

BOER WAR MEMORIAL – Manchester Square, Feilding



Architect: F. de J. Clere

Construction date: 1902

Visible materials: Cement render over Sydney sandstone, painted metal scrolls and lighting, drinking fountains

Architectural style: Obelisk

Use/building type: War memorial

Date and Compiler: Ian Bowman, 2016

Proposed category: B

PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL HISTORY¹

Introduction

Feilding's South African War memorial appears not to have had its own unique unveiling event. Rather its 'official introduction' to the town appears to have become incorporated into the major event held in Feilding on 9 August 1902, celebrating the coronation of King Edward VII. Certainly the returned troopers made up part of the procession through the town, while a number of these men were also awarded the South African War medal during the ceremony. The newly-completed monument will have made a poignant backdrop to the presentations in Manchester Square, although the sadness of

¹ <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/memorials-and-monuments/page-3>

the war deaths will have conflicted awkwardly with the decorated bicycles and vehicles that were also present to celebrate the coronation.²

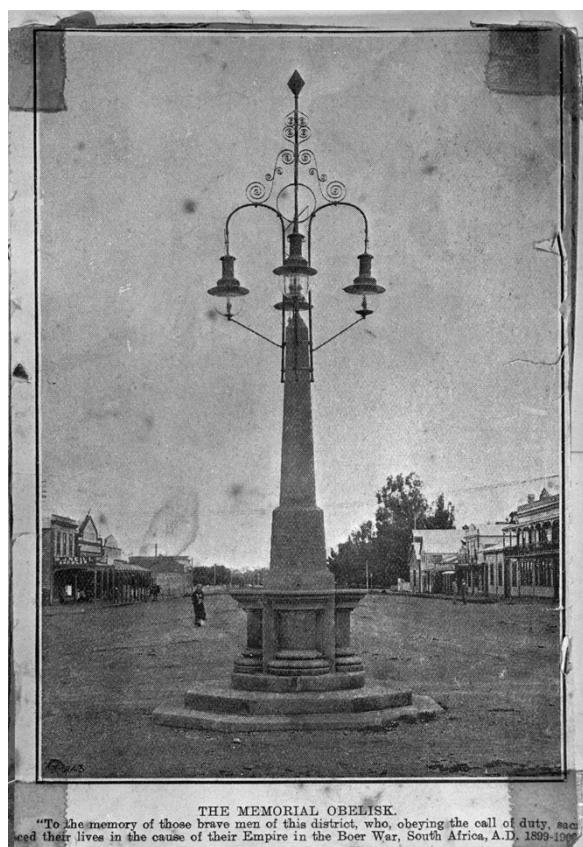


Figure 1 The South African War Memorial (Photo: Feilding Library No. BLG:pb27).

Installing the Memorial

The *Feilding Star* recorded much of the progress toward erecting the war memorial. For example, the edition of 7 May 1902 (p. 2) recorded that: *"We have been informed by His Worship the Mayor that the Transvaal war memorial will shortly be erected in the centre of Manchester Square, plans of appropriate and handsome design having been completed for that purpose by Mr F. J. de Clere, F.R.I.B A., of Wellington. The memorial will consist of a handsome spiral structure artistically finished in Sydney stone, resting on a base of Footscray stone steps, surmounted by two incandescent arc lamps. Drinking fountains are provided for, and the work will be carried out by an expert monumental mason. When finished the memorial will be a very fine architectural improvement to the town, as well as a silent yet eloquent tribute to the memory of those gallant lads whose lives were given for their nation's cause and honor."*³

The installation of the South African War Memorial in Manchester Square, Feilding, was duly set to coincide with the celebrations surrounding the coronation of King Edward VII in England, and the *Feilding Star's* editorial of 8 May 1902 (p. 2) acknowledged the two events. It stated that: "As

other centres in the colony are already moving in the matter and making preparations for the proper celebration of the Coronation of the King, we presume that Feilding will not omit to do something in the same direction." It then went on to explain that in Dunedin the coronation celebrations had included provision for a memorial to the fallen soldiers. Auckland, Wellington and Canterbury were planning similar celebrations. The editorial concluded by hoping: *"that among other things the Mayor will consider the advisableness of following the example of Dunedin and laying the foundation stone of the monument to be erected in Manchester Square on the occasion, and thus serve the double purpose of 'honoring the King,' and of perpetuating the memory of those gallant fellows who represented this part of the colony during the war in South Africa."*

