



## The Follies of Australia #1



The Macquarie Watchtower at Stingray Bay, Sydney, New South Wales

**O**ne of the difficulties of researching follies in a foreign country is the simple matter of language. Since it is hard enough for us in Britain and Europe to agree a standard definition of “folly”, it is all too easy to forget that other countries also have a different understanding the term. The United States of America is an obvious case in point, with almost every tourist site and roadside curiosity exploiting the folly banner. Of course I had hoped for an easier time when researching the follies of Australia, especially since we were kind enough to send them an English-speaking population in the first place, but it has proved to be far from easy.

Make a Google search for “Australian Folly” and almost nothing recognisable shows up. The same happens if you add terms like tower, temple, or even grotto, but once you stumble on the correct

place name, some excellent examples are there to be found. Towers appear to be the most popular, but even they are few and far between.

Why the interest in Australia? Well, having focussed on Europe and America for so long, it seems timely to redress the balance and take a look at the ones built down under. The list is still woefully short and it would be good to expand it into something more meaningful. So, if you are lucky enough to live in Australia or be taking a holiday there, please look out for follies and drop me a note to report any that you know or see. I will include a few more in the February edition of *Foll-e* and will write up others that you are kind enough to tell me about.

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# New South Wales:

## The Macquarie Monuments

**M**ajor-General Lachlan Macquarie was the Governor of New South Wales from 1810 to 1821, and responsible for transforming the State from a penal colony to a free settlement. He also helped to shape Australian society, had a passion for creating gardens in the Picturesque Style and arrived in Australia with a pattern book on Neo-Classical Architecture under his arm. It is no surprise, therefore, that he is remembered in many street names, places and monuments.

One such monument is the small two-storey sandstone tower erected in the La Perouse suburb of Sydney. It was built in 1820 and served as the first Customs House in Australia, providing a place for Officers of the Crown to watch for convicts and smugglers operating around the coast.



By 1885 the area was being protected by a new Fort at Bare Island, from which a battalion of soldiers and customs men operated. Rather than take it down, the authorities converted the tower to a school. It is now one of Sydney's smallest visitor attractions.



A little further round the coast is a wrought-iron gazebo built as a tribute to Mrs Macquarie, wife of the famous Governor and builder of one of the first follies in Australia. The dedication stone on the gazebo (copied right) explains:

### A Folly For Mrs Macquarie

Fiona Hall

Lachlan Macquarie and his wife governed in Sydney from 1810 to 1821. They arrived with a pattern book for building in the Neo-Classical style and a desire to transform the colony. This part of the harbour foreshore was landscaped in the Picturesque manner fashionable in Britain at the time. A sketch from the period indicates that Mrs Macquarie had a folly constructed.

The design elements of the folly echo those early aspirations for the colony, but are also mindful that there was much folly in the way in which Britain chose to colonise Australia. The doomed roof of Norfolk Island pine fronds for example refers to the colonists' regard for this tree. Mrs Macquarie presided over the planting of one near here in 1816 which became known as the "Wishing Tree". However the pine's brittle timber dashed hopes that it would make excellent ship's masts. The bone ceiling refers to animals which once lived in this area and the Gothic windows represent the barbed wire used to claim and divide up the land.

The finial is from the Macquarie family crest, while the folly floor indicates the direction of Britain from this site.

Installed October 2000

Royal Botanical Gardens Sydney

## The Centenary Tower, Mount Gambier

**C**entenary Tower is built on the highest point of Mount Gambier, some 190 metres above sea level. As its name suggests, the tower was built to commemorate the centenary of something, which in this case was the sighting and naming of Mounts Schank and Gambier – the first major place names bestowed in South Australia – by Lt. James Grant on 03 December 1800.

Plans to build a commemorative tower were announced at the beginning of 1900, but interest in the project was slow to get off the ground. The delay was mainly due to difficulties raising money from the public, but in the end, and just in time, the Chief Justice Sir Samuel Way was able to lay the foundation stone on 03 December 1900. It still took another 18 months before the project committee could invite tenders for the work, and the tower was officially opened on 27 April 1904, more than four years late!

At 10 metres in height, and built in red dolomite that had to be drawn to the site by a team of horses, the final cost was £480. A century later,

in time for the bicentennial celebrations in 2000, the tower was refurbished and two plaques were unveiled in the car park. Today, the tower is an important landmark in the lakes region, and at night its light (installed in 1993) acts like a beacon for visitors. The tower is also used by fire spotters during the summer.



