

First Nations peoples are advised that this publication may contain images of deceased persons or culturally sensitive material.

SUMMARY OF STATE HERITAGE OBJECT

REGISTER ENTRY

Entry in the South Australian Heritage Register in accordance with the *Heritage Places Act 1993*

NAME: Commissioner of Public Works Honour Board **OBJECT NO.:** 10895-001
Board

Object intrinsically related to the Torrens Building (SHP 10895)

ADDRESS: Karna Country
202-220 Tarntanyangga / Victoria Square
Adelaide SA 5000
Hundred of Adelaide
CT 5896/686 D27841 A5



Commissioner of Public Works Honour Board, Torrens Building, Tarntanyangga / Victoria Square

Source: Peter Barnes, Jan 2018 (courtesy of Marigold Francis)

Summary of State Heritage Object: 10895-001
Provisionally entered by the South Australian Heritage Council on 7 December 2023
Confirmed by the South Australian Heritage Council on 27 June 2024

STATEMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

Place: Torrens Building (SHP 10895)

Built 1877-1881, the Torrens Building is an outstanding example of Victorian Free Classical architecture in South Australia. Designed by Michael Egan, with modifications by South Australian Architect-in-Chief John Woods, the building demonstrates key attributes of the style, including unusual fenestration, decorative accents such as the urns and coat of arms, and the unconventional order of architecture through the combination of Tuscan, Roman Doric and Ionic elements.

Purpose-built to house several government departments, notably the Commissioner of Public Works, Registrar General and Water Works, the Torrens Building is directly associated with the expansion of the colony and its administration in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Object

The Commissioner of Public Works Honour Board (the Honour Board) is intrinsically related to the Torrens Building as it represents the scale of operations of the Public Works Department and its enduring association with the building into the twentieth century. The board contains the names of 497 First Nations and non-Indigenous departmental employees who enlisted to serve in the First World War, including 52 that died overseas. The Honour Board demonstrates the profound impact of the war on the state's public service and commemorates the contribution of the Public Works Department to the defence of South Australia and Australia.

The creation of the Honour Board and its six siblings was the responsibility of the Works and Buildings branch and was designed by draughtsman for the Architect-in-Chief's branch, Archibald J. Lavender. South Australian artist Blanche Francis was commissioned to paint the scenes in oil. Both the Architect-in-Chief and Works and Buildings were departments of the Commissioner of Public Works, meaning the Honour Board was designed and made for members of staff who were based in the Torrens Building.

COMMENTARY ON THE LISTING

Description and notes with respect to an object entered in the South Australian Heritage Register in accordance with the *Heritage Places Act 1993*

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The Commissioner of Public Works Honour Board is a rectangular, timber board 2.75m high, 4.15m wide and is made of walnut. It features a central panel with five vertical panels on either side listing the names of 497 Australian Imperial Forces service personnel hand painted in yellow gold. Nailed to the centre base of the frame is a small plaque with a painted red border commemorating the unveiling of the honour board by Viscountess Jellicoe.

The central panel features two painted sections to the upper half, with 52 names hand painted in two columns underneath. The top panel features a painted red ribbon featuring the title 'Commissioner of Public Works' held up by a British and Australian flag. Below is a panel distinguishing the Roll of Honour, reserved for those who died while in service. A central passage reads:

He died the noblest death a man can die

Fighting for God, for truth and loyalty

And such a death is immortality

Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori

The phrase in Latin translates to 'it is sweet and fitting to die for one's country'. The passage is flanked on either side by two Diggers in the reverse arms position. A laurel wreath, topped by a crown, surrounds the 'of' in Roll of Honour.

The Honour Board is crowned by an arched, rectangular pediment with foliated scrolls at each end. The British coat of arms is hand painted in oil in the centre, with the British and French flags on the left, and the Australian, French and New Zealand flags on the right, with an ordinance QF 18-pounder field gun underneath. Scenes are painted on either side, one depicting a ruinous French town, and the other a warship at sea.

