

ATHANASIOS TSAKONAS

TSAKONAS

IN HONOUR OF WAR HEROES  
Colin St Clair Oakes and the Design of Kranji War Memorial

# IN HONOUR OF WAR HEROES

COLIN ST CLAIR OAKES AND THE  
DESIGN OF KRANJI WAR MEMORIAL



AT THE END OF the Second World War, a young British architect was appointed to design a series of cemeteries and memorials across Asia for the war dead. Colin St Clair Oakes, who had fought in the brutal Burma campaign, was the only veteran of the recent war among the five principal architects of the Imperial War Graves Commission. Completed in 1957, Kranji War Cemetery and Memorial in Singapore is a masterwork of Modernist architecture – a culmination of Oakes's experiences in war and his evolution as an architect.

Richly illustrated with photographs, maps and architectural plans, and drawing on extensive archival research and interviews in Europe, Australia and Asia, this is a riveting account of a world shattered by war, and man's heroic efforts to recover, rebuild and remember.

ATHANASIOS TSAKONAS is an architect, urban designer and writer. He is Design Principal of Tan+Tsakonas Architects, a Singapore-based consultancy, and also practises in Melbourne. His articles have appeared in *Singapore Architect* and *BiblioAsia*.

visit our website at:  
[www.marshallcavendish.com/genref](http://www.marshallcavendish.com/genref)

**mc** Marshall Cavendish  
Editions



Marshall Cavendish  
Editions  
**mc**

For Review Only

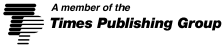
# In Honour of War Heroes

COLIN ST CLAIR OAKES AND THE  
DESIGN OF KRANJI WAR MEMORIAL

Athanasios Tsakonas

© 2020 Athanasios Tsakonas

Published in 2020 by Marshall Cavendish Editions  
An imprint of Marshall Cavendish International



All rights reserved

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner. Requests for permission should be addressed to the Publisher, Marshall Cavendish International (Asia) Private Limited, 1 New Industrial Road, Singapore 536196. Tel: (65) 6213 9300. E-mail: [genref@sg.marshallcavendish.com](mailto:genref@sg.marshallcavendish.com) Website: [www.marshallcavendish.com/genref](http://www.marshallcavendish.com/genref)

The publisher makes no representation or warranties with respect to the contents of this book, and specifically disclaims any implied warranties or merchantability or fitness for any particular purpose, and shall in no event be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damage, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages.

Other Marshall Cavendish Offices:

Marshall Cavendish Corporation, 800 Westchester Ave, Suite N-641, Rye Brook, NY 10573, USA • Marshall Cavendish International (Thailand) Co Ltd, 253 Asoke, 16th Floor, Sukhumvit 21 Road, Klongtoey Nua, Wattana, Bangkok 10110, Thailand • Marshall Cavendish (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd, Times Subang, Lot 46, Subang Hi-Tech Industrial Park, Batu Tiga, 40000 Shah Alam, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia

Marshall Cavendish is a registered trademark of Times Publishing Limited

## **National Library Board, Singapore Cataloguing in Publication Data**

Name(s): Tsakonas, Athanasios.

Title: In Honour of War Heroes : Colin St Clair Oakes and the Design of Kranji War Memorial / Athanasios Tsakonas.

Description: Singapore : Marshall Cavendish Editions, [2020] | Includes bibliographic references.

Identifier(s): OCN 1175571771 | ISBN 978-981-4893-36-7 (paperback)

Subject(s): LCSH: Oakes, Colin St. Clair. | Kranji War Memorial (Singapore) | War memorials—Singapore—Design and construction. | War cemeteries—Singapore—Design and construction.