## The Obelisk at Cape Dombey

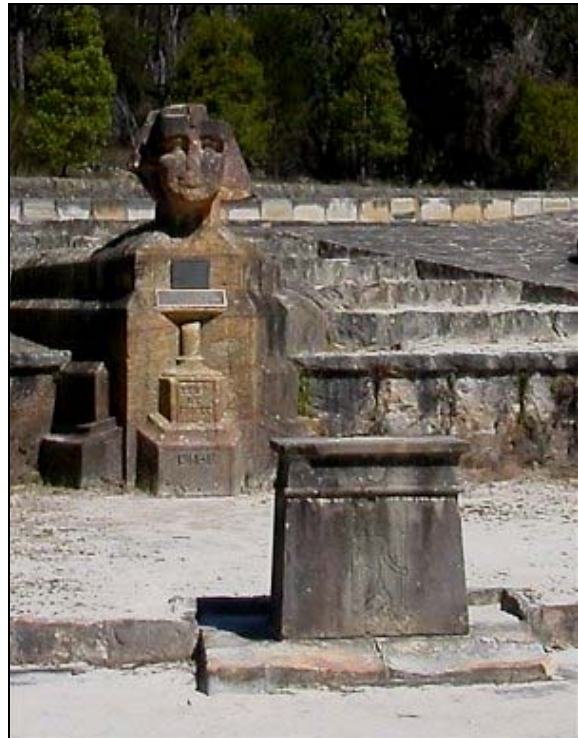
**T**he headland at Robe is marked by a small pyramidal obelisk that was originally built to guide ships to harbour and as a store for rockets that could be used to assist sailors and others who were in distress at sea. It was initially painted white but sailors complained it couldn't be seen until they were so close to the shore that they were at immediate risk of running aground on the rocks that extend for nearly 2 km out from the base of the cliffs. As a result it acquired its now familiar red and white bands to make it stand out against the skyline.



The 13 metre high obelisk was built in 1855 using the local stone, and has always been known as Templar's Folly. With its new colour scheme the obelisk is prominent enough to be seen 15 km off the coast.

## A Touch of Egypt

**I**t never feels comfortable suggesting that war memorials can also be follies, especially since some people take offence at the idea. Much rests on the knowledge and attitude of the individual concerned and his or her understanding of what it is that constitutes a "folly". I'm sure, however, that even with its serious and deeply touching tribute to his fallen comrades, even William Shirley would not have objected to the label being applied to his Sphinx memorial in the Kuring-gai Chase National Park, 25km to the north of Sydney.



Private William Shirley was a soldier in the First Australian Imperial Force (AIF), and sailed to war in January 1916 with the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion AIF (known as the Two Blues because of the two tone blue patch on their uniforms). Like so many of his countrymen he was sent home through the Lady Davidson Convalescent Hospital suffering from the effects of gas inflicted during the fierce battles on the Western Front, added to which he had also contracted tuberculosis. Back in Australia, and despite his failing health, William Shirley worked to carve a one-eighth replica of Egypt's Sphinx as a personal tribute to his friends in the AIF who had fallen and died in foreign fields. It took him a year and a half to complete his work, including the two small pyramids that flank his personal memorial. Unfortunately, the soft sandstone that lies beneath



the National Park is vulnerable to erosion from the combined effect of wind and rain, and by the 1990s the memorial had decayed significantly. With some encouragement the State agreed to restore the Sphinx, work that was completed towards the end of 1995, allowing the monument to be rededicated on 9 November of that year.

Private William Shirley died shortly after he had finishing his great tribute, and an inscription on the Sphinx reads:

To my glorious comrades of the AIF  
by the late W. Shirley  
No 5756 Pte. 13th Battalion  
Died 27<sup>th</sup> August 1928

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**E**gyptian monuments are unexpectedly common across Australia, with Egyptian tombs, pyramids and mausoleums standing in many city cemeteries and formal gardens. There is, for example, a stone pyramid close to the Jacobsen Road in the grounds of the Henty Estate at Ballandean in Queensland (see below). The estate produces some of the finest wine from in the region and is well-known for its Riesling and Shiraz grapes. When its vines were first planted, workers cleared away a number of large stones that lay over the ground. In what was initially meant as a joke, the wine-maker suggested they had enough to build their own pyramid! After the initial laughter had died down, the amused owner spoke with a Brisbane-based structural engineer and together they built one.