A detailed description of the memorial was subsequently published in the *NZ Herald* of 16 July 1902: *"A handsome stone obelisk is being prepared by Mr. W. J. Helyer⁴, as a memorial to fallen troopers, to be erected in a prominent position at Feilding. The monument, which will be 14ft 6in high, will be surmounted by an ornamental iron branch, bearing four lamps. On the respective sides will be*

² *Feilding Star*, 8 August 1902, p. 2, 9 August 1902, p. 2

³ *Feilding Star*, 7 May 1902, p. 2

⁴ Walter James Helyer (c1858-1932) was an Australian-born monumental mason, who had arrived in NZ as a child with his family. His father was a monumental mason in Wellington, and Walter in due course joined his business. He then eventually took it over. (*Evening Post*, 8 April 1932, p. 9) Helyer erected the Ballance Memorial in Parliament grounds in 1897. (*Evening Post*, 22 December 1896, p. 5) He also constructed the Collingwood South African War Memorial – which is a similar, but plainer version of the Feilding memorial. (*Nelson Evening Mail*, 27 September 1901, p. 2)

engraved the following inscriptions :—(1) 'To the memory of those brave men from this district who, obeying the call of duty, sacrificed their lives in the cause of their Empire in the Boer war in South Africa, A.D., 1899-1902;' (2) 'V.R.:' (3) 'E.R.:' (4) 'Duty to God and Empire.' The memorial is to be supplied with four drinking basins and cups, and also a drinking trough for dogs. Mr. F. de J. Clere was designer of the monument."⁵

The *Feilding Star* of 4 August 1902 in due course reported that: "The material for the Transvaal War Memorial, to be erected in Manchester Square, has arrived, and a start was made this morning to lay the foundation."⁶

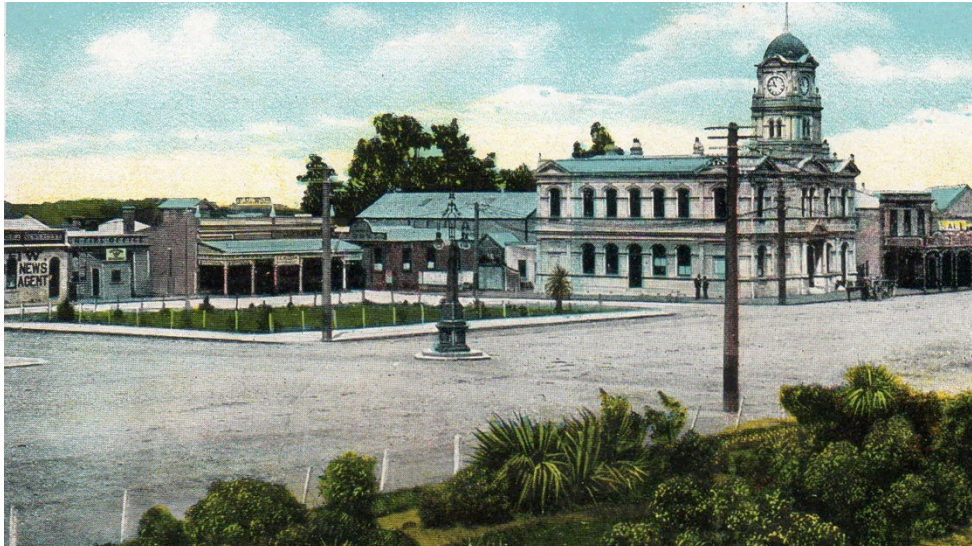


Figure 2 The South African War Memorial in its original location – in the site now occupied by the Feilding Clock Tower (Photo: Val Burr, Private Collection. Also Feilding Library's Photo No: STS:ms46)

At the Feilding Borough Council meeting of 7 August 1902: "The Mayor, Crs. Dickson and Cobbe were appointed a committee to deal with the question of the proposed lamp provided for in connection with the Transvaal War Memorial."⁷ Two days later the Coronation celebration was held.