Classification: DDC 725.94095957—dc23

Printed in Singapore

# Contents

	Foreword	5
	Preface	7
CHAPTER 1	Introduction	15
CHAPTER 2	Writings	32
CHAPTER 3	The Architects	45
CHAPTER 4	Architecture	71
CHAPTER 5	Colin St Clair Oakes	93
CHAPTER 6	Singapore	122
CHAPTER 7	Kranji	148
CHAPTER 8	Building a War Cemetery	183
CHAPTER 9	Post-War	220
	Notes	252
	Bibliography	280
	Index	285



Unveiling ceremony of Kranji War Memorial, 2 March 1957

CHAPTER 1

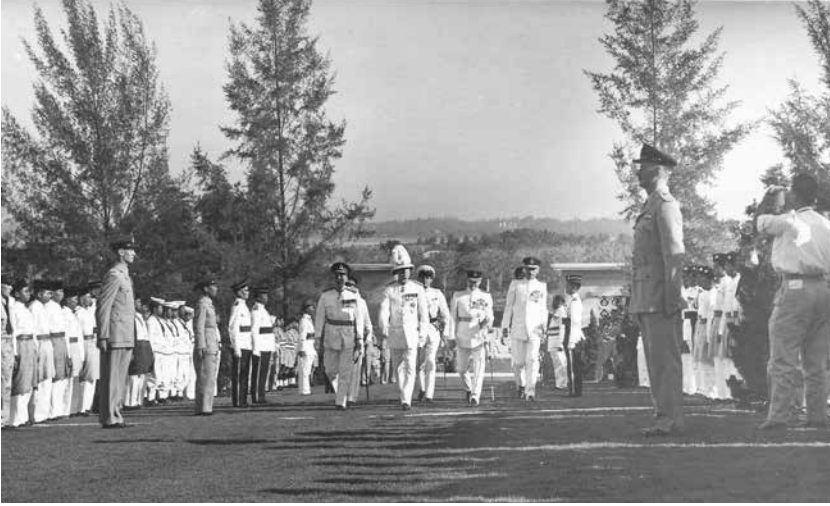
# Introduction

On a bright and early Saturday morning on 2 March 1957, the shallow mist that often formed in the surrounding rubber plantations of Kranji during the night had gradually lifted, filling the sky with the white towering cumulonimbus clouds so typical of the tropics. The month of March in Singapore marks the official end of the north-easterly monsoon and the beginning of the warm, dry season. Ceremonies and events would often be hosted in the early hours, before the rising temperatures and high humidity made it uncomfortable for all who resided in the island state, especially those visiting from temperate latitudes.

Slowly pulling into an open car park at the base of the small hill, a motorcade with the British Union flag fluttering off the bonnet was met by representatives of the armed forces and Singapore government officials. The Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Singapore, Sir Robert Black<sup>1</sup>, had arrived to preside over the official unveiling ceremony of the newly constructed Singapore Memorial at the Kranji War Cemetery. Amidst a silence that had fallen among those gathered, many of whom had arrived at dawn, Black was received by Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Longmore, Vice-Chairman of the Imperial War Graves Commission. Although not in breach of protocol, it was unusual for royal support to be absent during the event; this was not the

case in the opening ceremonies of numerous other major war cemeteries throughout the world. The Duke of Gloucester, also President of the Imperial War Graves Commission, was noticeably absent because of the ongoing political instability throughout Malaya and Singapore. So was John Hare, 1st Viscount Blakenham, the recently appointed Secretary of State for War and Chairman of the Commission. Seeking a face-saving and honourable alternative, the Commission turned to Black, who had served as an intelligence officer during the war before being captured and interned in Singapore's Changi prisoner-of-war camp. With the endorsement of the Colonial Office, and acquiescence of Singapore's government – which was represented that day by the Chief Minister Lim Yew Hock – it thus fell upon the Governor to act as the representative of the British monarch, as guest of honour for the occasion.<sup>2</sup>

Adorned in the traditional Court Uniform of the Colonial Service, with its white drill, gilt buttons and white sun hat plumed with ostrich feathers, Black projected the unmistakable image of the Empire and all it represented. Yet, this image was incongruous with the reality of the times. The post-war period in Singapore, which briefly saw violence, disorder, malnutrition and high unemployment, had made way for an economic recovery through the growing demand for rubber and tin. The early 1950s also saw rising discontent among the local populace. The British government's failure to defend the island – their 'impregnable fortress'<sup>3</sup> – had shattered the Empire's credibility with the local population and inspired the latter's political awakening. Rising anti-colonial sentiment and nationalism saw deadly riots break out, in particular the Hock Lee incident in 1955, ostensibly on account of failed negotiations between the Hock Lee Amalgamated Bus Company and its workers. Less than a year later, similar agitation and unrest would erupt at the Chinese High School, both incidents underscoring the modernisation trajectory of Singapore's local population. Having arrived two years earlier in 1955 and astutely reading the local mood for independence, Black would quietly advise the government in London on the desirability of independence, and proceed to set in motion the