The Ballandean Pyramid marks the entrance to the vineyard and is one of Queensland's best known landmarks: it is said that everyday there is a bemused tourist having his photograph taken beside it.

For a time Sydney's Bondi Beach was overlooked by a conical shell-like pyramid formed from used car tyres (called the Stupastupa) and created by Niels van Amsterdam. A more standard type stands in the gardens of a house at Burrawang in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales, flanked with bushes that diminish

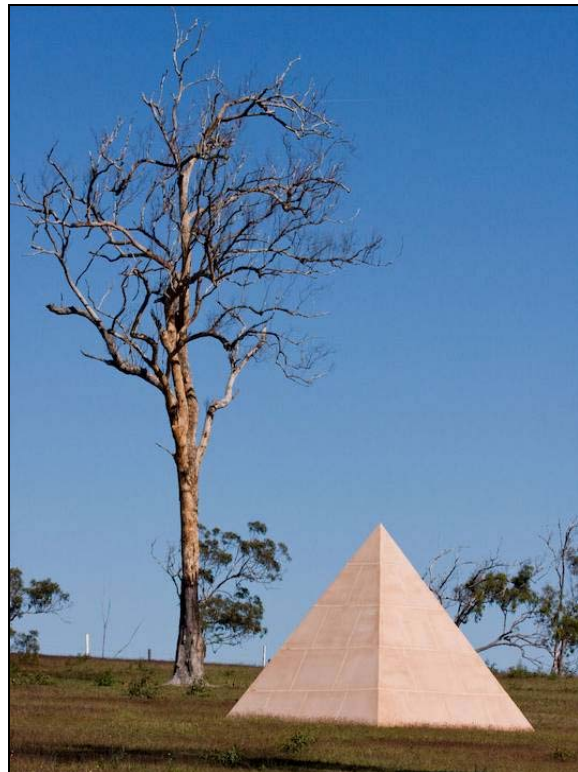


in size to make the pyramid appear larger than it is and give the overall scene a trompe l'oeil effect.



It is possible to imagine that Australians are obsessed with all things Egyptian, especially when talking to John Richardson who breeds and races camels outside of Yepoon in Queensland. His plan to create a slice of Egypt on the Capricorn Coast started when he took ownership of 50 camels and built a fibreglass model of one of them on his farm. Since then he has added a few miniature pyramids and a giant replica of a pharaoh's mask.

When asked why, Mr Richardson simply reminds you that Australia has a big pineapple so it is perfectly natural that Yepoon has a big camel and some tiny pyramids. He accepts that none of his creations are authentic copies of the original, but that is to be expected since he's never been to Egypt! But, he is quick to point out, "Why bother to go to Egypt when we have it all here in Yepoon!"





## Folly of the Month: Benjamin Boyd's Tower at Eden

**B**enjamin Boyd was one of Australia's better known pioneers and entrepreneurs, but was a Scot who had been born at Merton Hall in Wigtownshire on 21 August 1801. By 1824 he had moved to London to work as a stockbroker, and began to realise the huge investment potential that Australia had to offer. In a letter of 8 October 1840 to the Whig politician Lord John Russell, he announced that he had invested £30,000 in an expedition to identify *'the resources of Australia and its adjacent Islands'* and asked for favourable terms to buy land at the ports he intended to establish. While the reply argued that land could not be sold to an individual to the "exclusion or disadvantage of the public," his enthusiasm was not dampened. Around the same time he floated the Royal Bank of Australia after selling debentures worth £200,000, which he later took to Australia as the bank's representative.



Boyd arrived in Port Phillip on 15 June 1842 and eventually reached Sydney's Port Jackson 33 days later. According to Mrs Georgina McCrae, with whom he had dinner in Port Phillip, Boyd had "an imposing personal appearance, fluent oratory, aristocratic connexions, and a fair share of commercial acuteness."



Using both his own and his bank's money, Boyd set about buying a vast amount of land and property. Writing on 17 May 1844, Sir George Gipps, the Governor of New South Wales from 1838-46, described him as "one of the largest squatters in the country, owning 14 stations in the Maneroo district and 4 more in Port Phillip, all amounting to 381,000 acres in total." His firm of Boyd and Co. was also running six ships and was busy building the Port of Boydstown on the south coast. There, among his other projects, he built the 75 feet (23 m) high lighthouse that takes his name.



