

Learning to Fly: Distance and the Wartime Experience of Australian Architect Stanley George Garrett

Katti Williams

University of Melbourne

This paper explores the influence of distance on the work of the Australian architect Stanley George Garrett. Garrett was part of a generation of young architects whose horizons were broadened by their experience of service during the First World War. But Garrett's own experience of distance was twofold: as a pilot in the Australian Flying Corps, he was not only geographically distant from home, but also aerially distant from the earth. His was a rare and privileged view of the urban environment and the wider landscape.

For Garrett, this paper speculates, aerial and geographical distance provided freedom from constraint: from his role within a family building business, from the suburbs of Melbourne, and—most strikingly—from a conventional view, allowing him to see the world in a different way. The physical nature of flying, the witnessing of the destruction of war, and his immediate post-war architectural training in London, all facilitated a conceptual and visual distance from the status quo. This paper explores how these experiences influenced Garrett's design for the Australian Flying Corps Memorial at Point Cook, which was dedicated in 1938. His own letters home from the front form the basis for interrogating the influence of this experience on his architectural practice.

Keywords: Australian architects; Australian architecture; aerial view; war, pilot; memorial; aeroplane; education

During the First World War, Australian Flying Corps observer Jack Buckland was armed with a camera. After his death in France in 1918, only his personal effects returned home. His photographs, donated to the State Library of Victoria, convey a range of views, from aerial reconnaissance prints to informal snaps of airmen.¹ Of all these images, however, one stands out: a literal snapshot, taken mid-air, of a pilot turning to the photographer, momentarily distracted from the task at hand (fig. 1). A second copy of this photograph found its way into a letter from pilot Stanley Garrett to his own sisters, far distant in Melbourne. Describing how it came to be taken, Garrett wrote, “At 2000ft [Jack] asked me to look around & he then snapped me.”²

Stanley Garrett (1894-1958) (fig. 2) was one of several hundred Australian architects whose horizons were broadened by war. As a pilot, his experience was one of both geographic and aerial distance. This distance provided freedom from the constraints of home and the status quo, and—most strikingly—from a conventional view, allowing him to see the world in a different way. This paper is speculative in nature, exploring how these experiences of distance might have affected Garrett’s architectural outlook, and focusing on his design for the Flying Corps Memorial at Point Cook of 1937. Garrett’s own letters home from the war years and immediately after—also held by the State Library of Victoria—form the basis for interrogating the influence of these experiences of distance.

Garrett was born in Victoria, Australia, into a family of successful builders. On leaving school, he worked for five years with his father’s business in Box Hill, and attended night classes “for Builders and Artisans” at Swinburne Technical College.³

1 State Library of Victoria (SLV), YMS15534, Buckland, Hipwell & Copeland family papers.

2 SLV, MS10762, folio 2a, August 27, 1917, Stanley George Garrett, letters October 30, 1916 – June 18, 1920, Garrett to his sisters Mabel and Edith (Edie). Buckland gave the location as Newark, England, with an aerial distance of 4000 feet.

3 SLV, MS10762, folio 5a, Garrett to his father, Thomas, March 20, 1919, mentions five years “outdoors with you,” but with no further detail. *The Age*, 15 February 1913, 5. NAA: B2455: Garrett, S. G. SLV: MS9454, Box 87, Records of the Victorian Chapter of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, past member files, Garrett, S. G.

Figure 1. Photograph of pilot Stanley George Garrett over Newark. Photograph by W. A. J. Buckland. SLV, MS 15534, box 4, Buckland, Hipwell & Copeland family papers. (Courtesy of State Library of Victoria.)





Figure 2. Portrait of Stanley George Garrett, Point Cook, 1916. Photograph by Darge Photographic Company. Australian War Memorial (AMW), DAAV00057. (Courtesy of Australian War Memorial.)

In March 1914, he joined the 48th Kooyong Infantry as part of the recently introduced scheme of compulsory service, then enlisted for formal war service in 1916, giving his occupation as “architect.”⁴ While this amplification was a legitimate claim at a time of unregulated training, it more probably reflects the tendency of hopeful Australian Flying Corps (AFC) applicants to inflate their qualifications in keeping with the AFC’s higher standards of education.⁵ Yet the time Garrett returned home from the war, his professional prospects were significantly brighter. While this global conflict was a tragic career interruption for many, for Garrett, it would open new vistas.

4 NAA, B2455, Garrett, S. G.

5 Michael Molkenin, “Culture, Class and Experience in the Australian Flying Corps,” (honours thesis, University of Wollongong, 2004), 7; see also Michael Molkenin, “Quite the Right Type: Recruiting and Reinforcing Australia’s Effort in the Air 1918-1918,” (conference paper, *By the Seat of their Pants*, RAAF Museum, Point Cook, November 12, 2012).

