



Wallace Statue Unveiling 24th May 1889

Research by R. D. Mosman

On Queen Victoria's 70th Birthday, Friday 24th May, 1889, a public holiday, the statue of Sir William Wallace was ceremoniously unveiled.

Sculptured by Mr Percival Ball, Melbourne and provided from the James Russell Thomson bequest at a cost of £1,000, it represents Wallace standing upon the abbey Craig waiting for the precise moment when a blast from the horn hanging from his side, would give the signal for his forces to attack the English as they cross Stirling Bridge.

The ceremony commenced at 1pm before some 3000 persons including over 100 connected with the Melbourne Caledonian Societies with 20 in highland costume of various clans, and many dignitaries arriving by train from Melbourne were met at the Ballarat Railway Station by Thomas Stoddart and travelled to the gardens by tramcar and cabs. The entrance was guarded by a strong muster of Militia, headed by four pipers the Highlanders entered the enclosure to Scotch national music, during the waiting period the Militia Band provided rousing music.

Local dignitaries included Parliamentarians, Mayors, Councillors and many others including Mr Percival Ball, the Trustees of the J. Russell Thomson bequest, Mr H A Nevett, Mr J Noble Wilson who were also assisted by Mr Thomas Stoddart.

Mr H A Nevett opened the proceedings by giving an account of the Trustees stewardship of the gift of Statues by the late J. Russell Thomson. The first purchase was of the superb statue The Flight from Pompeii for £1,500 followed by the statue of the national Scottish patriot and hero, Sir William Wallace for £1,000 and lastly the four others in the Statuary Pavilion, Susannah, Rebecca, Ruth, and the veiled Modesty for £2,500. The remainder of the funds were used to purchase the brass tablet in the Pavilion with a brief account of the bequest and the donor. The Wallace Statue was draped with a banner on which was emblazoned the red lion of Scotland.

The Hon John Nimmo, MLA, Minister of Public Works, then pulled a string and the banner fell from the statue of Sir William Wallace revealing the figure in all its beauty. Loud cheers were given and the band played 'Scotts Wha Hae' (Scots we have).

Researcher's Note: The Hon John Nimmo filled in for Mr Dugald MacPherson, President of the Caledonian Society, Melbourne who at the last moment could not come.

The Hon J Nimmo addressed the assembly at length amid loud 'Cheers' and 'Hear, Hear' from the crowd as he referred to the battle of Stirling Bridge, the Scots, the English and the Irish national in Australia all of whom he had come to know and respect. Other speakers were Mr J Noble Wilson, a Trustee for James Russell Thomson, the Mayor Cr McDonald and Mr Percival Ball. Mr Nimmo called for three hearty cheers for His Worship the Mayor, the Trustees, and the Sculptor. After the cheers the band played 'God Save the Queen' and the crowd dispersed after singing 'Auld Lang Syne'.