Complaints, Vandalism, Lights and Various Other Issues

It seems that it was not long before the new memorial was attracting negative attention, as on 23 August 1902 the *Feilding Star* reported that: "Some evil disposed persons have defaced the letters V.R. on the monument in the centre of Manchester Square. We may point out that a silly act of vandalism such as this may bring condign punishment on the heads of the offenders. The police have the matter in hand."⁸ Then, on 19 September 1902. Mr J. J. Bagnall inserted an advertisement in the *Feilding Star* "stating that though a member of the Borough Council he is in no way responsible for the erection of the monument in Manchester Square."⁹

The Feilding Borough Council's meeting of 2 October 1902 learned that the Department of Trade and Customs had written to them: "stating that there was no legal authority to refund the amount of (£7) paid on (the) Transvaal War Memorial, but that an amount will be placed on the supplementary estimates and a refund made when the vote has been passed by the Legislature."¹⁰

⁵ *NZ Herald*, 17 July 1902, p. 5

⁶ *Feilding Star*, 4 August 1902, p. 2

⁷ *Feilding Star*, 8 August 1902, p. 2

⁸ *Feilding Star*, 23 August 1902, p. 2

⁹ *Feilding Star*, 20 September 1902, p. 2 & p. 3

¹⁰ *Feilding Star*, 3 October 1902, p. 2



Figure 3 The South African War Memorial in around 1920, having been relocated off the roadway, to its second site where it stood until about 2006. It had also been stripped of its lights by this time. (Photo: Val Burr, Private Collection)

Things evidently began to look up significantly after the addition of the lamps to the memorial in early October: *“The recent additions to the Transvaal War Memorial in the shape of four arc lamps together with the well-designed ornamental scroll work from which the lamps have been suspended, are a noticeable improvement and materially reduced its sombre appearance. The ironwork, which was carried out by Mr A. Hawker, of Messrs W. E. Chamberlain and Co, is a very creditable piece of workmanship, and the gas and water fittings were supplied by the Gas Company, and executed under the supervision of Mr Stunell, the Manager.”*¹¹

The matter of the lights on top of the war memorial featured again in the discussion of the Feilding Borough Council of 5 February 1903: *“The Lighting Committee referred the account from the Gas Company to the Council for consideration, excepting £22 17s 6d for Lucas lamps and £11 0s 8d for fittings, labor, etc., which were ordered for the Transvaal war memorial, and that incandescent burners be placed in all lamps in Kimbolton Road... In the consideration of the Lighting Committee's report, Cr Carthew stated that the Committee had struck out the items mentioned in the Gas Company's account. He enquired what authority had been given to procure the lamps, etc. The Mayor explained that the matter had been discussed in open Council, and verbal instructions had been given to procure them. When the lamps were obtained it was found they were unable to be fixed to the Transvaal War Memorial. After some discussion the report was eventually adopted, and it was resolved, on the motion of Cr Carthew, that the amount due to the Gas Company, as per account, be passed in full. Crs Cobbe and Tustin voted in the negative.”*¹²

The *Manawatu Times'* Feilding correspondent took a special interest in the memorial in November 1911, as it had clearly deteriorated somewhat by then. He wrote: *“RUN DRY, A NEGLECTED MEMORIAL At the close of the Boer War a memorial slab and drinking fountain was erected in the Square in loving and never forgetful memory of the brave troopers who fell in the Transvaal. To look back at the fountain no one would ever dream that the troopers were ever remembered. The slab is dirty, and it will soon be impossible to read the inscription. As a fountain it has actually run dry. Some of the taps*