Architects and the Aerial View

In their book *Seeing Above*, Mark Dorrian and Frederic Pousin write that the human experience of flight “generated profound transformations in the cultural imagination,” allowing the eye to see a visually comprehensive global space, previously only imagined or translated through mapping and panoramic views.⁶ From the mid-nineteenth century, photographic technology allowed aerial views to be captured by camera from kites, balloons, and even pigeons, while balloon flight became more accessible to the public.⁷

At the turn of the twentieth century, aviation gathered momentum, further spurred by the exigencies of war. The

6 Mark Dorrian & Frederic Pousin, ed., *Seeing from Above: The Aerial View in Visual Culture* (London: IB Tauris, 2013), 1.

7 Kim Sichel, *To Fly: Contemporary Aerial Photography* (Boston: Boston University Art Gallery, 2007), 9-15; Marie Th  baud-Sorger, “Thomas Baldwin’s *Airopaidia*, or the Aerial View in Colour;” in *Seeing from Above*, Dorrian & Pousin, 46-47.

newly created Flying Corps of the opposing armies played an increasingly important role in reconnaissance, enabling artillery coordination, facilitating aerial bombardment, and participating in dogfights.⁸ In peacetime, aviation focused on long-distance flight and the creation of multi-passenger craft. As flight became more readily accessible, the aesthetic and theoretical potential of the aerial views it afforded were recognised. In 1927, Hungarian artist and Bauhaus professor László Moholy-Nagy theorised on the perception and conception of space in *The New Vision*, writing that “Aviation has a special part to play. ... The essential is the bird’s eye view, which is a more complete space experience. It alters the previous conception of architectural relations.”⁹ Space could thus be perceived beyond the normative scales of human experience. In 1928 and 1929, architect Le Corbusier flew over Paris and Brazil: journeys that would prove profoundly influential for his own conception of utopian planning.¹⁰ He stated that the aeroplane “is an indictment. It indicts the city. It indicts those who control the city.”¹¹ By revealing the wider truth, the aeroplane became a useful theoretical tool for architects, and the experience of flight a masterclass in spatial experience and awareness.¹² After all, we can suggest, the aerial view is a plan writ large.

As a passenger, Le Corbusier could immerse himself in the view, his perception mediated by his accumulated knowledge and experience as a fully-fledged architect. Garrett’s experience, a decade earlier, was very different. It was mediated by war, the aeroplane being the machine with which he performed his tasks. Furthermore, in 1916, both his architectural and aeronautical careers were in their infancy. Garrett had to actually learn to fly.

Learning to Fly

Embarking for England in October 1916, Garrett had amassed just three hours of flying at the Central Flying School at Point Cook, most probably on the rudimentary Bristol Biplane (Boxkite) (fig. 3).¹³ On arrival, he commenced a lengthy course of theoretical and practical instruction, describing the experience in letters home to his parents, and siblings Walter, Mabel, and Edie. As he took to the air, his familiarity with aerial views increased; the flat landscape of Lincolnshire, divided by extensive hedges, looked like “a huge draftboard [*sic*], when viewed ... from above,” he wrote.¹⁴ In April 1917 he proudly informed his family that he had completed his first “solo on a real flying machine,” an Avro 504 (fig. 4): “it is such a peculiar sensation, the propeller is roaring and the ground just tears

8 Michael Paris, “Air Power and Imperial Defense 1880-1919,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 24, no. 2 (1989): 210. See Richard P. Hallion, “World War I: An Air War of Consequence,” *Endeavour* 38, no. 2 (June 2014): 77-90.

9 László Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision and Abstract of an Artist* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, Inc., 1947), 63.

10 Adnan Morshead, “The Cultural Politics of Aerial Vision: Le Corbusier in Brazil (1929),” *Journal of Architectural Education* 55, no. 4 (2002): 201.

11 Le Corbusier, *Aircraft* (Paris: Adam Biro, 1987 [1935]), 11.

12 Morshead, “The Cultural Politics of Aerial Vision,” 201. See also Christine Boyer, “Aviation and the Aerial View: Le Corbusier’s Spatial Transformations in the 1930s and 1940s,” *Diacritics* 33, no. 3/4 (2003): 93-116.

