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Seeds of Discontent

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Harry Oakman (1906-2002) was one of Australia's foremost gardening authorities and a pioneer of Australian architectural landscaping. A prolific columnist and author, his vision and writings have greatly influenced the form, number and appearance of our green spaces and gardens – both private and public – especially in Newcastle, Brisbane and Canberra. Oakman directed the Brisbane City Council Parks Department for 16 years (1946-1962) and was later Director of Landscape Architecture with the National Capital Development Commission in the Australian Capital Territory.

While his civic and published works reveal much about his professional life (at least some of his 16 books remain standard references), we have few other insights to this influential immigrant. What little has been written about him is largely celebratory and concerned mostly with his horticultural interests and achievements. Oakman's uncommon attitude towards military commemoration in public spaces – which oftentimes placed him at odds with both community and public sentiments – does however reveal something of a more complex character. No sooner had he been appointed by Brisbane City Council, in 1946, when he set about systematically removing and disposing of every item of obsolete artillery from every public space within his sphere of influence. As a consequence, scores of colonial, Boer, World War I and World War II guns were removed from the city's public spaces and corralled into Council's Crosby Park Depot pending disposal. Some, at least went to the Queensland Museum. With obsessive determination, Oakman pursued this cause unrelentingly throughout his 16-year tenure, his wholesale removal of Brisbane's commemorative and ornamental weaponry having no precedent either here in Australia, or elsewhere.[1]

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This article examines this unusual aspect of Brisbane's post-war history. It seeks to explain how Oakman was able to use his high office, for so long, in pursuit of such an ambitious, oftentimes unpopular, and seemingly personal agenda. It also searches beyond this for possible motives, and for social and professional influences that could help explain his singular behaviour.

Tradition

The prominent public display of captured and obsolete weaponry has been universally practised for centuries, becoming especially important during and after World War I when more than 60 per cent of all casualties and injuries were inflicted by artillery.

Between 1914 and 1918, Australian servicemen captured thousands of enemy guns and mortars, more than 1,300 of which were subsequently distributed throughout the home states and territories as war trophies. In relative terms, this was the largest collection of its kind ever assembled by an allied army, an astonishing testimony to the Australian Imperial Forces' military prowess. With its unequalled casualty rate, the highest in per capita



This colonial saluting battery was photographed in the Brisbane Botanic Gardens where the State's first Boer War trophies were also first displayed in July 1905.
(Picture Queensland, State Library of Queensland)

terms of all combatant nations, the Australian Government was determined to make that success known in every part of the homeland. As Melrose stated:

> Australia was now one of the historical nations, and the equal of any other, for only a powerful nation – one that could rival Imperial Britain or Napoleonic France for military mettle – could possess such a collection of trophies.[2]

These meanings resonated with communities immediately after the war when many, though not all, clamoured to secure a share of this booty. Of the 47 guns and 45 mortars distributed by the Queensland Trophy Committee in the years immediately following World War I, at least a quarter are thought to have been allocated to communities and organisations within Brisbane's municipal boundaries. These were additional to the estimated two dozen colonial-era guns that had already been placed in city parks and gardens prior to the War, at least another five arriving during World War II. As a consequence, Brisbane's public spaces were literally bristling with artillery when Harry Oakman first arrived at City Hall on Armistice Day 1946.

Henri

Born Henri Octave Cyril Vereecke in Lommel, Belgium on 4 April 1906, Oakman was only two-years-old when his mother died. He spent the next six years with relatives and in orphanages. After Germany invaded Belgium in August 1914 his father Octave, a motor driver, collected his son and embarked on a tug bound for Holland, then London. After enrolling Harry (previously Henri) in a Twickenham boarding school, Octave, despite being 42-years-old, enlisted in the Motor Transport division of the British Army Service Corps. Following service in France he was officially discharged from the Imperial Army in November 1917 so that he could re-enlist with the Belgium Army.[3]

After the war the British Government offered ex-servicemen free passage to its dominions and colonies, 17,000 expatriates eventually taking advantage of this offer and arriving in Australia between 1919 and 1922. Amongst the 242 aliens who left London for Sydney in March 1921 aboard the P&O liner *Berrima*, were Henri and Octave Vereecke, the latter accompanied by his new British wife, Alice. The family name, Vereecke meaning 'of the oak', is said to have been anglicised soon after their arrival in Australia.[4]

Young Oakman first worked at the Agricultural Farm, Scheyville in western Sydney, before transferring in 1922 to the Wagga Wagga Experimental Farm. At the age of 17 he moved to Pennant Hills, in North Sydney, where for 2½ years he worked in Brunet's flower nursery. In 1927 he became a gardener with the Ku-ring-gai Council in northern Sydney where he gained his first experience of municipal parks.[5] His supervisor there, and subsequently at Newcastle City Council, was former Army gunner Richard Henry Patterson who appears to have both inspired and encouraged his young charge to consider his latest appointment as a possible career.[6] To this end, Oakman

enrolled in 1937 in the first Australian horticultural course for Parks and Gardens Department employees, attending evening classes at Sydney Technical College (three nights each week). By the time he resigned his position with Ku-ring-gai in 1940, he had been promoted to Foreman.

