served with the Australian Mounted Division in the Middle East and died in 1924, aged 32, of a war-related illness. The war also brought grief to the Harris family. Flora's son, Gunner Eric Brentnall Harris, who served with the 14th Field Artillery Brigade on the Western Front, died on 24 November 1918, aged 22; he had been discharged earlier as medically unfit after being gassed at Ypres. It is not known, however, whether he is depicted in the memorial.

In July 1931, after Daphne Mayo's final design for the memorial was accepted, she began preparing a full-sized clay model. Two months later she was ready to start carving the large stones that had been set into the Ann Street retaining wall of Anzac Square. In this work, undertaken during the summer months of 1931–32, she was assisted by George Harvey, the stonemason son of her former teacher, the artist LJ Harvey. She later described her routine:

I used to get up at first crack of dawn, 4am I think, toast a crust of bread and a slice of bacon, and get into my little car and off to the job. Sometimes it would be so dark when I got there that I had to



wait until it was light enough to see—this would probably be about 5am. By 9am it was so hot working against that stone wall that I nearly fried. Then I packed up and went home and was back again at 4pm, working until dark.⁹

Once the carving was completed, a bronze wreath and the commemorative inscription were added, the latter carefully chosen to honour all who had ‘lost their lives *through* the Great War’ so that those who died later as the result of war injuries, such as Mayo’s brother and Harris’s son, could be included. Beneath the carved panel, words adapted from John Arkright’s famous poem ‘O Valiant Hearts’ were added: ‘Splendid they passed, the great surrender made, Into the light that nevermore shall fade’. These words, which so aptly describe a ghostly procession marching to eternity, were chosen by Josephine Bedford of the memorial committee. Also, a bronze drinking fountain supported by dolphins was added. To complete the memorial, an ornamental iron railing designed by the City Architect, AH Foster, was erected; this was funded by returned army nurses.

For many years the Queensland Women’s War Memorial has been a focus for Anzac

commemoration by women, led by members of the Brisbane Women’s Club. The memorial, located in a quiet corner of Anzac Square, continues to inspire those who venture to see it.

DR JUDITH MCKAY was guest curator of the Queensland Art Gallery’s exhibition *Daphne Mayo: Let There be Sculpture*, 2011–12.

Daphne Mayo carving the Queensland Women’s War Memorial, 1932. UQFL444, Box 1, Series 4, Folder 7, Fryer Library, The University of Queensland Library

REFERENCES

1. Flora Harris, then generally known as Mrs Edgar B (Bridal) Harris, is included in DR Hacker and MP Spinaze, *The Matildas: Short Biographies of Queensland Women Past and Present*, Queensland Women’s Historical Association, Bowen Hills, undated, pp. 109–111.
2. Papers of Francis Clark, UQFL444, Box 1, Series 2 and 4, Fryer Library, The University of Queensland Library.
3. Queensland Women’s War Memorial financial statement, 10 November 1932, Papers of Francis Clark, UQFL444, Box 1, Series 4, Folder 7, Fryer Library, The University of Queensland Library.
4. *Brisbane Courier*, 27 November 1930, p. 20.
5. Queensland Women’s War Memorial financial statement.
6. Undated description, Papers of Daphne Mayo, UQFL119, Box 32, Fryer Library, The University of Queensland Library.
7. Letter from Memorial committee to Daphne Mayo, 21 August 1930, Papers of Daphne Mayo, UQFL119, Box 32, Fryer Library, The University of Queensland Library.
8. Extract from *The Week*, 24 October 1930, Papers of Francis Clark, UQFL444, Box 1, Series 4, Folder 7, Fryer Library, The University of Queensland Library.
9. Quoted in Judith M McKay, ‘Daphne Mayo, sculptor’, vol. 1, MA thesis, Power Institute of Fine Arts, University of Sydney, 1981, p. 132.