Sir Robert Black, Governor of Singapore, arriving for the unveiling ceremony

steps to achieving self-rule for the island. Within a few days of the unveiling of the Memorial, the first of three constitutional talks on self-government – commonly referred to as the Merdeka Talks – would be convened in London. This would culminate in the United Kingdom agreeing to grant the island complete internal self-rule, paving the way for the establishment of the State of Singapore the following year, in August 1958. The unveiling of the Singapore Memorial would thus become one of the last major official events Black presided over before departing Singapore later that year to take up the governorship of Hong Kong.

Beyond the stone-clad shelters that framed the formal entrance to the cemetery, a guard of honour had been assembled with soldiers lining the gently inclined grassed walkway up to the Memorial. It comprised contingents from the Royal Navy, the Commonwealth Armies and Air Forces, the Police, and the Singapore and Malayan Army and Air Forces. The band of the 2nd Battalion, The Royal Welch Fusiliers, played during its mounting and dispersal. And in strict tradition, it was the wreath-bearers who first marched through, followed by the procession of the Reverend Canon Victor J. Pike, Chaplain to the Queen and



Chaplain General to the Forces. Governor Black followed closely after, receiving the Royal Salute, then inspecting the Guards of Honour.<sup>4</sup>

Alongside the assembled dignitaries and representatives of the various Commonwealth governments, almost 3,000 invited guests had gathered among the neat rows of uniform white headstones and carefully tended orchids. They were there to bear witness to the conclusion of a process commenced over a decade earlier in the immediate aftermath of the war. Among them were over 500 next-of-kin, whose loved ones were interred within the cemetery or had their names inscribed on the memorial. They had come mostly from Singapore, Malaya and nearby countries in Southeast Asia. Ten relatives from the United Kingdom, eleven from Australia and New Zealand and one from Canada had made the arduous trip from homelands thousands of miles away.<sup>5</sup> Compared to the situation in Europe, where the majority of war graves were found in close proximity, either within the UK or just across the English Channel, the long distance and high fares to Singapore were a deterrent. But with the assistance of the British Legion and the War Graves Commission, a charter plane was arranged, and for the sum of £200, the relatives in the United Kingdom contingent were able to make the journey. Similar arrangements were put in place with government assistance for the Australian contingent, comprising mothers, fathers, wives and former prisoners of war.<sup>6</sup>

Overlooking the Straits of Johore to the north, the Singapore Memorial formed the backdrop to the war cemetery and the assembled guests. A gracious wing-like structure supported by 12 pillars, their Portland stone inserts were inscribed with the names of over 24,000 servicemen who had no known graves. Fronting each pillar, a sentinel from each of the represented services stood at attention, head bowed. At the centre, beneath the central pylon rising to the sky, was a curved stone panel draped with the Union Jack and carrying the inscription dedicated to the unveiling of the Memorial. It was here that the Governor took his position and delivered his address to the assembled guests and the thousands listening back home on the wireless. In a concise oration invoking Abraham Lincoln's poignant Gettysburg Address,

Black reminded those gathered that ‘it was for them to dedicate themselves to the task ahead so that the dead shall not have died in vain’.<sup>7</sup> And in commemorating those soldiers and airmen whose names the memorial would maintain in perpetuity, Governor Black unveiled the Singapore Memorial.