HISTORY OF THE OBJECT

The Public Works Department and the First World War

At 5pm on 5 August 1914, the South Australian Commissioner of Public Works, Sir Richard Butler, stepped out onto the footpath outside of the Torrens Building (then known as the Government Offices) in Tarntanyangga / Victoria Square to address members of the public service following Great Britain's declaration of war with Germany. Arranged by the Superintendent of Public Buildings, C. E. Owen Smyth, the proceedings began with a performance of 'The Song of Australia' by the Adelaide Police Band, followed by a reading of a message sent by Governor Sir Henry Galway endorsing the public meeting and asking 'the people of South Australia to keep a stiff upper lip.'¹ Thousands attended the demonstration, forming a sea across the square, 'anxious to give expression to their grand feelings of patriotism.' One attendee described the scene: 'from a thousand throats loud cheers rang as the red, white, and blue folds of another Union Jack were thrust through one of the large windows in front of the crowd.'²

Between 1914 and 1918, approximately 34,959 South Australians enlisted to fight, which was 37.7 percent of the male population between 18 and 44 years of age.³ These men were joined by 300 women in the Australian Army Nursing Service. By the end of the war, 15,000 men had been wounded and 5,000 had died.⁴

Almost 500 members of the Public Works Department enlisted to serve overseas, and their absence was heavily felt by those on the home front. In response to a letter from the Under Secretary in October 1916 requesting a list of unmarried men between the age of 21 and 35 years eligible for military training, the Secretary of the Commissioner of Public Works expressed that the enlistment of any more men would 'seriously dislocate' the work of the department.⁵

In October 1919, Owen Smyth reported that 28 officers and men had enlisted from his office alone, lamenting the loss of five of them. He wrote of the difficulties of the past few years caused by the shortage of 'suitable materials, inflated prices, and worse still, the shortage of competent and willing workmen in some of the branches.'⁶ By the end of the war, 52 men from the Public Works Department had died while serving in the Australian Imperial Forces.

Commissioning the Honour Boards

During the Vaughan Ministry (1915-1917), the Works and Buildings Department of the Commissioner of Public Works was assigned the task of 'designing, collecting data for, and erecting honour roll boards' for seven Government departments, namely the Chief Secretary's Office, Public Works, Attorney-General, Crown Lands, Education, Agriculture, and the Government Printing Office.⁷ The instructions came from Chief Secretary Alfred William Styles and the boards were to be erected at 'Government expense and placed on the walls of the various Government Offices.'⁸

It was a substantial undertaking, one well suited to the Works and Buildings Department who were responsible for directing the construction, maintenance and improvement of all public buildings, including the government offices on King William Street (Treasury Building), Tarntanyangga / Victoria Square (Torrens Building), and Flinders Street.⁹ Archibald J. Lavender, a draughtsman with the Architect-in-Chief's Department, designed the board, and local artist Blanche Francis was commissioned to paint the scenes in oil.

Blanche Francis

Born in Adelaide in 1871, Blanche Francis was the granddaughter of the first superintendent, and later director, of the Adelaide Botanic Garden, George William Francis (1800-1865). Part of a large artistic and musical family,¹⁰ she discovered her craft at an early age, winning prizes in the under-sixteen watercolour and flower-painting categories at the Port Pirie Agricultural Show in 1887.¹¹ In 1891, Francis made her operatic debut in Mélesville's 'The Windmill', and in the late 1890s she began exhibiting her paintings with the Adelaide Easel Club.¹²

Although her early work focussed on painting, Blanche demonstrated a strong talent for wood carving. In 1913, Lady Florence M. Stirling (née Milne), wife of the President of the Legislative Council, Sir Lancelot Stirling, commissioned Francis to design and hand-carve a reredos for the Anglican Church in Strathalbyn.¹³ The completed altarpiece of solid walnut, 'seven feet in length by five in height,' was described as 'handsome' by newspapers. The *Mail* provided the following details:

The top frieze is a design of conventional roses, and the two single panels contain representations of St. Joseph's lilies. These were drawn by Miss Francis from the actual flowers themselves, and are most realistic, the carving being exquisitely done.¹⁴