¹¹ *Feilding Star*, 7 October 1902, p. 2

¹² *Feilding Star*, 6 February 1903, p. 2

*are upside down and others are useless, and in its present condition the memorial is neither use nor ornament. The only service it renders is to hold up the lamps for lighting the Square. It is hoped that the Council will take steps to have the tablet cleaned up and the drinking fountain put in order.”*¹³

This evidently struck a chord with the Feilding community, and the next day he wrote that: *“Several leading Feilding people came into the Times’ Feilding office yesterday and thanked me for referring to the shockingly neglected condition of the memorial and drinking fountain erected in memory of fallen troopers during the South African campaign. It is hoped that something will be done now to improve the condition of the memorial. As regards the usefulness of fountain, nobody seems to know why and when the taps were allowed to get into disuse, nor why the fountain went dry. The Councillors are now aware of the condition of it, and if they still remain inert, they cannot render themselves immune from criticism in allowing over £100 to be wasted in the centre of the town. For it is a waste and a shameful one when the memorial fountain is not serving the purpose for which it was erected, A much more economic gas lamp post could have been erected.”*¹⁴

The same edition of the *Manawatu Times* then published a letter from a reader on the topic: *“ANOTHER PROTEST. To the Editor. Sir,—The trooper’ memorial is in a disgraceful condition, and I am glad that your resident reporter has drawn the attention of the Council to the need of something being done. Talk about a neglected graveyard! This is infinitely worse, because the neglected memorial stands in the centre of the town for the public to gaze at. Visitors receive a very poor impression of the faithfulness of the citizens by such a neglected memorial. If the Council cannot do something towards cleaning it up, and laying on the water again, I would suggest that the inscription be completely covered up so that the reproach will not be staring people in the face each day.—I am, etc, KOPJE. Feilding, Nov. 21”.*¹⁵

When Feilding held its Peace celebrations on Saturday, 19 July 1919, the South African War Memorial was the recipient of the Mayoral wreath - after which the large crowd stood in *“reverential silence”* while the ‘Last Post’ was sounded from the steps of the monument.¹⁶

However, the memorial was again drawing complaints in August 1919 – doubtless as a memorial to the WWI dead was being considered. A correspondent to the *Feilding Star* wrote that a community hospital would have been a better war memorial than the one they now had – which had seemingly been relocated out of the centre of the Square in the meantime: *“It (a hospital) certainly would serve a useful purpose, and be a fitting commemoration of the objects for which our soldiers fought—humanity. Not long ago the South African war was fought, and we had erected in the centre of the Square a monument. Where is it now? Pushed on one side, as another would be in years to come. If the difficulties in having a hospital are insurmountable, there are other means of creating a memorial to perpetuate the memory of the fallen and at the same time benefit the families of the returned men, which would be better than spending good money on statues and broken columns...”*¹⁷

¹³ *Manawatu Times*, 21 November 1911, p. 6

¹⁴ *Manawatu Times*, 22 November 1911 (p. 6)

¹⁵ *Manawatu Times*, 22 November 1911, p. 6

¹⁶ *Manawatu Times*, 21 July 1919, p. 5

¹⁷ *Feilding Star*, 21 August 1919, p. 4



Figure 4 This photo, taken in about 1986, shows this memorial as it appeared for around 85 years, and with the WWI/II War Memorial in the distance. Note the fittings for the drinking fountain then still in place on the memorial. (Source: Jock Phillips and Chris Maclean¹)

Feilding's First World War Memorial was duly unveiled nearby on 3 October 1923.¹⁸

Deteriorations and Restorations to the Present

The *Manawatu Times*' 'Feilding Page' of 25 September 1923 (p. 2) reported that: *"The local South African war memorial, which had a very weather-beaten appearance, has been painted by Messrs. Harford and Sons gratuitously giving it an appearance more in keeping with the new memorial to those who made the supreme sacrifice in the Great War."*

Doubtless the South African War Memorial has undergone an array of maintenance over the years, however, only that since the 1990s was sighted for this study. For example, the Manawatu District Council records state that in November 1997, the Feilding & District Historical Society wrote to the Council requesting that the dirty, discoloured Boer War Memorial be fixed. The Council then arranged for the Feilding RSA to clean it, while the committee of the Mainstreet Programme agreed that the memorial should be *"restored to its former glory with the gaslights."* Work was to start *"soon."*¹⁹