Up to that point Oakman is unlikely to have had any professional involvement with either trophy or ornamental park guns or mortars, none of which were ever allocated to Ku-ring-gai. However, since his arrival in Australia coincided with the delivery and apportioning of some 5,000 trophy weapons, he would have witnessed both the nationwide scramble to acquire these bellicose artefacts and, their subsequent deterioration, disposal and disavowal. Those advocating their removal included leading clerics, pacifists, politicians and even council gardeners. At least some of these people might have been known to Oakman. In 1933 for example Wagga Wagga City Council's Head Gardener recommended the gun in that city's Memorial Gardens be removed, similar proposals having earlier been advanced in places such as Kempsey (1925), Newcastle (1930) and Dubbo (1932). As an industry insider and former Wagga Wagga resident Oakman would, at the very least, have become indirectly aware of these shifting public and professional attitudes.[7]

Exactly how his wartime and interwar experiences might have shaped his later attitudes and behaviours (viz-a-vis park guns) will likely remain a subject for conjecture, although one can imagine how his experience as a wartime refugee, combined with his father's extended absence on military service, could have caused both the child, and the young man, to eschew all things martial.

Newcastle (1940-1946)

Oakman's appointment in 1940 to the role of Parks Superintendent with the Newcastle City Council compelled him to adopt a more prominent public role, and it was during these wartime years that he also discovered his talent for writing, initially as a gardening columnist for *The Sydney Morning Herald*, then the *Newcastle Herald*. These published musings hint that his later interest in purging Brisbane of its park guns may have been shaped, in part at least, by the Newcastle City Council's openly disdainful attitude towards war trophies. By 1922 only one of the steel city's many trophies had been mounted for public display, most others lying rusting 'in a jumbled heap... alongside a broken down, abandoned lavatory'.[8]

Council later leapt at the chance to be rid of its Boer War *(Gregson Park*) and World War I *(Waratah Park)* trophies when in October 1941 the Army's 2nd Salvage Headquarters requested that they be removed for recycling. Aldermen decided 'it was better that the guns should be a menace to the

enemy than to the children who often hurt themselves when they climbed on guns and fell off them'.[9]

This repurposing proposal encountered only token opposition, those who had captured the guns – speaking on behalf of the local Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia (RSSILA) – even publicly declaring that 'sentiment doesn't count... We will organise working-bees to break up some of these guns and carry them away'.[10]

The degree to which Council had shaped Oakman's attitudes on these matters, and vice versa, remains unknown. What cannot have escaped



Harry Oakman, c.1960.
(Fryer Library UQFL358)



The trappings of war which Oakman found so distasteful were still commonplace throughout Brisbane when he arrived there in 1946, these anti-aircraft guns having been photographed in suburban Annerley the same year.
(Australian War Memorial 127253)

Superintendent Oakman's notice was the widespread reversal of public attitudes that had occurred since the early 1920s when municipalities were openly competing for the Australian War Trophy Committee's largesse. More importantly, here was proof that the influential Returned Sailors' Soldiers' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia (RSSAILA) could be guided by pragmatism, rather than sentiment; that municipal governments could successfully sway tradition and public opinion; and that public officials like himself could be the agents for such change.[11]

If Oakman did harbour pacifist or anti-war sentiments or sympathised with the mounting chorus demanding the removal of park guns, then these ideological leanings were kept constantly in check and never advanced as justification for any of his professional actions or pronouncements. Indeed, when years later he was asked why he never enlisted for military service during World War II he explained that he only narrowly missed out, by one month, on being called up.[12]

It was only after he had resigned his position with the Newcastle City Council in late 1946 that he publicly revealed his views regarding the purpose of public parks, and the placement of guns within them, carefully confining his criticisms to aesthetic matters. There is even a tone of confidence in his parting message to the citizens of Newcastle:

> The beauty of a city is largely gauged by its parks...The real cause for concern is not so much-the lack of civic beauty in Newcastle, as the absence of a desire for beauty in the majority of its citizens... .Parklands should...be jealously retained as such, and not turned into dumping grounds for old guns, memorials, flagpoles, baby health centres, or monuments...Once a park becomes cluttered up, it ceases to be a park.[13]

Brisbane (1946-1962)

With career progression in mind, Oakman joined the Brisbane City Council in late 1946 taking charge of a Parks division that was 'totally derelict', and still operating as a subordinate unit within the city's Engineering Department.[14] He soon discovered though that the senior administrative and political arms of Brisbane City Council were mostly supportive of his civic beautification plans, including those affecting park guns. With Mayor John Beals Chandler and Town Clerk James Cameron Slaughter, Oakman could not have wished for better allies (neither having ever served with the military), and nor could he have arrived at a more opportune time.