In the early 1900s, Francis established an art school in her studio at Pirie Chambers in Pirie Street, predominantly teaching wood carving. In November 1915, her school held an exhibition of over 50 articles such as tables, cabinets, hall stands and settees, and an entire bedroom suite carved from oak, walnut, and blackwood.¹⁵ The work featured was done entirely by women, except for a hall seat and picture frame, which were created by a 'gentleman pupil.'¹⁶ The exhibition was formally declared open by Sir Lancelot Stirling who stated during his opening speech that those present were attending 'perhaps the first important woodcarving exhibition held in Australia.'¹⁷

The 1915 exhibition, along with the Stirling family's overwhelming endorsement, possibly contributed to Francis being commissioned to work on the Commissioner of Public Works Honour Board. Francis worked on several honour boards for other organisations with enlisted service personnel, including the Adelaide Cheer Up Hut Society,¹⁸ the Allendale North School and District in Kapunda,¹⁹ and the Blackwood Anglican Church.²⁰

Unveiling the Honour Board

The Commissioner of Public Works Honour Board was the sixth of the seven to be presented to the public. The ceremony took place in the north corridor of the Torrens Building on 27 May 1919. The formalities were performed by Florence Gwendoline Viscountess Jellicoe (née Cayzer), wife of British Admiral Lord Jellicoe, who commanded the Grand Fleet through the Battle of Jutland on 31 May 1916.²¹ Viscountess Jellicoe was welcomed by the Commissioner of Public Works, Sir George Ritchie, the Superintendent of Public Buildings, C. E. Owen Smyth, and the heads of all departments.

Viscountess Jellicoe's arrival was accompanied by cheers from the crowd, who packed the corridors of the building. She pulled a cord, and the Union Jack once concealing the board rolled away revealing a 'beautiful memorial.' Viscountess Jellicoe addressed the crowd:

I feel much honoured by being asked to unveil this shrine this morning, and I do so with the greatest pleasure to the memory of those brave men of the Public Works Office. I know that these names are already engraved on other shrines – the shrines of your hearts – but *it is well that they should also be recorded here, that the passers-by, in generations to come may be able to do honour to those who have fought so bravely* [emphasis added]. I tender to all the relatives of those men who have fallen the heartiest sympathy of the Admiral of the Fleet and myself! They have earned that most perfect of all epitaphs, 'Faithful unto death!'²²

A small wooden plaque was nailed to the centre of the base commemorating the unveiling by Viscountess Jellicoe, making it, as Smyth noted, the only woman's name to be inscribed in the Government service.²³

The Honour Board remained on display in the north corridor of the ground floor of the Torrens Building until 1993, when it was removed and placed in storage during the building's restoration. When the building reopened in 1997, the Honour Board was placed back on display and is now mounted in the western, ground-floor corridor of the Torrens Building.

CHRONOLOGY

Year	Event
1854	1 January: The Public Works Department is established in place of the Colonial Architect's Department.
1856	The <i>Constitution Act 1856</i> is assented establishing a system of responsible government in South Australia.
1859	Draughtsman Archibald John Lavender (1859-1929) is born in England.
1871	Artist and woodcarver Blanche Francis (1871-1934) is born in Adelaide.

- 1876 South Australian Government purchases an entire town acre on the corner of Tarntanyangga / Victoria Square and Wakefield Street.**
- 1877 Michael Egan's design for the New Government Offices (Torrens Building) is accepted.
- 1879 Excavations for the basement and foundations are completed by Robert Huckson.
- 1879 May: Egan completes the final plans for the New Government Building.
November: James Shaw's tender is accepted for the construction of the building.
- 1880 7 April: First stone of the New Government Offices is laid.
Construction begins on the New Government Offices.**
- 1881 8 April: Construction on the New Government Offices is completed.**
- 1901 - 1932 Sir Lancelot Stirling (1849-1932) serves as President of the South Australian Legislative Council.
- 1904 6 June: Adelaide's first war memorial, commemorating the South Australian's who died in the South African War, is unveiled on the corner of King William Street and North Terrace.
- 1914 4 August: Britain declares war on Germany.
5 August: The South Australian Commissioner of Public Works, Sir Richard Butler, addresses members of the public service in front of the Torrens Building in Tarntanyangga / Victoria Square.
- 1914 War Memorial Oak (SHP 26348) is planted on 29 August 1914, commemorating the outbreak of the First World War. It is the first South Australian memorial to the war.**
- 1915 3 April: The Vaughan Labor Government, led by Premier Crawford Vaughan (1874-1947) is elected. The Ministry holds office until February 1917.
- 1915 7 September: Wattle Grove World War 1 Memorial (Dardanelles Campaign, also called Gallipoli Campaign) (SHP 26394), the first memorial commemorating the landing of Australasian troops at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915 is unveiled by the governor-general in the south parklands.
- 1917 17 August: Letters requesting the names of all enlisted men are sent to all departments of the Commissioner of Public Works.**
- 1918 January: An honour board containing the names of members of office and teaching staff of the Education Department, School of Arts and Crafts, Public Library, Museum, Art Gallery, and Observatory is unveiled in the Education Building in Flinders Street.