In December 1997, Helen Worboys of Feilding Promotion – Mainstreet Programme, requested that the Boer War Memorial be waterblasted etc., and the committee would also like to see the memorial moved to a better location where it could be another feature of Manchester Square. The following month Manawatu District Council replied stating that both war memorials would be cleaned for the Millennium celebrations, and also due to the Clocktower project. The letter's writer added that it would also be nice to see gas lamps fitted back onto the memorial again.²⁰

The first of the modern plaques on the memorial was unveiled in October 1999. This commemorated the 100th Anniversary of the first deployment of NZ Forces overseas on 21st October 1899, with 215 men and 250 horses sailing from Wellington on the SS 'Waiwera', bound for South Africa.

¹⁸ *Manawatu Times*, 2 October 1923, p. 2

¹⁹ Manawatu District Council: File 4/3513, 'Memorials - Heritage Management - General'

²⁰ Manawatu District Council: File 4/3513, 'Memorials - Heritage Management - General'

The second of the modern plaques is installed in the paving in front of the memorial. This commemorated the re-dedication of the memorial, following relocation, strengthening and restoration. New wrought iron lights that were replicas of original gas lamps were also installed. The plaque also explained the memorial's history. The work on this project was completed in April 2006.

Architect: F. de J. Clere²¹

Frederick de Jersey Clere was born at Walsden, Lancashire, England, on 7 January 1856, the second son of Ellen Vaughan and her husband, Henry Clere, an Anglican clergyman. Frederick was educated at St John's School, Clapton, and then at the age of 16 articulated to the architect Edmund Evan Scott of Brighton. From 1875 to 1877 he was chief assistant in the London office of Robert Jewell Withers.

Clere emigrated with his family to New Zealand in 1877, arriving at Wellington on the *Hurunui* on 12 December. After working briefly in Wellington, he practised in Feilding from 1879 to 1883 and in Wanganui from 1883 to 1886. He married Mary Goodbehere at Feilding on 18 April 1883; they were to have three daughters and two sons. In 1886 Clere and his family moved to Wellington, where he was a partner in a succession of architectural firms.

The scope of Frederick Clere's work illustrates his versatility. From 1883 to 1888 he was architect to the Wanganui Education Board. He designed large country homes, such as Overton near Marton, and many houses in Wellington. His surviving commercial buildings include Wellington's AMP building and two harbour board buildings on Queen's Wharf, Wellington. Clere's early houses and his commercial and public buildings were generally conservative in design. His building techniques, however, were more innovative, particularly in their attempt to minimise earthquake and fire damage.

Clere is chiefly known, however, for the more than 100 churches he designed as architect to the Wellington Anglican diocese from 1883. Until 1904 these were of timber and were mostly in country districts; they are exemplified by St John's in Feilding. For urban churches on a larger scale Clere made increasing use of brick, as at All Saints' in Palmerston North, and ferro-concrete, notably for St Mary's in Karori, St Matthew's in Hastings, St Mary of the Angels in Wellington, and St Andrew's in New Plymouth. Almost without exception Clere's churches were an economical and unostentatious adaptation of the contemporary Gothic Revival style, expressed particularly by the pointed arch and a variety of roof-truss constructions and forms of tower or belfry. About 85 of these churches still stand.

Clere was elected an associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1882 and a fellow in 1886; he was honorary New Zealand secretary for many years. He resigned from the institute only in 1948 at the age of 92. Clere also served as president of the Wellington District Branch of the Association of Architects, and was a foundation member, treasurer and later a fellow of the New Zealand Institute of Architects. He published a number of articles, on art and architecture.

Apart from his involvement in his profession, Clere served on the Wellington City Council, the Lower Hutt Borough Council, the Anglican diocesan and general synods, and the licensing bench. He was a life member of the Waiwhetu Lodge of Freemasons and of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, with whom he exhibited watercolours. Clere was awarded the King George V Silver Jubilee Medal in 1935.