Post-war reconstruction had emerged as a national political imperative and in common with every other Australian capital, Brisbane too was being swept along by a tide of planning enthusiasm, and a matching concern that post-war urban expansion should not be allowed to 'continue its economically costly, socially inequitable, and aesthetically underwhelming haphazard course'[15].

Anticipating these changes, Council had made provision in its February 1944 Zoning Plan for a 'Green Belt' to encircle the entire city, the merits of this grand but controversial new vision being later extolled in a *Town and Home Planning Exhibition* held at City Hall which featured aspirational content provided by New York's Museum of Modern Art.

Oakman eventually realised Mayor Chandler's Arcadian vision by creating 'a Brisbane filled with colourful subtropical plantings and indeed he oversaw the first extensive and prolonged street tree plantings in that city.'[16]

He focussed initially on creating an independent Parks Department which he then set about reorganising and expanding, while simultaneously acquiring new parklands. With his 180 staff he established 40 new parks across the city, and refurbished another 40. Brisbane's first Council nursery, central to the realisation of his vision (and the Mayor's) was also one of his initiatives, being established north-east of the city at Crosby Park.

Oakman, however, had in mind a programme that went some way beyond the creation of new green spaces, and the rejuvenation of existing parks. He held that no amount of good design, planning or planting could offset the retention of ugly accretions such as the numerous war surplus buildings, neglected outdoor furniture and obsolete weapons still occupying many of the city's parks.[17]

Brisbane's green-space artillery had survived World War II largely unaffected by the vagaries of changing public sentiment, or wartime austerity drives.[18] That stasis was irrevocably shattered in early 1949 when the *Brisbane Telegraph* reported the vandalism of the Cameron Rocks war memorial, an accompanying picture showing how vandals 'had carved their names into the stonework and written obscene words on the monument...Fishermen from the nearby point having [also] lighted fires in the wooden stand of the overturned cannon, thus destroying part of it completely.'[19]

Individual expressions of concern began reaching Council four months later when still nothing had been done to remedy the situation: 'we should do something about memories of dear departed days, as well as souls. Brisbane has so few links with the past'[20]. These became progressively more strident and frequent, escalating quickly into a public debate that embroiled Council's Parks Superintendent for years thereafter. Also drawn into this sometimes unseemly exchange was the Queensland Museum's Director, George Mack, who was quick to explain that he could not possibly accommodate the 'Two guns [that] no one wants' since 'This is not an historic museum'.[21]

Compelled to respond on Council's behalf, without the backing of a formal municipal policy or plan, Oakman advocated that the guns be removed while underplaying his own aesthetic objection:

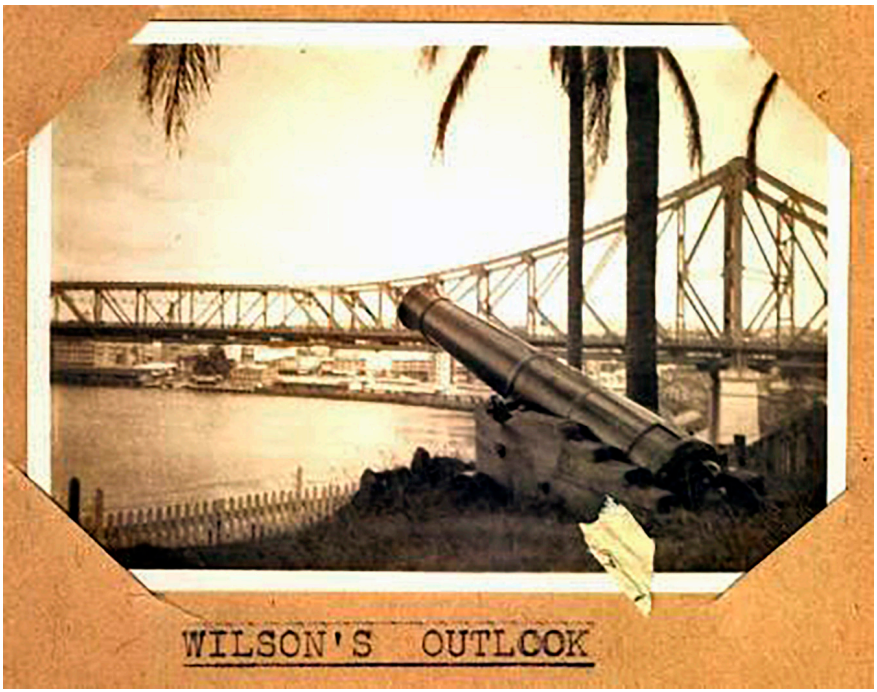
> although cannons have undoubted historical value, they are not really suitable for display in public parks... He [Oakman] pointed out that it seemed probable that Cameron Rocks would be entirely demolished by the Harbours ' and Marine Department in the near future because of a proposed quay line close to the existing shore line. In these circumstances the restoration of the cannons at the present site would not be justified. He recommended that the cannons be offered as a gift to the Queensland Historical Society.[22]