6 June: An honour board containing the names of serving officers employed in the departments of the Chief Secretary and Treasury is unveiled in the Old Government Offices.

3 July: Two honour boards, containing the respective names of enlisted men from the Attorney General's Department and Crown Lands Department, are unveiled in a corridor of the Crown Lands Office.

August: Final letters to the departments of the Commissioner of Public Works requesting the names of additional enlistments are sent out. The letter notes that the 'Signwriter' is ready to begin work at once.

24 September: An honour board containing names of officers of the Department of Agriculture and Industry is unveiled in the entrance hall at the Department of Agriculture, Tarntanyangga / Victoria Square.

11 November: Germany signs the armistice ending the war.

1919 27 May: Honour board unveiled in the northern corridor of the New Government Offices building by Florence Gwendoline Viscountess Jellicoe, Secretary of the Centenary Fund of the British and Foreign Sailors' Society.

24 December: An honour board containing names of enlisted men of the Government Printing Office is unveiled in the Government Printing Office, King William Road.

1931 25 April: The South Australian National War Memorial on North Terrace is unveiled, with 75,000 people in attendance.

1945 The title of Commissioner of Public Works is changed to Minister of Works. The Minister continues to exercise administrative responsibility over the Engineering and Water Supply Department and the Public Building Department.

1978 The Government Building is added to the Register of the National Estate.

1979 The Government Building is renamed the Torrens Building after Sir Robert Richard Torrens.

1981 The Torrens Building is entered in the South Australian Heritage Register as a State Heritage Place.

1993 After 112 years of continuous government occupation, the Torrens Building is closed for restoration. The honour board is placed in storage for the duration of the works.

1997 The Torrens Building reopens and the Honour Board reinstalled.

2023 The Honour Board is on display in the western corridor Torrens Building.

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- Express and Telegraph*, 'Some Fine Wood-Carving,' 19 November 1915.
- Journal*, 'Every Woman, The Week,' 20 November 1915.
- Kapunda Herald*, 'News of the Week,' 29 October 1920.
- Mail*, 'The Social World,' 8 November 1913.
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- Observer*, 'An Honour Board,' 31 May 1919.
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- The Public Works Department. *Public Works Report for the Year Ending June 30th, 1919*. Adelaide: Government Printer, North Terrace.

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State Records of South Australia, 'Commissioner of Public Works,' Agency Description, GA41, <https://catalogue.archives.sa.gov.au/agency?id=GA41>, accessed 31 October 2023.

OBJECT DETAILS

Public Works Honour Board

OBJECT NO.: 10895-001

202-220 Tarntanyangga / Victoria Square, Adelaide SA 5000

DESCRIPTION OF OBJECT:	Rectangular honour board (2.75 x 4.15 metres) made of walnut timber, featuring the names of 497 men who enlisted for service in the Australian Imperial Forces during the First World War from the Public Works Department.
DATE OF CONSTRUCTION:	Unveiled 1919
REGISTER STATUS:	Nomination: 10 September 2019 Provisional Entry: 7 December 2023 Confirmation: 27 June 2024
CURRENT USE:	First World War memorial 1919 - present
DESIGNER:	A.J. Lavender, draughtsman Public Buildings Department 1915 - 1918
CREATOR:	Blanche Francis, painter 1915 - 1918
LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA:	Adelaide
LOCATION:	Floor: Western Corridor, Ground Floor Street No.: 202-220 Street Name: Tarntanyangga / Victoria Square Town/Suburb: Adelaide Post Code: 5000
LAND DESCRIPTION:	Title Reference: CT 5896/686 D27841 A5 Hundred: Adelaide

PHOTOS

Public Works Honour Board

OBJECT NO.: 10895-001

202-220 Tarntanyanga / Victoria Square, Adelaide SA 5000



The Commissioner of Public Works Honour Board.