Covering the ceremony was the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) World Service, through their new Far East correspondent Anthony Lawrence. Lawrence, in his distinct clipped tone, provided a vivid running description of the day’s events. Reported in both radio and television news programmes later that evening<sup>8</sup> to living rooms thousands of miles away in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Canada as well as those closer to home in Singapore and Malaya, the BBC’s coverage gave the sense that due recognition was finally being accorded to the many who had sacrificed their lives in Southeast Asia. The ceremony was also filmed, with screenings held soon after back home. This was one of the first major events covered by Lawrence, who would go on to become one of the most highly regarded and influential BBC foreign correspondents, covering the Cultural Revolution in China, the independence of Malaya and Singapore, and the Vietnam War.<sup>9</sup>

A lone bugler from King Edward VII’s Own Gurkha Rifles then stepped forward to sound the ‘Last Post’, and the lament ‘Lochaber No More’ was played by Pipers of the King’s Own Scottish Borderers. The Reverend Canon Pike dedicated the Memorial, and Reveille was called. Sir Reginald Blomfield’s Cross of Sacrifice, its Christian symbolism a mere few metres away on account of an additional row of graves which were not in the earlier plan, was an appropriate prop for the prayers that followed. The Reverend I.E. Newell, representing the Far East Air Force, led those gathered in ‘Let Us Pray’ and the Reverend Cannon Pike read from 2 Thessalonians of the New Testament and pronounced ‘The Blessing’. To address the multicultural, multi-faith origins of the many fallen Commonwealth servicemen who fought on behalf of the British Empire, the Nadzir Ugana Haji Ibrahim bin Yusoff, the Bhawan of the 1st Battalion, 2nd Gurkha Rifles, Pundit Bhoj Raj Sharma and



Pipers of the King's Own Scottish Borderers performing at the unveiling of Kranji War Memorial

the high priest Venerable Sek Hong Choon offered Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist prayers, respectively. The Senior Roman Catholic Chaplain of the Far East Land Forces, the Reverend P. Tobin, accompanied by the Reverend P.F. Bailey, concluded the ceremony's liturgy with a reading of a prayer of lament, Psalm 130.<sup>10</sup>

Following the laying of wreaths at the base of the Cross of Sacrifice, the Governor took the general salute, and the national anthem 'God Save the Queen' rang out across the site. A flypast of six de Havilland 'Vampire' jet fighters from the Far East Air Force punctured the sky in a salute, their white, interwoven atmospheric trails lingering overhead. Governor Black and his entourage then fanned out to inspect the Memorial and read out the acknowledgements of all those involved in the creation of the War Cemetery. The spirit and generosity of the occasion was best reflected in a photograph appearing in

the local Chinese newspaper *Nanyang Siang Pau* the following day. Attired in a white linen suit, a smiling Ho Bock Kee, the builder of the Memorial, was seen receiving the Governor's handshake, a gesture of appreciation for the completion of the Memorial. The ceremony, steeped in the formalism of an established protocol dating from the beginnings of the Imperial War Graves Commission in 1917, would be officially over by mid-morning.<sup>11</sup>

The unveiling ceremony at Kranji was not unique. Over the past decade, numerous similar ceremonies had been held across Europe, North Africa, the United States, Canada and the Middle East, coinciding with the completion of war cemeteries, monuments and memorials. In Asia itself, there were 21 major war cemeteries, in an administrative district that stretched from Karachi in the west to Hong Kong in the east, from Assam in the north to Singapore and Ceylon on the equator. By March 1957, given the difficulties encountered with the distances, access to materials and skilled labour, 12 of the war cemeteries had been completed, six were under construction and three remained to commence.<sup>12</sup> In fact, the first such unveiling ceremony in Asia had taken almost a decade after the conclusion of the war. It was only in January 1955, having endured internal conflicts, independence struggles and a myriad of other delays, that the Sai Wan Memorial within the Sai Wan War Cemetery in Hong Kong was unveiled, its classical form serving as a backdrop to the terraced graves overlooking the South China Sea. Similar ceremonies in Delhi and Karachi followed soon after in the latter half of 1957, the Rangoon Memorial in Taukkyan War Cemetery in 1958, and Chittagong War Cemetery in 1962. These rituals, centred on a memorial or war cemetery, often represented a fitting and overdue acknowledgement of the thousands of servicemen and women who died in the war; their remains were either never found or never positively identified. They also provided relatives and friends of the deceased with a physical monument to visit and commemorate their loved ones. The scholar Jay Winter offers that 'war memorials marked the spot where communities were reunited, where the dead were symbolically brought home, and where the separations

# For Review Only



of war, both temporary and eternal, were expressed, ritualized, and in time accepted'.<sup>13</sup>