Work on the tower began in 1847, using Pyrmont sandstone shipped from Sydney. The original plan was to mount a rotating light on the roof but this was dropped when Boyd's financial empire began to collapse and he could not afford it. Part of his problem was that he wanted to develop on the south side of Twofold Bay contrary to the council's determination to limit development to the north. At the same time he had difficulties obtaining cheap labour for his whaling ships and embarked on an unsuccessful venture to use slaves from nearby Pacific Islands. An unsuccessful law-suit following the loss of one of his ships and a group of disgruntled shareholders in the Royal Bank finally saw the loss of his operating capital and a shortfall of £80,000.

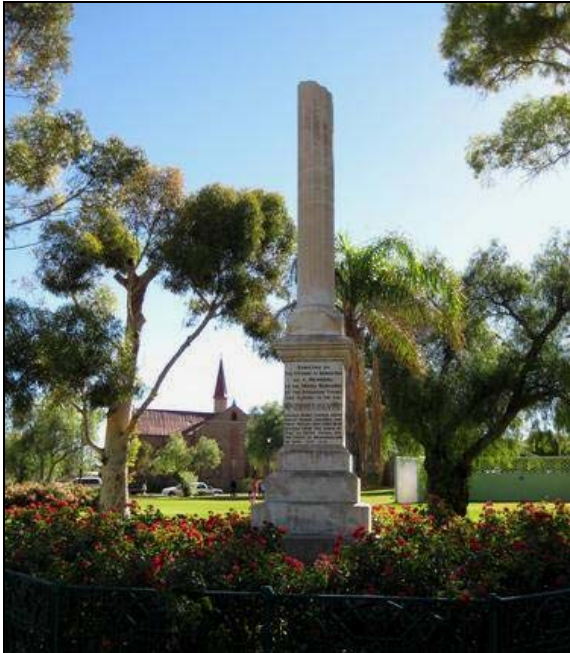
To avoid financial ruin, the tower was sold to the Davidsons family who used it to spot whales in the Kiah Inlet. When one was spotted, crews were alerted with a gunshot and launched their boats in pursuit of their quarry.

The Boyd Tower is one of two lighthouses in Australia that have never provided light to ships at sea. It stands 62 feet (20 m) tall, and is surrounded on three sides by open sea, making it vulnerable to damage from salty rain and winds. Today it stands in an area that is designated as a National Park.



## Titanic Memorial at Broken Hill

**S**turt Park at Broken Hill commemorates the centenary of the inland explorations by Capt. Charles Sturt in 1844-45. There, close to its rotunda is a memorial to a much forgotten group of men – the bandsmen of the Titanic who valiantly played on as the ship went down.



Although it stands many hundreds of miles from the sea, Broken Hill is a mining community and knows about tragedy. It has a colliery band in common with its British counterparts and according to Jack Harris, a volunteer guide in the town, the memorial was suggested by the colliery bandsmen to recognise valour in the face of certain death. By all accounts, as the ship started to sink the band played ragtime music, but in the final moments they struck up the tune 'Nearer My God to Thee.' An inscription on the base of the column records:



## Tasmania:

### Archer's Folly at Carrick

**R**uined and half-finished houses are usually excluded from the 'folly' classification on the basis that they were designed with a specific purpose and lack that certain *je ne sais quoi* that upgrades them to folly status. There are notable exceptions to this rule, of course, like the Mitchell Mansion at Folly Point in Jamaica and Lyveden New Bield in Northamptonshire. For Australians, their equivalent is the Archer's Folly at Carrick, and listed as such in the Tasmanian Heritage Register.

John Kinder Archer was born on 6 March 1816 at Ware, Hertfordshire, where his father was the owner and miller of Ware Park Mill. In 1828, at the age of 12, he sailed with his father to Australia initially leaving his mother and sisters behind, but who finally joined them in Tasmania in 1831 shortly before the death of John's father.

Part of John Archer's inheritance was 30 shares in a steamship, allowing him to start a small shipping business. It proved to be successful and made him a notable fortune, allowing him to climb the social ladder. In 1859 he was elected to the House of Assembly for Norfolk Plains, and held the post for two years, at which time he began building a large mansion on the high ground near Bishopsbourne Road in Carrick.



An intriguing part of his design was a tunnel that was dug beneath the centre of the mansion, allowing horse drawn vehicles to be taken through the building from the front entrance to an inner courtyard and out to the back to the stables.

As work on the front of the house continued, Archer suffered a number of set backs, including the loss of two of his ships which collided with one another in the Bass Strait during a storm. Their cargos of building materials for the house were lost and a claim on the insurance was turned down. After a long and expensive battle, which Archer lost, all further work on the house was cancelled and the project remained unfinished. In 1867, the site was sold to an ex-employee of Archer's father who used the property for storage.