13 SLV, MS 10762, folio 2a, Garrett to Mabel and Edie, February 4, 1917.

14 SLV, MS 10762, folio 1a, Garrett to Mabel and Edie, February 20, 1917.

away from you.”¹⁵ Of flying at three thousand feet, he initially wrote that “it feels awfully strange to be up so high all by yourself,” but he soon became accustomed to the experience, graduated night flying in a BE2e, “with just the electric torch inside to show you the instruments.”¹⁶ He progressed to RE8s (fig. 5), and the nature of flying became reflexive: during practice shoots, he explained,

*very little time is devoted to the machine, we just have to fly by feel. ... If the nose gets down you here [sic] the wires begin to play all kinds of tunes. ... If you start side slipping you feel a frightful draught across your face, and with your eyes watching your gun and target, you correct the machine automatically.*¹⁷

Garrett also had to learn the skill of reconnaissance photography. “The camera is a very large one pointing downwards,” he wrote; “All the pilot has to do is change each plate & pull a string & the photo is taken ... Very often it means flying hands off for about 2 or 3 minutes.”¹⁸ When repeated, the process covered a wider view than that contained by the camera’s lens, and the resulting prints were pasted together in a mosaic (fig. 6). Kim Sichel

15 SLV, MS 10762, folio 1b, Garrett to Mabel and Edie, April 2, 1917.

16 SLV, MS 10762, folio 1b, Garrett to Thomas and Elizabeth, 1 April 1917; Garrett to Mabel & Edie, May 4, 1917.

17 SLV, MS 10762, folio 2a, Garrett to Mabel and Edie, July 24, 1917.

18 SLV, MS 10762, folio 3b, Garrett to Mabel and Edie, April 22, 1917.

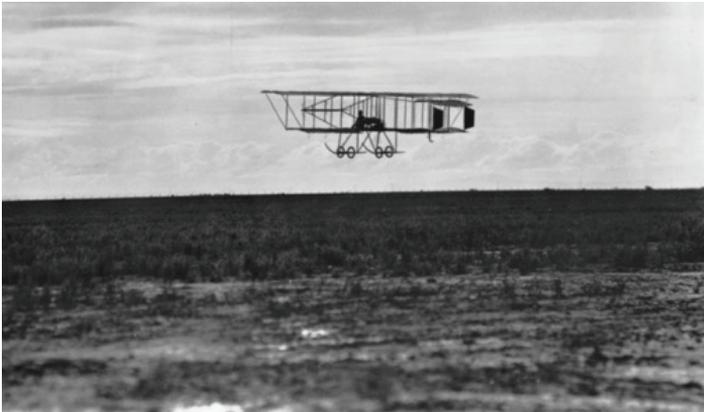


Figure 3. Bristol Biplane (Boxkite) at the Central Flying School, Point Cook, 1915. Unknown photographer. AWM, A04758. (Courtesy of Australian War Memorial.)



Figure 4. Avro 504 trainer aircraft, Leighterton, England, April 1919. Garrett was stationed here in 1918. Unknown photographer. AWM, D00462. (Courtesy of Australian War Memorial.)



Figure 5. RE8 A3662 of No. 3 Squadron, Australian Flying Corps (AFC), Baillieul, France, November 30, 1917. Photograph by Kenneth Henderson McLeod. AWM, P00355.045 (Courtesy of Australian War Memorial.)

describes such aerial views as “transgressive,” being divorced from normal human scale, but for the pilot and observer, these were but a contracture of their view, and not representational of the whole experience of flying, which included the machine’s movement, the passage of the earth underneath, and the oblique nature of views gained lower to the ground (fig. 7).¹⁹ These lower views are quite distinct, more akin to seeing an architectural structure in the round, and less transgressive than transformative.

19 Sichel, *To Fly*, 10-11.

Returning to England in mid-1918 to serve as an instructor, travel by air became a normal mode of transport, and even an enabler of social interaction. Having befriended the daughter of a local family, he and a fellow pilot playfully followed her regular train to London in separate machines, on one occasion flying “down very low, and of course going much faster than the