Yet amidst the pomp and ceremony of that day, the architect of Kranji War Cemetery and Singapore Memorial, Colin St Clair Oakes, was not in attendance. After the war against Japan ended, at the behest of the War Graves Commission, Oakes had immediately set off to Asia to advise on the location and layout of the many war cemeteries being established hurriedly by the Army. In the decade after, his professional practice was largely dependent on these sites, to which he would return to evaluate their suitability and what preliminary preparation the war graves units had undertaken. This also involved developing the conceptual schemes through to their realisation. However, for all these years of emotional investment in the Commission's foray into Asia, Oakes did not attend any official unveiling or opening ceremony of the many war cemeteries and memorials he had designed throughout India, Bangladesh, Hong Kong and the countries in Southeast Asia. In a varied career that saw him study in Rome, work in Bengal and fight in Burma before taking up an appointment as Principal Architect for the Imperial War Graves Commission, Oakes was by 1957 content to remain at home in rural England with his wife and four children, work in his garden and contribute to the rebuilding of a Britain still emerging from the devastation of the war years.

This book examines the Imperial War Graves Commission's work in Asia following the conclusion of the 1939–45 war, through the design narrative of the Kranji War Cemetery and Memorial. It argues that Kranji is a distinctive product of the wartime opportunity afforded a relatively unknown young architect. As the fifth and final Principal Architect appointed by the Commission, Oakes's undertaking of the design responsibility for the majority of the war cemeteries and memorials throughout South and Southeast Asia came about because of his military service background along with the experience of having lived and worked in Asia.<sup>14</sup> It proved an astute choice, as Oakes introduced a modernist sensibility to these sites of commemoration and pilgrimage,

in the process defining his future career. Similarly, Kranji is framed within the wider context of these sites of difficult memories. Whilst spanning vast geographical distances between nations of disparate cultures and societies, the war cemeteries' shared architectural heritage produces a common history with its own narrative: the advance of the Japanese campaign and its subsequent military confrontation and retreat.

With its creative origins emanating from the design principles founded by the Commission for the Great War in 1917, the design of Kranji was a collaborative process involving many participants. These included the British and Australian War Graves Units dispatched immediately after the surrender who were responsible for the collection and concentration of the deceased, the Imperial War Graves Commission and its officers and advisors, through to the local builder appointed to transform a once-temporary burial site into the permanent site of commemoration as it is known today. Kranji's design was



Killed during the final battles on the Western Front, the bodies of Australian troops, each with its simple wooden cross, are gathered for burial at a cemetery being constructed at Guillemont Farm, 3 October 1918.

also informed through its architect's education process and life experiences. And the island's location along the equator was an important consideration. Kranji would take well over a decade to fulfil its architect's vision.

Above all, Kranji symbolises the contemporary amnesia that befell similar sites throughout the region. An essentially British or 'imperial' project created in a colonial outpost with its populace seeking independence, Kranji has a contested history. From the Commission's perspective, this 'sacred site' represented the fallen soldiers and airmen of the Commonwealth forces during the war against the Japanese. Drawn predominantly from the ranks of the British, Australian, Dutch and Indian dominions along with members of the local Malay regiments, the bodies interred and names inscribed reflect a foreign enterprise far from their places of origin.<sup>15</sup> Though it may partly be attributed to its vast distance from the better-known and more well-patronised war cemeteries and memorials in western Europe, Kranji also speaks of its uncomfortable position within a society and culture vastly different from its predecessor. This discomfort denies the memorial the opportunity for multiple visitations and the accompanying vigils and commemoration that might occur elsewhere in Europe, further isolating the site.<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, local Chinese combatants and civilians, unless associated with the imperial forces such as Dalforce or the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force, did not meet the Commission's criteria on qualifying personnel and were precluded from burial within Kranji War Cemetery.<sup>17</sup> Instead, the local community in a country with a majority ethnic Chinese population established their own sacred spaces of remembrance after independence from Malaysia in 1965. The most significant is the Memorial to the Civilian Victims of the Japanese Occupation.<sup>18</sup> Located in the civic quarter of the city, with its distinctive four identical pillars rising to the sky, the memorial annually hosts the most significant local commemoration – the surrender of Singapore to the Japanese on 15 February 1942. Along with VJ Day on 15 August, local appropriation of this memorial relegates Kranji to Remembrance



