

**A SERVICE TO COMMEMORATE THE CENTENARY OF THE LAYING OF
THE FOUNDATION STONE FOR THE SHEFFIELD WAR MEMORIAL
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
SHEFFIELD WAR MEMORIAL, TUESDAY 7 DECEMBER 2021**

Good afternoon everyone and welcome to this service to commemorate the centenary of the laying of the foundation stone for the Sheffield War Memorial on this day in 1921.

I begin by paying my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community. I recognise a history of truth, which acknowledges the impacts of colonisation upon our Aboriginal People. I stand for a future that respects and acknowledges Aboriginal stories, culture, language and history.

In 1919 as our soldiers began returning from the fighting in Europe, at the end of the First World War, communities throughout Australia decided that it would be fitting to erect memorials to local soldiers who had died while serving our country during the war.

Part of the reason for building these memorials was that, in almost every case, the families of the fallen had no permanent marker for their deceased loved ones. They were buried in cemeteries close to the battlefields in Europe where they were killed. While the families and friends might have known of the site of the grave, few, if any, had the means to travel so far to pay their respects.

This memorial here in Sheffield was first erected to commemorate those who died in service or were killed in action during World War One. Consistent with other monuments, a plaque was added later to commemorate those who served in World War Two, and in later conflicts.

This monument is a white marble statue of a World War One soldier with arms reversed on a granite obelisk on a three stepped base. The statue is unusual as the face sports a moustache¹. This may be unique as we are not aware of any other soldier statue with a moustache. Although, from photographs at the time it is clear that many soldiers had a moustache².

¹ <https://www.monumentaaustralia.org.au/display/70838-sheffield-war-memorial> accessed 29 Nov 21

² https://www.centenaryofanzac.tas.gov.au/history/40th_battalion accessed 29 Nov 21

First planned in 1919, it was on 7 December 1921 that final plans for the memorial were implemented. One of my predecessors, the 13th Governor, His Excellency Sir William Lamond Allardyce, travelled here from Hobart to take part in the important laying of the foundation stone. I am delighted to follow his journey and to be part of this Centenary service.

Of course, my trip here was a much easier journey. I arrived yesterday afternoon and will return tonight. Governor Allardyce travelled for days before and after arriving in Sheffield.

Introducing the Governor at that time, the Hon J Hope MLC expressed his admiration for the 400 men from around the Kentish area who enlisted and the almost 100 who died. Those men were included in the approximately 13,000 Tasmanians who enlisted, 2431 of whom did not return.³

In his address, His Excellency mentioned that more Victoria Crosses, proportionally, had been awarded to Tasmanians than to any other State. Also, those who volunteered for service were proportionately higher.

As he laid the Foundation Stone it is reported that the Governor said⁴:

“With pride and humbleness of heart, and in affectionate remembrance of those who fell, I declare the foundation stone of this memorial well and truly laid.”

I am informed that last year, around \$30,000 was raised and spent on refurbishments of the monument by our Sheffield Returned Services League. The entire concrete base had to be replaced. It was a sloping surface and was cracking. A new step was added to the bottom of the monument to align with the existing surrounding pavement.

New plaques were installed to include the personnel from conflicts since Vietnam and to recognise the support of the Women’s Auxiliary provided over the years. The carved inscription on the foundation stone was difficult to read so a new granite stone was added with the same inscription.

You can also see a memorial wall where the community can place a plaque in memory of their loved ones who have served in any of the military forces. This wall has been many years in the planning, but we can see that it was well worth the wait.

³ Advocate Saturday 10 December 1921, p2

⁴ Loc cit

We cannot see it now, but on a summer evening, the shadow of the cenotaph falls on the memorial wall and the shadow of the digger is set in the centre of the wall. This was not planned at the time of construction. However, it is a poignant reminder of shadows cast by those who died in and from service, and the effect of their deaths on families and friends.

One of those men was Private James William York. Jim York was born in Zeehan, Tasmania, on 2 May 1892, the eldest of five children of Albert and Ether York. He grew up in the Sheffield area and went to the nearby West Kentish state school. By the time the First World War began, York was working in Burnie as a school teacher.

He enlisted for service in the Australian Imperial Force at Claremont on 10 October 1916. After initial training, he was allotted to the 7th Reinforcements to the 40th Battalion. Following deployment and more training, Private York joined the 25th Machine Gun Company in France in mid-October. His Company spent the next months rotating in and out of the front line in the Ypres sector in Belgium.

Private York served with the Company in the Somme and Amiens, firing in support of Australian infantry units of the 5th Division. In the early hours of 9 April 1918, Private Jim York was digging a machine-gun position. He was shot through the head by a German sniper and killed instantly. He was 25 years old. Given a battlefield burial at the time, his remains were later exhumed and reinterred in Crucifix Corner Cemetery at Villers Bretonneux.⁵

Now, with humility, I am honoured to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the laying of the foundation stone and to share with you all in this service of remembrance.

Lest we forget.

⁵ <https://placesofpride.awm.gov.au/memorials/214911/private-james-william-york-5th-machine-gun-battalion-aif> accessed 15 Nov 21