Source: DEW Files, Oct 2023



Crowning panel featuring the British coat of arms flanked by the flags of Britain, France, Australia, and New Zealand, and two scenes painted in oil.

Source: Peter Barnes, Jan 2018 (courtesy of Marigold Francis)

Summary of State Heritage Object: 10895-001

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12 of 16



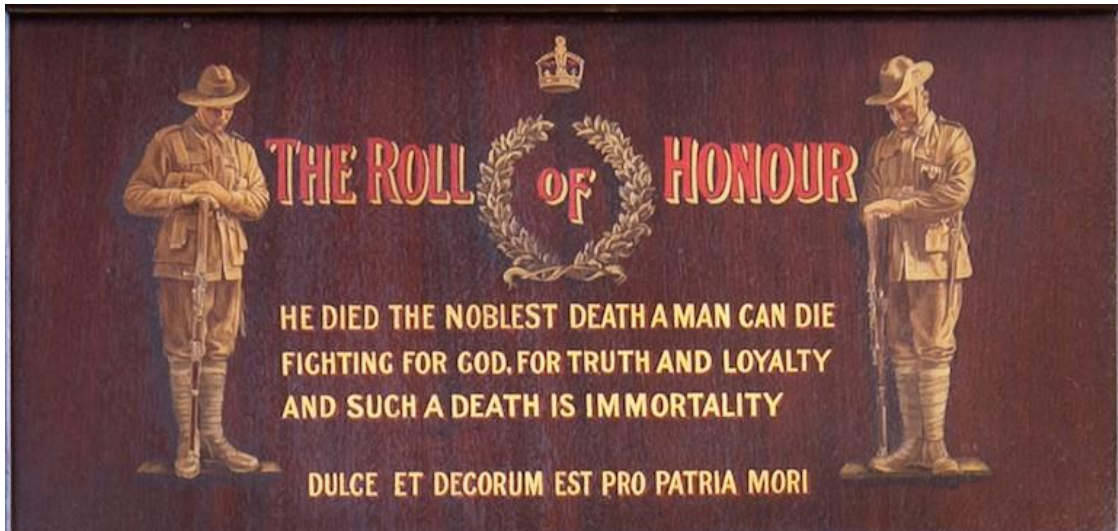
Detail of scene depicting a naval vessel at sea painted by Adelaide artist Blanche Francis.

Source: Peter Barnes, Jan 2018 (courtesy of Marigold Francis)



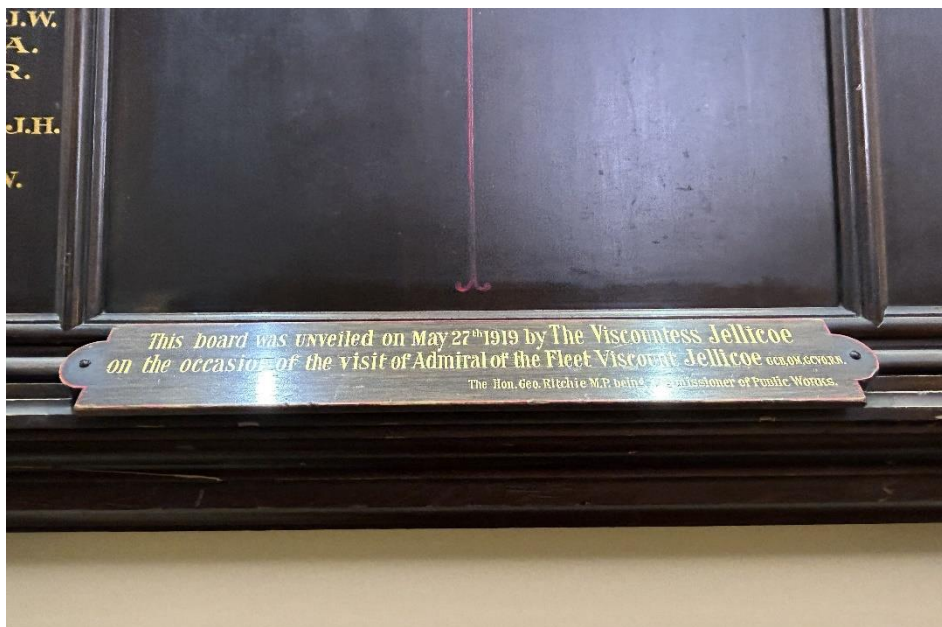
Detail of scene depicting the ruins of a French town painted by Blanche Francis.