Instead of defusing the issue, his comments precipitated further criticism. One of the first to respond was KF Caldwell, a member of The Historical Society of Queensland (HSQ) (later the word 'Royal' was added) who wrote directly to the Lord Mayor as he felt 'that this is a matter in which only your personal intervention would be effective.'[23] Knowing that the Mayor had migrated from England as a young man, Caldwell appealed directly, and unashamedly, to his patriotic, historical and aesthetic sensibilities:

> I think you will have a much better understanding than the average person of the significance of these guns... Six guns of this type were a gift from Queen Victoria to her young colony of Queensland in 1862, and were used as a saluting battery in the Botanical Gardens for many years...while the Society might be able to accept one or two guns, it would hardly be able to accept all the guns which Mr. Oakman wishes to remove. With all respect to your staff, I submit that to bury these guns is an act of wanton and senseless vandalism. The Superintendent has, it seems, definite views on the matter: but he should not have freedom to deprive the city of some of its scanty relics which are, indeed, older than Brisbane itself.[24]

Caldwell's letter reflected the tone and substance of other complaints. It drew together the most commonly stated arguments in support of park guns (namely patriotism, heritage, amenity and aesthetic values), but went further than most other respondents by suggesting that Oakman's behaviour was at best unprofessional, and possibly even illegal. These criticisms it seems were not without justification, and may help to explain why Oakman subsequently sought the formal approval of Council's powerful Establishment and Co-ordination Committee (E&CC) before attempting further relocations and disposals.

Whereas The Historical Society of Queensland Inc. began negotiating with Council, unsuccessfully, for the guns to be relocated to *Newstead Park*, at least one Society member felt that the matter warranted more immediate and direct action. In a personal plea published the following week in *The Courier-Mail*, journalist and historian Clem Lack expressed the hope that 'Council will be wise enough to allow the cannon to remain undisturbed. Brisbane has a limited number of historic relics, and surely the small expenditure that would be necessary to mount the guns suitably is justified in the interests of civic pride' adding that 'The cannon at Albert Park was the oldest of all the naval guns in Brisbane [and] It is not impossible that these and other guns in Brisbane's parks... saw service at Trafalgar in Nelson's ships, firing round



One of Oakman's most vocal critics was K F Caldwell who wrote directly to the Mayor in August 1949 seeking to have the Parks Superintendent's decisions (vis-a-vis park guns) overturned. This view from Wilson's Outlook is one of several that he included with his letter to 'illustrate [the] use of old cannon to good effect.'

(Brisbane City Council File BCA0275).

shot from the flaming gunports of a British three-decker. Preservation of these relics of the past... Is a matter upon which there should be no doubt or argument, for obvious historical and sentimental reasons.'[25]

A well connected and respected former naval officer, Lack's public opposition may have caused Council to pause and rethink its gun removal programme. Within a few months Oakman, too, had articulated a broad philosophical statement addressing the social purpose of the modern park:

> it was once the custom to fill parks with monuments, ruins, caves, towers, reflection pools and many other contrivances, each of which was intended to induce the particular trends of thought in vogue at the time.
>
> The modern tendency is for the creation of an atmosphere of lightness or gaiety, combined with beauty so that the dominant mental reaction is relaxation from the speed and turmoil of our present mode of life. Nothing could be more opposed to this objective than the installation of cannons, which to the average mind convey only sordid thoughts of bloodshed, despair and bereavement.



Queen's Park was described as 'An emerald setting liberally studded with multi-coloured flowers, Nature's glowing gems'. In the foreground is the state's first Boer War trophy (now held by Queensland Museum), and behind it stands Australia's first Great War trophy, gifted by King George to the State of Queensland in 1917.