Day organised by the British, Anzac Day by Australia and New Zealand, and the occasional foreign-led pilgrimage and service.<sup>19</sup>

In examining the available writings on the Kranji War Cemetery and the commemoration and memorialisation of its war dead, Chapter 2 enables an understanding of how this site has been perceived through the various historical and cultural filters of the authors and their audience. Making use of scholarly writings in the disciplines of social geography, military history, political science and architectural history, each author's perspective on how the war cemetery and its memorial are viewed and appropriated by various stakeholders is revealed. We also explore that sense of fluid ownership that often serves multiple agendas.

Chapter 3 places the appointment of Oakes as the Commission's final Principal Architect for the Second World War sites within the broader timeframe and selection process that took place as the conflict was coming to its end. This enables an appreciation of the other architects and their contribution to the war cemetery and memorial effort. Similarly, the choice of Oakes itself poses questions as to the viable alternatives that were at the Commission's disposal. It argues that whereas Oakes was an unknown choice, the three architects who were overlooked – Arthur Hutton, James Ferrie and John Brindley – were all known to the Commission through their work on memorials, and had personal connections to Singapore. The sense of ownership and stakeholder interest in the Singapore site is best exemplified by the Australian architect and soldier Brindley, who not only designed a war memorial for Singapore, but was interned at Changi. Was this an opportunity missed to also commemorate the prisoners of war who survived?

The original tour by Major Oakes and Colonel Harry Obbard of the numerous battlefields, prisoner-of-war and labour camps, and burial sites throughout South and Southeast Asia frames Chapter 4. This was carried out on behalf of the Imperial War Graves Commission during the chaotic period following the war's end in late 1945–1946. As the appointed Advisory Architect and the Commission's Inspector

for India and Burma respectively, these two men, recently demobilised from active service and seconded to the Commission, would produce the initial outline of those sites suited to becoming permanent war cemeteries and provide preliminary design layouts for the Army's War Graves Units to work to. Chapter 4 then introduces an understanding of the architectural principles that the Imperial War Graves Commission embraced after the war of 1914–18.<sup>20</sup> Through the vision of the Commission's founder and Vice-Chairman, Sir Fabian Ware, and the direction of its Artistic Advisor, Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Frederic Kenyon, the design of war cemeteries and memorials became a lasting legacy. It introduces the original Principal Architects and then considers the changing environment that greeted the Commission with the Second World War. The expansion of the Commission's role in Asia brought new challenges in working in such an unfamiliar environment. It introduced the need for a Principal Architect for the Asian theatre, leading to the tentative appointment of Colin St Clair Oakes.

A biographical account of Oakes forms the basis of Chapter 5. Unlike the Commission's other Principal Architects, who through their status and positions in British society at the time were recognised and written about, Oakes was an obscure figure. The son of an architect who served in the Great War, his trajectory through a local polytechnic would impress upon him the possibilities of modern architecture. A stint in Finland followed by selection to the British School at Rome marked a turning point for Oakes, with the friends and contacts he developed over two years in Italy guiding him throughout his life. This preceded his departure for Bengal as a government architect just before the outbreak of war and his subsequent enrolment and active service in Burma. It was because of this period in Asia that his credentials attracted the attention of the Commission.

The selection of Kranji in Singapore as the site for the permanent war cemetery and memorial to the missing airmen and soldiers throughout the Southeast Asia campaign is examined and developed throughout Chapters 6 and 7. According to the primary sources from the Commission's archives and Oakes's family records, it is apparent

that the preferred location was in fact not Kranji but a hilltop site to the centre of the island. Similar sentiments were voiced by representatives of the local Chinese community in a parallel quest to establish their own site of remembrance for civilian victims of the Japanese Occupation. The Australian authorities on the other hand were advancing the case for Changi, the site of incarceration for thousands of servicemen, to stage a national war memorial, going so far as to call for a design proposal. Through the tour of Asia that formed his assessment to the Commission's preference against considered advice, the design of Kranji offers an insight into Oakes's reading of the contemporary landscape after the war. It also marks an attempt to redress the conception of the war cemetery as an imperial project implanted into another society. The deliberations on the architect's background and his involvement in the Asian theatre of the war offer this study a new way of looking at Singapore's only war cemetery: as part of a wider body of similar sites of commemoration designed by Oakes throughout South and Southeast Asia.