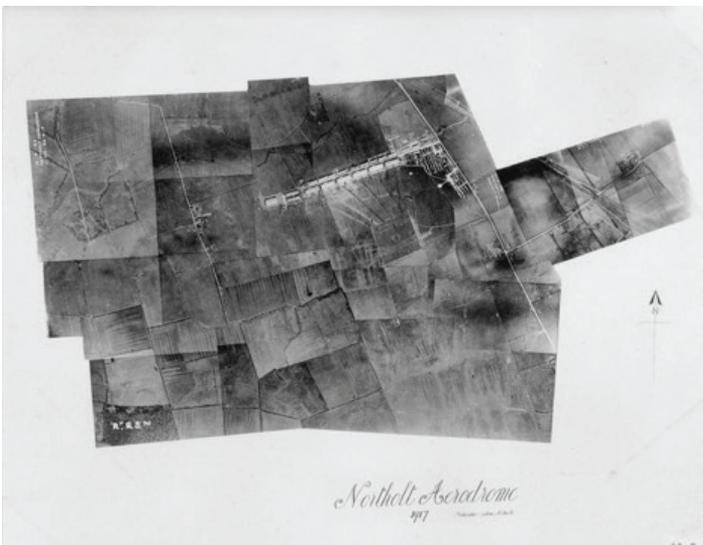


Figure 6. Vertical aerial mosaic of Northolt Aerodrome, England, 1917. Unknown photographer. Imperial War Museum (IWM), Q111426. Reproduced with permission. © Imperial War Museum.



Figure 7. Aerial reconnaissance image of the Amiens area, 21 August 1918. Baillieu (pilot) and Sewell (observer) were in Garrett's squadron. Photograph by T. L. Baillieu or F. A. Sewell. AWM, P09378.002. (Courtesy of Australian War Memorial.)

train. As we came to a hedge we would hop over, do a climbing turn and come back again on to the train whenever possible.”²⁰ Playfulness sometimes gave way to reflection: “when I am thousands of feet in the air I often wonder what you are doing,” he told his family.²¹ What became second nature to Garrett after months of intense training, through war’s dreadful stress and leisure’s joy, would be taken for granted by passengers like Le Corbusier.

20 SLV, MS 10762, folio 3b, Garrett to Mabel and Edie, 21 June 1918.

21 SLV, MS 10762, folio 4a, Garrett to Thomas and Elizabeth, 8 July 1918.

Distance and Proximity, Construction and Destruction

Distance from home meant proximity to different scenery. Travel has always been vital to an architect’s intellectual and visual training; for colonials, war service enabled travel through Britain and Europe.²² Garrett saw many different forms of ancient and modern architecture, from Stonehenge to medieval cathedrals and grand houses, and wrote home to share his views with descriptions and postcards.²³ Active service in France brought different experiences again. Initially stationed near the northern town of Bethune, the squadron was billeted in Nissen-style huts “just like a tunnel about 20ft long... [with] a rounded corrugated iron top.”²⁴ A sketch on a later letter showed the canvas screening arrangement he devised to maximise the use of the shared living space (fig. 8). An unfortunate French dwelling nearby was described as having “a square quadrangle but a rectangular smell,” while the numerous brick shrines to the Virgin Mary appeared “something like those electric power stations of ours.”²⁵

22 See Julie Willis, “Architecture and Wartime,” in *The First World War, the Universities and the Professions*, ed. Kate Darian-Smith & James Waghorne (Parkville, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2019), 291-308.

23 SLV, MS 10762, folio 4a, Garrett to Mabel and Edie, July 14, 1918.

24 SLV, MS 10762, folio 2a, Garrett to Mabel and Edie, July 24, 1917.

25 SLV, MS 10762, folio 2a, Garrett to Mabel and Edie, July 24, 1917.

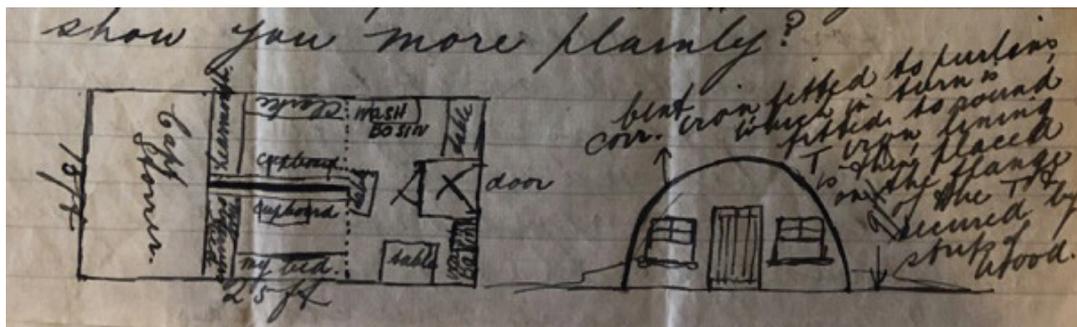


Figure 8. Sketch plan and elevation of squadron huts in a letter to his sisters, 7 October 1917. Drawing by S. G. Garrett. SLV, MS10762, folio. 2b. (Courtesy of State Library of Victoria.)