(*The Queenslander Annual*, 1 November 1937, p. 38)

> Newstead Park was recently redeveloped as a result it is now fast becoming one of Brisbane's most colourful parks. It is contended that the erection of a collection of guns would set at naught the work of the last eighteen months and leave instead a horrible collection of ironmongery.[26]

Success

In March 1954 he revealed his Gibson Island rearmament solution, a master stroke which saw half a dozen of the city's oldest guns permanently removed to a remote industrial precinct near the mouth of the Brisbane River:

> Six cannons will be placed on the island in positions where guns were sited during the Russian scare of the last century...The Southern Electric Authority had notified the Council it would accept a perpetual loan of, and repair and mount six old cannons...He [Oakman] said it was now well recognised that guns were out of place in public parks where they were a disturbing element, devoid of beauty and quite out of keeping with the peaceful atmosphere intrinsic to every park.[27]

By endorsing Oakman's 'rearmament programme' Council's Establishment and Coordination Committee was effectively delivering a forceful pronouncement as to what was, and was not, aesthetically appropriate for



Deputy Town Clerk Laurient (Laurie) UC Kempster served with distinction with the 11th Australian Light Horse Regiment. In c.1953 he arranged for the former Sandgate Council's trophy (above), reputedly captured by the 11th ALH at Semakh in 1918, to be relocated to New Farm Park which was then one of Oakman's horticultural centerpieces. This intervention must have caused considerable chagrin for Oakman since the gun was dilapidated when it arrived, and remained so throughout Oakman's term with Brisbane City Council.

(Photograph courtesy of Charlie Clelland).

public green spaces, a message that could not have been missed by other municipalities in regional Queensland, and beyond.[28] Council's heritage assets, so it seemed, were now commodified and transferable, even to corporate interests (viz. the Southern Electricity Authority of Queensland). This helped establish an important precedent which, in time, Oakman began exploiting. Feeling less constrained by arguments about heritage responsibility or diminished amenity value, and emboldened no doubt by the success of his Gibson Island rearmament solution, Oakman renewed his efforts to rid the city of its remaining guns.

He began focussing on relocating, rather than simply removing park guns, always confining his efforts to those weapons that fell within Council's purview. Whenever possible he tried to transplant these relics as far as possible beyond the City of Brisbane's municipal boundaries so that his vision would not be tainted by their proximity. This strategy however, which he pursued doggedly for most of his 16 years with Brisbane Council met with only limited success, being defeated more-often by the cost and effort needed to move these large, heavy and awkward objects long distances to regional

centres such as Wandoan, Gympie, Tewantin, Ingham, Biloela and Proserpine. Although he had succeeded in denuding the city's parks and gardens of weaponry, he had unwittingly created an unsightly weapons stockpile at Council's Crosby Depot.

Numerous branch RSLs had expressed interest in his cache but for cost and logistical reasons, none were ever collected. While some guns were eventually off-loaded to embryonic Army museums, Oakman's relocation efforts throughout the 1950s were often frustrated. Desperate in 1958 to be rid of the dozen guns still crowding his Crosby Depot, he brazenly advertised that Council 'Has Guns to Give Away'.[29] And where previously he would only consider requests from museums, veteran and military organisations, he now began recommending to the E&CC that it approve gun requests from scouting, yachting, pistol shooting and even religious organisations.[30]

Some war trophies within the city's boundaries however were simply beyond his reach and were to remain, for Oakman at least, blights on the city's landscape. While these untouchables were mostly on Commonwealth-owned lands at Colmslie, Enoggera and Victoria Barracks, they also included the city's two most prominent war trophies, namely the behemoth *Mephisto*, an armoured vehicle displayed near the entrance to the Queensland Museum, and the *Queen's Park* FK96 field gun.[31] Unlike Brisbane's other war trophies,



Albert Park, 1949. (Picture Queensland, State Library of Queensland)

these had been secured after direct representations by the State Premier, a factor that must have imbued them with some added protection.

With *Mephisto*'s hulking mass permanently occupying its forecourt, the Queensland Museum had also demonstrated a long-standing disdain for war trophies. Unlike most other items in its collection, these were only ever tolerated outside, one large Belgian howitzer even re-appearing in a Council park after it had been allocated to the Museum in 1922.[32]

In late 1946 Acting Director George Mack made another attempt to get rid of *Mephisto* which he described as 'the ugly object across the entrance to the museum', a move that was later quashed by the State Premier's intervention.[33] Adding to this indignity, Mack was compelled 19 months later to accept another pair of Oakman's orphan guns.[34]

What had begun in March 1949 as a story about vandalism and military commemoration, had quickly evolved into a much broader public debate about heritage management responsibility; the state's 'poorly developed historical sense' and eventually; the role of the Queensland Museum which was criticised 'for not reflect[ing]... the continuing history of Queensland, as American museums do for Americans.' The Museum's Director, George Mack, sought to neutralise this discussion by restating his earlier view, perhaps still evident, that 'It is common knowledge that the Queensland Museum quite rightly restricts its efforts to the fields of zoology, geology, anthropology, and closely allied subjects.'[35] Conspicuously absent from these extended public debates was the usually outspoken RSSAILA.