Source: Peter Barnes, Jan 2018 (courtesy of Marigold Francis)



The Roll of Honour panel featuring depictions of the Australian Digger. The 'Roll of Honour', as opposed to the 'Honour Roll', is reserved for the names of service personnel who have been killed in war.

Source: Peter Barnes, Jan 2018 (courtesy of Marigold Francis)



Plaque commemorating the unveiling of the Honour Board on 27 May 1919 by the Viscountess Jellicoe.

Source: DEW Files, Oct 2023



The Honour Board in situ in the western ground floor corridor of the Torrens Building.

Source: DEW Files, Oct 2023

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- ¹ *Chronicle*, 'Patriotic South Australians,' 8 August, 1914, p.38.
- ² *Daily Herald*, 'Adelaide's Patriotism,' 6 August 1914, p.6.
- ³ Jude Elton, History Trust of South Australia, 'War Memorial,' SA History Hub, History Trust of South Australia, <https://sahistoryhub.history.sa.gov.au/things/war-memorial>, accessed 26 October 2023.
- ⁴ Michael Williams, *The Making of the South Australian Landscape: A Study in the Historical Geography of Australia* (London and New York: Academic Press, 1974), 592.
- ⁵ Charles Hay Dewhirst, Secretary Commissioner of Public Works to the Under Secretary, letter dated 23 October 1916, State Records of South Australia (GRG24, Correspondence, 841).
- ⁶ The Public Works Department, *Public Works Report for the Year Ending June 30th, 1919*, (Adelaide: Government Printer, North Terrace), p.83.
- ⁷ *Public Works Report for the Year Ending June 30th, 1919*, p.83. And *Register*, "'Rolls of Honour" and "Honour Rolls",' 5 November 1919, p.6.
- ⁸ C. E. Owen Smyth, Superintendent of Public Buildings to the Chief Secretary, letter dated 14 February 1919, State Records of South Australia (GRG24, Correspondence, 243).
- ⁹ State Records of South Australia, 'Commissioner of Public Works,' Agency Description, GA41, <https://catalogue.archives.sa.gov.au/agency?id=GA41>, accessed 31 October 2023.
- ¹⁰ Nomination, Public Works Department Honour Board, September 2019.
- ¹¹ *South Australian Register*, 'Agricultural Shows,' 12 October 1887, p.3.
- ¹² *Quiz and the Lantern*, 'The Easel Club's Exhibition,' 22 October 1897, p.8.
- ¹³ *Advertiser*, 'General News,' 3 November 1913, p.14.
- ¹⁴ *Mail*, 'The Social World,' 8 November 1913, p.2.
- ¹⁵ *Journal*, 'Every Woman, The Week,' 20 November 1915, p.19.
- ¹⁶ *Express and Telegraph*, 'Some Fine Wood-Carving,' 19 November 1915, p.3.
- ¹⁷ *Mail*, 'Exhibition of Paintings and Relief Work,' 20 November 1915, p.6.
- ¹⁸ *Daily Herald*, 'Diggers' Comrade,' 8 March 1920, p.3.
- ¹⁹ *Kapunda Herald*, 'News of the Week,' 29 October 1920, p.2.
- ²⁰ *The Register*, 'Religious Notes,' 22 December 1923, p.6.
- ²¹ *Observer*, 'An Honour Board,' p.32.
- ²² *Observer*, 'An Honour Board,' p.32.
- ²³ *Observer*, 'An Honour Board,' p.32.