26 SLV, MS 10762, folio 3a, Garrett to Mabel and Edie, March 24, 1918.

27 SLV, MS 10762, folio 4a, Garrett to Mabel and Edie, September 7, 1918.

28 SLV, MS 10762, folio 4a, Garrett to Thomas and Elizabeth, December 30, 1918.

The towns and villages near the aerodromes were damaged and re-damaged by bombardment as the front line moved back and forth. These views of destruction made a significant impression, and the aerial view did not always miniaturise the impact of war. In March 1918, flying above a bombardment, Garrett and his observer watched the destruction of history play out beneath them. “[We] were above the tower of the town hall when it received its knockout blow, and we saw it topple over and crash into a neighbouring church. I suppose the tower has been up for hundreds of years, and now it is no more,” Garrett mused.²⁶ Examining a part of the line in September 1918, he found that:

*In dozens of cases there was not even a brick to show that a village had ever been there. The vegetation had absolutely gone ... just the tracks and road and in between shell holes, craters, trenches and the unburied dead.*²⁷

Countless photographs in museum collections provide visual witness to such scenes of destruction: wood, tiles, bricks, and plaster mingle haphazardly as rubble; sliced open, buildings are viewed as if in section (fig. 9 & 10). From the air, the widespread damage was more fully revealed. The observation photographs taken by Garrett’s friend Jack Buckland reveal swathes of country pitted with craters like a moon scape, while ruined buildings and splintered trees cast pitiful shadows (fig. 11).

Orderly, rational construction—such as Garrett had experienced with his father in Melbourne—was constantly displaced by the irrational, chaotic destruction of war. Witnessing such deviation from the architectural norm took a toll. After the armistice, he sought visual and emotional relief in travel to Italy: “living as we were in ruined villages & devastated country,” he confided in his parents, “it effects [sic] the nerves.”²⁸ Perhaps pursuing architecture, denying the ravages of destruction, would provide him with even greater solace.



Figure 9. *Top left.* The ruins of the village of Strazeele, France, 14 May 1918. Unknown Australian official photographer. AWM, E02229A. (Courtesy of Australian War Memorial.)

Figure 10. *Bottom left.* Ruined church at Houplines, near Armentieres, France, January 1917. Unknown Australian official photographer. AWM, E00125 (Courtesy of Australian War Memorial.)

Figure 11. *Bottom Right.* Aerial reconnaissance image of the Western Front, c.1917-1918. Photograph by W. A. J. Buckland. SLV, YMS15534, box 5, Buckland, Hipwell & Copeland family papers. (Courtesy of State Library of Victoria.)



From Pilot to Polymath

Unlike Le Corbusier, Garrett was not a fully-fledged architect when he took to the skies. After a year or so, he pondered his future, filling in the periods of enforced idleness characteristic of Flying Corps service with a self-set course of study.²⁹ This determination could have been inspired by a close association with the many engineers and architects who made up the flying ranks, or as an effect of gaining a distance from home, and from the status quo. But it is also probable that the exercise of viewing the earth from the air, in actively seeing and perceiving these spatial relationships, spurred Garrett to think more in terms of architecture than merely building—that is, it prompted him to think in a more spatial construct.

On leave in England in January 1918, he had purchased a slide rule and some books on geometry.³⁰ In August, he reported

²⁹ Service as a pilot necessitated bursts of activity between unpredictable stretches of inactivity, given the dependence on weather conditions. See Michael Molkentin, *Fire in the Sky: The Australian Flying Corps in the First World War* (Crowns Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2010), and *Australia and the War in the Air: The Centenary History of Australia and the Great War, Volume 1* (South Melbourne, Vic.: Oxford University Press, 2016).

³⁰ SLV, MS 10762, folio 3a, Garrett to Mabel and Edie, February 10, 1918.

studying “trig, algebra, etc.” with a friend.³¹ In Belgium, after his post-armistice tour of Italy, he increased his efforts.³² Finally, in March 1919, he wrote to his father to convey his future plans. Of flying, he wrote,

*I like it more and more, but not as a living, & not for good. It reminds me too much of a glorified chauffer [sic] ... Well the next thing is the old game, and this I would like to avoid if possible, so as to make the most use of my five years outdoors with you, I intend going in for architecture.*³³

By “the old game,” he meant building, and by “architecture,” he meant formal, prestigious training. He continued: “The AIF sent around applications for those who wished to make use of their educational scheme ... and now I am to do six months at an architectural school in London... [it] is a fairly advanced one, so I will have to work overtime to catch up.”³⁴

The AIF’s scheme of non-military employment aimed to occupy the troops after the armistice, and to assist their return to civilian life. The course Garrett attended, taught at the Architectural Association (AA) in London, was profoundly influential not only for the attendees, but also for the Australian architectural fraternity as a whole.³⁵ Garrett attended for fifteen months, gaining professional experience in the office of Herbert Baker, and passing the special examination for associateship of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA).