Publicly Oakman would exercise considerable restraint when referring to park guns. His internal official communications however were often more expansive, and revealing:

> it would be difficult to find objects more antithetical to the purpose of a Park than these. They bring to mind war and bloodshed, death and desolation, the diametric opposite of peace, beauty, and relief from daily cares, all of which it is a primary purpose of the Park to create. In themselves these cannon are ugly and detract from the beauty of a Park.
>
> The problem of Park cannon is not confined to Brisbane. All over the world Park directors are confronted with the problem of protecting Parks from becoming dumping grounds or show places, (depending on the point of view) for cannon and other war souvenirs.[36]

Although these sentiments were subsequently repeated by several Council officials, including the Mayor, there appears to be nothing in the canon of town planning or park management literature to support Oakman's contention that park cannon constituted a universal concern. The problem was more likely imagined, than real, and fortunately perhaps for Oakman his claims were ultimately never challenged.[37]



Many of the park guns stockpiled at Council's Crosby Park Depot eventually passed into private ownership. Photographed in the front yard of a Waterworks Road residence in the early 1970s, this German l.F.H.Kp and s.F.H13 were found lying on their sides behind Albion Park.

(*Courier-Mail* 2061/RSM 1500-7).

Living memorials

A stronger justification for removing park guns was to be found in the living memorial movement which had its genesis during World War I, and found its greatest expression following World War II. As much rejection of traditional war memorials and their 'organic combination of triumphalism and lamentation', living memorials were typically utilitarian and concerned with promoting physical fitness and, with 'Educating adults and children in ideals of community living and common citizenship.'[38] Brisbane's first such living memorial, an initiative of the Playground and Recreation Association, appears to have been the Crosby Park project which, when officially opened on 8 July 1950, was lauded as 'one of the most up-to-date play and recreation centres in Australia.'[39] It is unclear just why Oakman persisted with the vulnerable notion of a dominant public aesthetic (vis-à-vis park guns) when local grassroots initiatives like the living memorials movement, which also eschewed park guns, had already been enthusiastically embraced by Council and the city's ratepayers.[40] Describing the growing appeal of this new

orthodoxy in 1947*, The Telegraph* even claimed that 'not one citizen in forty now wants Japanese or German guns in Queensland parks.'[41]

Beyond the state capital, however, there were others who also felt that guns were ugly artefacts that had no place in communal park spaces. These voices, first heard after the Armistice, could still be heard during and following World War II. Through his attendance at professional fora, such as the Parks and Gardens Superintendent's Convention, Oakman will have discovered counterparts who shared his views. Launceston's Superintendent of Public Reserves, for example, publicly called in 1946 for the scrapping of that city's 'hideous' war trophies.[42] These dissenting voices were sometimes louder in regional centres, in towns like Maryborough and Toowoomba where pacifist Mayors had succeeded shortly after World War II in having war trophies permanently removed from their parks.[43]

Harry Oakman's sustained attempt to purge Brisbane of its bellicose symbols can be seen as a unique social experiment, interesting both for its audaciousness, arrogance and scale. While he achieved some short-term success (notably with respect to World War I trophies), Oakman failed to deliver any lasting change either within or beyond the boundaries of Brisbane.

The gains he made on this front were tenuously propped up by the incumbency of a sympathetic Town Clerk and Mayor, seemingly without regard to their sustainability. That he did succeed in removing dozens of historic and ornamental weapons from Brisbane's parks may have been due as much to the climate of nationwide disinterest in military and Anzac commemorations that prevailed between World World II and the Vietnam War; a simple case, perhaps, of an unusual idea having taken root and found nourishment in the right place, at the right time. In his final years, Oakman acknowledged that his gains began unravelling after Clem Jones was appointed Mayor in 1961, the latter, so Oakman believed, being more interested in sporting fields, than parks or gardens.[44] Oakman's gun-purging plans began reversing soon after his departure in 1961, assisted by both the city's citizenry, councillors and Council officials. His forced migration programme certainly made these elements temporarily less accessible and visible, at least until the 1970s when there began a renewed public interest in the city's military heritage.

Even the stand-alone Parks Department that he worked so hard to create, and which he counted as one of his career successes was by 1974 eventually dismantled.[45] By the 1980s Brisbane City Councillors were seeking to actively recover and reinstate the city's lost artillery heritage, these efforts having continued ever since.

