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Christchurch War Memorial

Bridge of Remembrance

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OPENED BY

His Excellency, Admiral of the Fleet,
Viscount Jellicoe of Scapa,
G.C.B., O.M., G.C.V.O.

Armistice Day, November 11, 1924

HISTORY AND SYMBOLIC FEATURES

Extracts from an Address by J. WYN IRWIN, M.A.,
Hon. Secretary, Bridge of Remembrance Committee.

History of the Memorial.

The Bridge of Remembrance has been erected by the citizens of Christchurch as a visible symbol to express gratitude and enshrine the memory of those from Canterbury who took part in the Great War, 1914-1918.

The Memorial owes its origin to a letter written to the Press on July 24th, 1919, by a Christchurch lady, suggesting the appropriateness of erecting, over a site made sacred and historic by its association with the departure of the Canterbury troops, a beautiful memorial in the shape of a Stone Arch and Bridge, bearing the inscription, "Bridge of Remembrance."

The suggestion was warmly supported by the public, and, as a result of a plebiscite arranged by the "Press," on the nine schemes suggested, the Bridge scheme received an overwhelming majority of votes.

Difficulties were encountered in the early stages of the campaign for funds, but were overcome by the zeal and energy of the Committee. The Memorial received the support of the City Council, and on the 14th February, 1921, this body agreed to provide the money for a suitable understructure of the Bridge.

Competitive designs were invited from architects throughout New Zealand, and of the 24 designs submitted, that of Messrs. Prouse and Gummer, of Auckland and Wellington, was chosen as symbolising in most appropriate and beautiful form, the ideals for which our soldiers fought.

The successful contractors for the erection of the Memorial were Messrs. Scott and Sons, of Christchurch, who submitted a tender of £16,078. The erection was commenced on the 23rd of January, 1923, and the foundation stone was laid by His Excellency, Admiral of the Fleet, Viscount Jellicoe of Scapa, on Anzac Day, April 25th, 1923; the blessing of God on the undertaking being invoked by His Grace, the Archbishop of New Zealand, Archbishop Julius of Christchurch.

The Object of a War Memorial.

A Memorial to possess an enduring significance must have an idea which will appeal to the highest side of human nature. It should be an inspiration not only to the present generation, but to generations yet unborn.

The object of a Memorial is too great, too sacred a thing to be bound up with the physical necessities of human existence; yet in the Bridge of Remembrance we have a Memorial in which the spiritual and symbolic element is not hampered in the least, but rather heightened by its association with the utilitarian feature—the necessity of bridging a stream.

In this respect Christchurch is very fortunate, and in this respect the Bridge of Remembrance will always be an individual memorial.

Evolution of the Design.

The River Avon flows at an angle of approximately 30 degrees to the axis of Cashel Street. This fact provides the basis of the design in plan and elevation, and all planes in the Bridge and overhead Arch are at an angle either of 30 degrees to the direction of the Bridge, or at

some multiple of this angle, as 60, 90 or 120 degrees. The plan is, in fact, built up on the angles contained in a **hexagon**, which form has been adopted in the plan of the main piers of the Memorial Arch, and is carried out in the Bridge to the smallest detail.

Symbolic Features.

"The Bridge a symbol of the Span from earth to life supernal,
The Arch with Cross supreme, the everlasting arms and Hope eternal."

Bridge.

As a Bridge spanning the banks of the river it should remind us of the brief span of human existence, and of the Great Beyond.

Arch.

The Arch suggests endless activity and has always been symbolic of Victory, as evidenced in the triumphal Arches of Greece and Rome. This Arch, with its inscription, "Bridge of Remembrance," should be a reminder of the noble sacrifices made that Justice might triumph over tyranny.

Cross.

The Cross, which is in the centre of the Arch, was, ages before our era, the symbol of life, and when enclosed in a circle which ends not, nor begins, an emblem of Eternal life. In our era it is an emblem of sacrifice, and in position, with its downward stem forming the keystone of the Arch, conveys the idea that the Spirit of Sacrifice is, after all, the basis of human character.

Torches.

The Pylons on either side of the main Arch carry uplifted torches typifying the everlasting remembrance of all that the names of the chief battle-fronts on the panels above stand for. These names are:—Gallipoli, Egypt, Palestine, Mesopotamia, France, Belgium.

Coat of Arms.

Above each of the minor Arches spanning the footways are panels in which are inscribed the British Coat of Arms and the Canterbury Coat of Arms.

Lion.

Terminating the buttresses in which the minor Arches occur is a further symbol of the Empire, namely, the British Lion, depicted fresh from conquest, with one foot pawing the honourable spoils of conquest, but with the rest of the body in full readiness for further action.

Laurel Wreaths.

On the Parapets of the Bridge are Laurel Wreaths in honour of the Victors.

Latin Inscription.

In the central panel of the Arch spanning the river is the Latin inscription, strong in its brevity, "Quid non pro patria"—"What will a man not do for his country."

Fascines.

Beneath is the bound bundle of reeds (fascines), denoting "UNION IS STRENGTH," and symbolising the strength of UNION of the British Empire.

Rosemary Decoration.

Surrounding this is a decorative treatment of the Rosemary plant. This decoration is also found on the inside of the minor arches surrounding a panel containing the words, "There's Rosemary—that's for remembrance."

Position of Arch.

Observe also the position of the Arch. It faces East and West; the East, the dawn of life, the dawn of Christian faith; the West, the evening of life, the end of our earthly journey.

The Cross which forms the keystone of the Arch will reflect the first rays of the rising sun, and also the last rays of the sun as it sinks in the West.

Masonry Construction.

In this Memorial there is none of the simplicity of regular sized, square-shaped stones, and the work of the masons has, therefore, been exceedingly difficult. Thought and labour and skill there have been, and it is my happy position to know that the masons, and especially the foreman, have entered into the work and carried it to completion with all the enthusiasm, care and craft required to imbue it with the living quality it should possess.

Time the contract has certainly taken, but my Committee has felt that this Memorial is to speak not only for and to this generation but to countless generations yet to come; and that the few extra months spent upon the work are as nothing compared with the result it is hoped to obtain.