His letters home describe long hours, a rigorous program, and a growing appreciation for the AA’s method. By October 1919, responding to anxious queries about his return, he explained that “at present I feel how very little I know, that to return knowing such a little would be very unwise for me.”³⁶ His decision was justified; “week by week I find that I am learning the subtleties of design,” he informed his father in March 1920, “and instead of looking upon architecture as a wonderful puzzle, I now find that it is but the expression of the solution of one’s client’s requirements.”³⁷ After his return home to Australia, in June 1920, he spent four months in the office of fellow AA attendee Arthur Stephenson, and later occupied an office at 258 Swanston Street, Melbourne.³⁸ But his time overseas—that fertile distance from home and the status quo—had left Garrett with a taste for travel and education, and possibly for more compelling schemes than domestic projects.³⁹ In June 1925, he left on an eight-year overseas interlude, attending the Liverpool School of Architecture, and working in major architectural offices on either side of the Atlantic, before studying painting

31 SLV, MS 10762, folio 4a, Garrett to Mabel and Edie, August 21, 1918.

32 SLV, MS 10762, folio 4b, Garrett to Thomas, March 20, 1919.

33 SLV MS 10762, folio 4b, Garrett to Thomas, March 20, 1919.

34 SLV MS 10762, folio 4b, Garrett to Thomas, March 20, 1919.

35 For a history of this scheme, and an examination of its significant impact on the Australian architectural fraternity, see Julie Willis, “The Architectural Association and the Architectural Atelier,” in *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia & New Zealand: 30, Open*, ed. Alexandra Brown and Andrew Leach (Gold Coast, QLD: SAHANZ, 2013), vol. 2, 961-72, and Willis, “Architecture and Wartime,” 291-308.

36 SLV, MS 10762, folio 4b, Garrett to Thomas and Elizabeth, October 26, 1919.

37 SLV, MS 10762, folio 5b, Garrett to Thomas, March 15, 1920.

38 SLV, MS 9454, box 87, Garrett, S. G. Cazaly’s Contract Reporter, April 8, 1922, 1.

39 SLV, MS 9454, box 87, Garrett, S. G.

and drawing in Paris.⁴⁰ On his return to Australia in 1933, he entered into partnership with fellow returned Anzac and AA attendee William Craig, and another returned serviceman, Bennet Reynolds.⁴¹

By now, Garrett was presumably something of an architectural polymath, but documentation of his later projects is frustratingly limited. For this reason, as well as to come full circle on his aerial journey, this paper now turns to the AFC Memorial at Point Cook, dedicated in 1938 and attributed to the firm of Craig and Garrett, with Garrett as principal designer.

Suggesting Flight

The memorial remembers the Corps as the progenitor of the Royal Australian Air Force, and honours the Corps' First World War dead. It comprises a Stawell freestone shaft nearly ten feet high and eleven feet wide on a concrete podium (fig. 12 & 13). Its visual strength and simplicity exemplify the contemporaneous commemorative architectural mode, yet its mass and solidity are offset with deliberate visual allusions to flight. An official brochure described it as “suggestive of a streamline section, terminating in the fluted curves of a wing’s trailing edge,” while two vertical lines, on its front face, “designed in the form of a leading edge of a strut, give a further suggestion of flight.”⁴²

Streamlining refers to an aircraft’s characteristic curved lines, and the sides of the monument itself thus gracefully curve away. This curvature also recalls the architecture of the aerodromes, such as the curved hangar roofs (fig. 14), and the Nissen huts in which the Corps were often quartered. The “fluted curves

40 SLV, MS 9454, box 87, Garrett, S. G.

41 The partnership of Craig, Reynolds and Garrett existed between 1936-38. Reynolds initially served in the Field Artillery and transferred to the Flying Corps in July 1918, but further research is needed to determine whether he came into contact with Garrett at any stage. SLV, MS 10762, folio 4b, Garrett to Mabel and Edie, 13 [20] April 1919, notes that “Hughie Craig and young Devereaux [Walter Alan Devereux] [*sic*] are doing the same course as I am.” Craig travelled overseas at the same time as Garrett, but whether they planned the journey together is unknown.

42 *Australian Flying Corps Memorial* (Australian Flying Corps Association, 1937), unpaginated.



Figure 12. AFC Memorial, RAAF Base, Point Cook, S. G. Garrett & W. H. Craig, c. 1937. Unknown photographer. Reprinted from *Journal of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects* 38, no. 5 (1940), 130.