In his final role as Chief Landscape Architect (1962-1972) with Canberra's influential National Capital Development Commission, Oakman was at

the peak of his career. And unlike any other national capital, there were no obsolete guns to be found in any of its parks and gardens.

More than just a historical aberration, Oakman's Brisbane experiment serves to illuminate an important counter narrative. Like their monumental counterparts, park guns were also the foci of highly charged political, religious, historical, aesthetic and ideological community debates recurring throughout Australia for much of the last century. Size, type, location, condition and longevity were all indicators of changing community attitudes, sentiments and values. While the former have been closely studied, revealing much about Australian society and history, park guns have been largely ignored. From the outset, Queenslanders and Australians have never wholly embraced the notion of military triumphalism in prominent public spaces, the disputation and disinterest revealed by Oakman in Brisbane being evident in numerous other towns and cities. He could have become a lightning rod and harnessed this widespread disaffection for his own ends or indeed, those of the profession he had helped nurture for so long. He chose instead to act alone, seemingly without having future-proofed the gains made during his 16-year purge.

The rusting barrels have now largely disappeared from Brisbane's parks replaced by an ever-expanding variety of memorial contrivances, the most visited and imposing example of which might well be Roma Street's Harry Oakman Pavilion.

Endnotes

1 The author was first to describe the Australian War Trophy Collection (1995), having since published a number of related research papers. The first comprehensive studies of war trophy collections were completed in the 1980s, in Canada (Donald Graves, 1985) and New Zealand (Aaron Fox, 1987).
2 Craig Melrose, *Historicising Australia through trophies: Memorial landscape 1920 – 1925*, unpublished paper presented to the Australian Historical Association Conference, July 2008, p. 15.
3 National Archives of Australia [NAA], *Octave Joseph VEREECKE – Naturalisation certificate,* NAA: A1, 1927/11365, p. 8.
4 National Archives of Australia [NAA]*, SS BERRIMA [passenger list inwards for Port of Sydney] 31/4/1921 [14 pages; box 67],* NAA: SP83/11, NN.
5 Fryer Library [FL], Harry Oakman audio Interview with M Bunzli on 16th November 1995, Brisbane. Tape 1, Box 1, UQFL358.
6 Patterson later became the first Australian to be honoured with a Fellowship of the British Institute of Landscape Architects, Oakman being conferred with the second such honour in 1972.
7 'Removal of war trophies', *Daily Advertiser*, 21 April 1933, p. 2.
8 'Old Junk', *The Newcastle Sun* [*NS*], 3 July 1922, p. 3.
9 'Trophy guns will see battle again', *NS*, 16 October 1941, p. 2. In April 1937 King George VI ordered the removal of two German trophies from Windsor Castle as 'He considered the guns disfigured the beautiful terrace and the famous sunken garden.'

(see 'Unsightly German Guns', *The Age*, 16 July 1937, p. 9). An aesthetic judgement of this order, having been widely reported throughout Australia, would have provided both confidence and direction for municipal leaders and council employees wrestling with the mounting safety, maintenance and aesthetic problems posed by ageing war trophies. Although these developments preceded Oakman's appointment, they could go some way towards explaining the openly disdainful attitude (vis-à-vis park guns) he encountered when he joined Newcastle Council in 1940.

10 'Nazis may get old guns back', *NS*, 7 May 1941, p. 4.

11 As early as 1933 the RSSILA is known to have supported council moves to remove trophy guns in other parts of Australia. See 'An Old Gun', *Circular Head Chronicle*, 18 October 1933, p. 4.

12 FL, Harry Oakman audio Interview with M Bunzli on 16th November 1995, Brisbane. Tape 1, Box 1, UQFL358.

13 Harry Oakman, 'Newcastle Can Be Made Beautiful', *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate*, 25 October 1946, p. 2.

14 FL, Audio interview, 1995, Tape 1, Box 1, UQFL358.

15 Robert Freestone, *Post-war Reconstruction and Planning Promotion in 1940s Australia*. In 15th International Planning History Society [IPHS] Conference Proceedings (2012), p. 4.

16 R McKinnion, M Brunzli & R Steward, 'Harry Oakman (1906-2002): A Retrospective of his Life and Work', in Cooke, G (ed.) *Queensland Review*, Vol. 10, No. 2, p. 66.

17 To some extent at least, Oakman's thinking here may have been influenced by broader developments in the town planning sphere, especially the Australian lecture tour in late 1948 by Britain's leading town planner, Sir Patrick Abercombie.

18 Colonial guns were overlooked by wartime salvors, one likely explanation being that they were mostly made of impure cast iron, whereas modern weapons required high-grade steel.

19 'Monuments Defaced', *The Telegraph* [*T*], 15 March 1949, p. 8.