²¹ Maclean, Susan. 'Clere, Frederick de Jersey 1856 - 1952'. *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 7 April 2006 URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>

Mary Clere died at Lower Hutt on 7 April 1904. On 17 October 1905, at St Paul's Cathedral Church, Wellington, Frederick Clere married Elizabeth (Bessie) Johnston Ingles; they were to have two daughters. He died at Wellington on 13 August 1952, at the age of 96; Bessie Clere had died in 1920. A devoted family man of deep personal integrity, he cared greatly for the reputation of his profession. In both his personal and professional lives he rejected affectation and excess. As an architect he is highly regarded for his success in marrying European styles to New Zealand conditions.

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

As built, the Feilding memorial was a stepped obelisk with drinking fountains at the base on its four sides. Four lights on ornate brackets have been added to the top of the memorial. The drinking fountain basins have been filled in. Assuming the original materials was Sydney sandstone, this has since been rendered with cement render.

The memorial has several inscriptions. The north has "ER", the west has "Duty to God and Empire", the south has "VR" and the east has:

To the
Memory of
The brave men
From this district who
Obeying the call of duty
Sacrificed their lives
In the cause of their
Empire in the Boer War
South Africa
AD 1899-1902

A bronze plaque has been attached under the VR inscription, commemorating the 100th anniversary of the first deployment to South Africa on 21 October 1999.

The obelisk form originated in Egypt where it was considered to be a ray of sunlight made solid and that God existed within the structure. The word obelisk is Greek meaning a prong for roasting and indicated protection, defence and stability. With about one third of all WWI memorials based on the obelisk design, it was the most common of a number of different designs. Cenotaphs, gates and arches were the next most common. A number of memorials included marble human figures while domed cupolas and crosses were rare²².

The memorial is located to the north east of the north-east quadrant of Feilding's Square. The obelisk is set within a square of brick paving to the north of the Feilding War memorial, which is situated in the centre of the quadrant. The two avenues of Kimbolton Road, the main road running through Feilding is to the immediate north of the memorial while the clock tower, on a central traffic island in the middle of the four quadrants, is to the west.

²² <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/memorials-and-monuments/page-4>

REVIEW OF REPORT

Based on a review of the report and viewing of Council files, the assessment undertaken in 2016 for this memorial is still applicable as at April 2021.

SUMMARY OF HERITAGE VALUES

The war memorial has **moderate** to **high local** significance for **architectural, technological, rarity, representativeness, group, authenticity, people, event, pattern, cultural, public esteem, commemorative** and **education** values.

As it exists today, the memorial has **moderate architectural, rarity** and **technological** values and **high representativeness** as an obelisk form, the most common form of war memorial in New Zealand. Presuming the Sydney sandstone is still under the cement render, the use of the material is somewhat rare.

The memorial has **moderate group** values as one of a number of Boer War memorials erected in small and provincial towns throughout New Zealand.

Based on original descriptions, the memorial appears to have **low** levels of **authenticity** with the two relocations, the change from a spiral design to an obelisk, the filling in of the drinking fountains, the removal of the taps and the addition of the lights.

The memorial has **high historic people, event, pattern** and **cultural identity, public esteem, commemorative** and **education** values as a war memorial commemorating those who died in the Boer War 1899-1902.

SOURCES

'Feilding South African War memorial': <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/photo/feilding-south-african-war-memorial> , (Ministry for Culture and Heritage).

Manawatu District Council: File 4/3513, 'Memorials - Heritage Management - General'; Feilding Public Library. *Note that there are a number of files held by Archives Central, Feilding, that are likely to contain many additional details from the life span of the memorial (repairs, maintenance etc.), however, only the early newspaper record and the more recent files still held by MDC were accessed for this study.*

Papers Past: <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers> (Feilding Star, Manawatu Times, Nelson Evening Mail, NZ Herald): (as per footnotes and text)

Note that two old postcards used are from my own private collection – Val Burr