Interest in the house is over-shadowed by the two towers that were at one time built in its grounds and shown in this late nineteenth or early



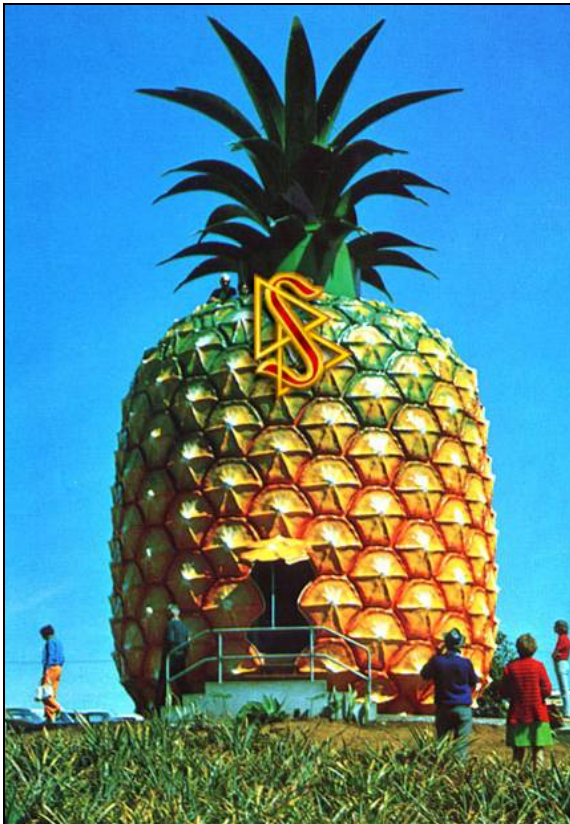
twentieth century illustration. Both towers are long gone but demonstrate interest in the building of follies and medieval landscape structures in early Australian history. It would be good to know more about them even if the house itself is ultimately dismissed as a folly.



## Queensland:

### The Pineapple at Woombye

**W**oombye is home to the Sunshine Pineapple Plantation and The Big Pineapple. Unsurprisingly, it is famous in Australia and has set a trend for building big versions of fruit and many other things.



It is, of course, a long way from the majesty of Scotland's Dunmore Pineapple, and is a bit too

false to be a folly in the true sense of the word, but at 16 metres high it is still impressive. In its wake it stimulated a craze for other large fruits, including a big mandarin and mango in Queensland, a banana and prawn in New South Wales, and even a giant lobster in South Australia. But perhaps the oddest of these is the giant concrete Merino Ram that is used as a restaurant in Canberra.



### The Odds and Sods

**T**he award-winning landscape gardens at Sunnymede are just two hours to the north of Melbourne, and are billed as one of Australia's best kept secrets.



They comprise a series of individual spaces that are designed to reflect well-known British and European landscapes, including those at Hidcote and Sissinghurst, with each space shielded from view by hedgerows, walls and the occasional folly, including a garden tower and a Gothick tunnel.





- Railton is a part of the Kentish Municipality and is known as Tasmania's "Outdoor Art Gallery". One of its major attractions is the tradition of topiary, which appears to be a local sport and competitive pastime. The area is awash with examples.



- Sydney's Chinese Gardens include the usual variety of pagodas and temples.



# Home News

## High Erccall Follow-up

In the **December 2008 issue**, we pictured the arches at High Erccall Hall in Shropshire, and asked whether they were a folly? Mike Cousins was one of those who kindly responded and told me that they featured on an edition of Channel 4's *Time Team* in 2002 (season 9, episode 8). At that time the house was owned by the actor John Challis, best known for his portrayal of Boycie in the sitcom *Only Fools and Horses*.

Mike wrote: "They did indeed investigate the 'pseudo-monastic arches', as they termed them, to ascertain if they were the remains of a former building, but based on the results from the various trenches dug and their condition, they drew the conclusion that they were erected as a Victorian folly – certainly they are in keeping with similar arch groupings in other nineteenth century grounds."

## Crossword solution

The first person to send me the correct answers to last month's crossword competition was **Richard Webber** who wins the castellated water jug.

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**Next month** will see the completion of our short focus on the follies of Australia with a look at those in the State of Victoria and on the Island of Tasmania. There will also be news of our victory at Packington Hayes, a look at the future of Severndroog Castle, and a build up to the AGM.

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