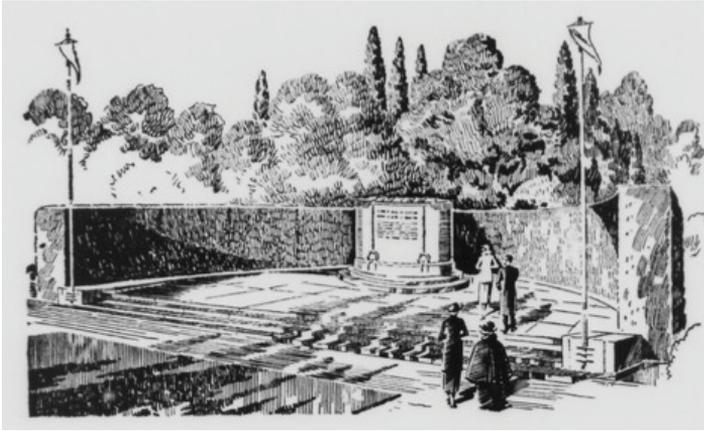


Figure 13. Sketch of Garrett and Craig's proposed Australian Flying Corps Memorial, 1937. Unknown artist. Reprinted from *Australian Flying Corps Memorial* (AFC Association, 1937).

of a wing's trailing edge," visible at the top of the monument's front face, are strongly reminiscent of the Boxkite flown by the Central Flying School (CFS) students, and as such, recall the AFC's early days on that site (fig. 15). But this fluting of the memorial also recalls the architectural nature of the machines themselves: from the scaffold-like Boxkite, to the BE2e's gentle wing curvature, its complex armature—seen in section—is reminiscent of hangar roofing trusses (fig. 16). And the fluted wing edge, placed at the top of the monument, is in turn reminiscent of the fluting of a column, adding a sombre classical note.

The struts were the vertical supports rising from the fuselage and between the wings of the First World War biplanes (fig. 4 & 5). Looking back at Buckland's snapshot of Garrett flying, the struts are clearly seen in the pilot's visual foreground against a tranquil sky (fig. 1). Depicted on the front of the monument, the vertical lines which echo them specifically recall the physical experience of flight for the viewer, enabling a former pilot or observer to reflect powerfully on their own memories.



Figure 14. Hangar at the Australian aerodrome, Leighterton, England, 1917-19. Unknown photographer. IWM, Q72612. Reproduced with permission. © Imperial War Museum.



Figure 15. Bristol Biplane (Boxkite) at the CFS, August 10 1915. Note the fluted profile of the rear of the wings. Photograph by Darge Photographic Company. AWM, DAD0035. (Courtesy of Australian War Memorial.)

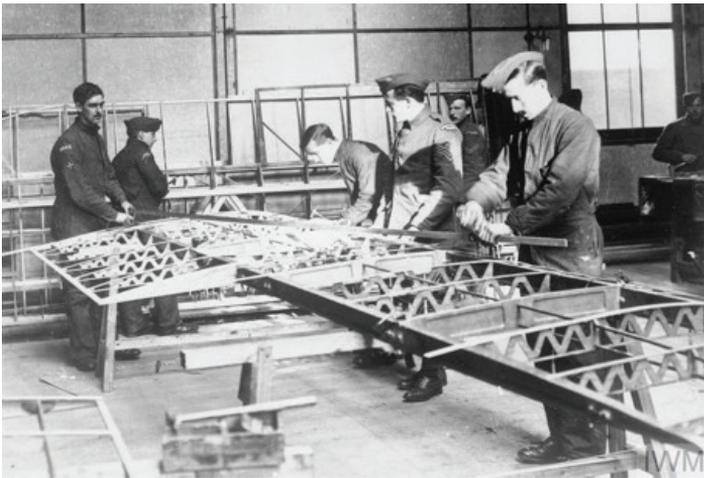


Figure 16. Workers testing the wing of a BE2c, Farnborough, England, November 1915. Photograph by British Press Agency. IWM, Q53913. Reproduced with permission. © Imperial War Museum.

Yet Garrett had a further personal investment in the memorial: it commemorated much loved AFC colleagues whose overseas war graves were themselves distant.⁴³ One was his sister Edie's fiancé, Fred Reeve, who crashed in France in May 1917, dying of his injuries.⁴⁴ Another was Owen Lewis, with whom he had played football most days.⁴⁵ The deaths of Buckland and his pilot Henry Ralfe were also keenly felt. Friends pre-war, Buckland and Garrett would often "have a chat over old times;" they flew together in Lincolnshire in 1917, at which time the snapshot was taken.⁴⁶ On the morning Buckland was killed, Garrett had been orderly officer: "at 5.45 [am] I called Ralfe and Jack, and after having a cup of tea with them I saw them off," he wrote, but their machine never returned.⁴⁷

These deaths bring another particularly poignant visual reference. During the war, the graves of Flying Corps airmen

43 For the impact of the distance of graves on Australian society, see Bart Ziino, *A Distant Grief: Australians, War Graves and the Great War* (Crawley, WA: University of Western Australia Press, 2008).