20 Brisbane City Archives [BCA], Letter dated 21 July 1949 from DJ Sinclair to Alderman M White. File BCA0275 *Guns in parks including Carron Cannons, Brisbane City Council, 1921-1999*.

21 George Mack, 'Two guns no one wants', *The Courier-Mail* [*CM*], 13 September 1949, p. 3.

22 'Move To Rid Park Of Cannons', [*T*], 27 August 1949, p. 3.

23 BCA: File 0275, Letter dated 28 August 1949 from KF Caldwell to Alderman J B Chandler. This is thought to be Sgt. Keith Frederick Caldwell (QX51568) who was Mentioned in Despatches while serving in New Guinea with the 7th Field Ambulance in 1944 (see *Maryborough Chronicle, Wide Bay and Burnett Advertiser*, 20th July 1945, p. 4).

24 Although Oakman stridently denied having ever buried park guns, there is some evidence that this did occur. In 1983 the Queensland Museum received the barrel of a Brisbane Field Battery gun (BL 15pr 7 cwt Mk 1 number 599) which shows clear signs of having been buried for many years. Two 18 Pdr. barrels were also unearthed at a Brisbane council depot in late 1990.

25 Clem Lack, 'Save city's cannon', *CM*, 7th September 1949, p. 2.

26 BCA: File 0275, Memorandum 16th December 1949 from Oakman to Town Clerk J C Slaughter.

27 'Six-Gun Rearmament', [*T*], 22 March 1954, p. 2.

28 The support of Mayor Frank Roberts (1952-1955) was critical to the success of these negotiations. In common with his predecessor, Roberts also had no military experience.

29 ‘Has Guns to Give Away’, *Sunday Mail*, 2 March 1958, p. 7.
30 Council records (vide BCA0275) indicate that at least one of the Crosby Depot guns was sold in around February 1958 to Mr C Thorn of *Warratoo*, Rosemary Street, Chelmer for £1. A further two cannon (ex Colmslie Reserve) were gifted in November 1963 to the Passionate Fathers at the Regina Caeli Retreat in Fort Road, Oxley.
31 These also included the Brisbane Grammar School’s trophy Skoda.
32 This refers to the Belgian 15cm K90 (serial number 9) now displayed at the 9th Battalion Museum, Enoggera. As one of the first guns captured by the Australians on the Western Front, it has been described more recently as ‘the most significant WW1 gun in Queensland since it came from the Pozieres battlefield where the AIF suffered 16,000 casualties over the two weeks of the battle.’ (Retrieved from www.http://www.ammsbrisbane.com/ajax/war_trophies/149mm_Krupp_FRC.html on 17th November 2017).
33 George Mack, Letter dated 9 August 1946 to the Director-General of Education L Edwards. Queensland Museum Library Archives, Outwards Correspondence 9185.
34 Transferred to the Queensland Museum at this time were Queensland’s first two trophy guns, both from the Boer War, which had been displayed in Queen’s Park for most of the twentieth century. These comprised Krupp 75 mm BL number 14, and Maxim Nordenfeldt number 3428.
35 George Mack, ‘Museum director on “historical” needs’, *CM*, 28 March 1949, p. 2.
36 Oakman, Memorandum dated 15 September 1949 to the Deputy Chief Engineer for Works. Brisbane City Archives File BCA0275.
37 Whereas park guns were to remain a primary focus, his antithetical objections are known to have also included the many wartime building occupying the city’s parks (see *Parks Superintendent’s Annual Report* (nd.), Folder 8, Box 1, Harry Oakman Papers, UQFL358, Fryer Library, University of Queensland Library).
38 ‘Buderim’s Memorial’, *CM*, 14 December 1950, p. 11.
39 ‘Park & Playground for War Memorial’, *CM*, 30 June 1950, p. 8.
40 As in the United States, the National Fitness Council emerged as a leading proponent of living memorials here in Queensland (see ‘Memorials to aid living’, *CM*, 13 March 1950, p. 4).
41 ‘Practical Ideas For War Memorials In Q’ld’, [*T*], 3 November 1947, p. 2.
42 ‘Guns In Park May Be Scrapped’, *Examiner*, 31 July 1946, p. 4.
43 ‘Gun Trophy Refused by Toowoomba’, *CM*, 15 January 1946, p. 3; ‘Proposal To Shift Town Hall Guns’, *Maryborough Chronicle*, 27 October 1949, p. 4.
44 Oakman, Audio interview with M Bunzli on 16th November 1995, Brisbane. Tape 1, Box 1, UQFL358, Fryer Library.
45 P Herbert, ‘The Case of the Disappearing Parks Department’, *Australian Parks*, August 1974, p. 3.