44 NAA, B2455, Reeve, C. F. Garrett went to some effort to secure a photograph of the grave for Edie. SLV, MS 10762, folio 3a, Garrett to Mabel and Edie, March 3, 1918.

45 SLV, MS 10762, folio 3b, Garrett to Mabel and Edie, April 17, 1918.

46 SLV, MS 10762, folio 1b, Garrett to Mabel and Edie, 14 June 1917; folio 2a, Garrett to Thomas and Elizabeth, July 25, 1917.

47 SLV, MS 10762, folio 3b, Garrett to Mabel and Edie, May 11, 1918.

were frequently marked with four-bladed propellers with three blades cut short to form a cross.⁴⁸ Thus truncated, the flat ends reveal a precisely engineered curvature (fig. 17). Buckland and Ralfe's graves were marked in this same way (fig. 18). The German air ace, Manfred von Richthofen, was given a similar cross by the Australians, transcending any barriers of national allegiance. Walking around the workshops, Garrett saw it being prepared, and included a sketch in a letter to his brother Walter (fig. 19); later, he visited the cemetery and saw it in situ.⁴⁹ With its flattened top and curved sides, the Corps memorial evokes these truncated propeller-crosses, and thus becomes a specific reminder of the graves of the fallen.

But perhaps the most significant point is that the AFC Memorial, positioned on the ground of the RAAF base, would also be viewed from the air. The simple elliptical plan would become its most prominent aspect. This dovetails with the AA's teaching, which Garrett described to his father in 1920: "the basis of the instruction given at the school is 'truth,' let your

48 This practice was not unique to the AFC.

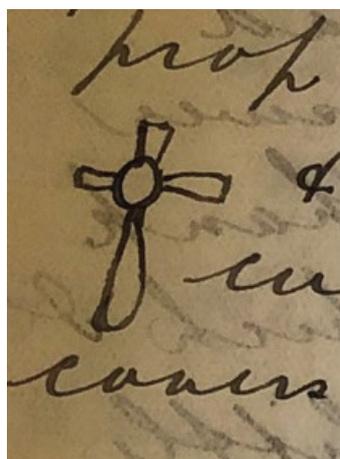
49 SLV, MS 10762, folio 3b, Garrett to Walter, April 26, 1918. Garrett and Barrow were initially—erroneously—credited with his death.



Figure 17. *Top left.* War graves of airmen, near Hesdin, France, 14 July 1918. Photograph by D. McLellan. IWM, Q12095. Reproduced with permission. © Imperial War Museum.

Figure 18. *Bottom left.* The graves of observer W. A. J. (Jack) Buckland and pilot H. D. E. Ralfe, May 1918. Unknown photographer. SLV, MS15534, Box 4, Buckland, Hipwell & Copeland family papers. (Courtesy of State Library of Victoria.)

Figure 19. *Bottom right.* Sketch of truncated propeller prepared for Manfred von Richthofen's grave in a letter to his brother, 26 April 1918. Drawing by S. G. Garrett. SLV, MS10762, folio 3b. (Courtesy of State Library of Victoria.)



elevation express your plan, and the nature of the building,” he wrote, adding later that “they teach us to plan first, and then let your elevation grow from the plan, and not try and force a plan to an elevation.”⁵⁰ Plan is indeed the memorial’s governing essence: its edges curved, cupped by a bordering hedge, the structure is visually differentiated from other buildings when viewed from the air, its curved ends lending it the character of a biplane’s wings as seen from above. It would thus act as a point of geographic reference, like the landmarks pilots habitually sought. Whenever seen from the air, the memorial would become an instant visual reminder of the history of the Corps, and the place of the dead within that history.

50 SLV, MS 10762, folio 5b, Garrett to Thomas, January 17, and February 3, 1920.

In its mass and integrity, the AFC memorial is a visual counter to memories of destruction. It encapsulates the quality of flight that Garrett and his fellow flyers knew. It is testimony to his awareness of both plan as the guiding basis of design, and the transformative nature of the aerial view, as gained during his war service and immediately after at the AA. Intrinsic to this was his physical, intellectual, and emotional experience of learning to fly, both as pilot and architect.