Whereas the previous chapter made the case for Kranji's selection (if not the preferred site, then a suitable compromise given the unsettled period), Chapter 7 addresses the origins of what would become the Commission's major memorial to the missing airmen of the war in Asia. In accordance with the Commission's long-standing policy of promoting sites with significant war-time memories, the location offers different readings to the various stakeholders in the venture. For the British, the Japanese landing at Kranji shattered their perceptions of Singapore as an impregnable fortress, with the threat envisaged and planned for coming from the sea to the south. For the locals, Kranji was merely the last move in the Japanese push southwards through the Malay Peninsula, culminating in the surrender of the island seven days later. To the Australians, whose forces fought bravely along the Kranji coastline, inflicting considerable losses upon the invader, the location reflected the chaos of the battle and their inglorious retreat. Kranji will always be remembered as the easy opening afforded the Japanese Army to the island.



Sorting and reburial of remains at Kranji War Cemetery, 1946

Reflecting upon local contributions to Kranji, Chapter 8 explores the development of the permanent cemetery and its memorial through its local builder, Ho Bock Kee. As a migrant from China, with his skills and entrepreneurship Ho played a significant role in the building of post-war Singapore – a contribution often ignored in the recorded anthologies of Singapore’s built history. Through oral interviews with Ho’s second son and the Singapore Hui Ann Association, a picture emerges of an industry deeply enconced in the construction of Singapore’s war-associated built heritage. This allows us to better comprehend and appreciate the development of Oakes’s design ideas and their realisation in the local context. This involves not only critiquing Oakes’s built design, but also the landscape design, a considerable investment in the war graves enterprise. In this case, Mandy Morris’s study of the quintessential war cemetery ‘that is for ever England’ frames our understanding of how Kranji evolved from the Commission’s post-First World War ideas of war cemetery landscape. Through the efforts of Oakes, Obbard and the Singapore Botanic Gardens, the site became rooted in its tropical domain. Similarly, the need for the urgent founding of the Singapore State Cemetery, adjacent to the

war cemetery, posed significant challenges to its previous hegemonic role in Kranji, representing a clear site for war memory and commemoration.

The final chapter opens with the human dimension of the official unveiling of the Singapore Memorial in 1957. Against the backdrop of political instability in Malaya and Singapore,<sup>21</sup> the ceremony marked an important shift in the relationship between the island state marching towards independence and its colonial rulers remembering their fallen. It had been ten years since Oakes first visited Singapore and began considering a likely site and its design. Oakes had by this stage relinquished his appointment with the Commission and taken up a new position as Chief Architect for the Boots Pure Drug Company. This would represent a full circle in his career – from designing sacred spaces for those who perished in the war, he would now turn to the rebuilding of London and numerous other cities and towns throughout Britain, cities scarred by the bombing damage wrought during the Blitz.

My interest in this war cemetery and memorial stems from an early appreciation of its solemnity within a contemporary landscape of rapid economic, industrial and social progress occurring in the country. A visit in early 1992 piqued my architectural interest in the why and how of its situation. At that time, the northern perimeter of the island contained a scattering of industrial estates, public utilities and farmlands, amongst which this solitary wing-like structure found itself placed. A subsequent search produced a solitary name of an architect without any further context. It raised a pertinent question of how one of the Principal Architects of the Imperial War Graves Commission had remained little-known and had subsequently not been accorded due recognition for his body of work. Where the other Principal Architects of the Commission like Reginald Blomfield, Edwin Lutyens, Herbert Baker and Louis de Soissons were invariably given due mention whenever they received promotions or honours, how did such an active participant in this post-war endeavour elude further examination and public awareness?<sup>22</sup>

Two decades later, after irregular yet periodic visits to the war cemetery, I decided to pursue further research into Colin St Clair Oakes. This enabled a better understanding of the extensive and still little-known body of work he left behind in Asia. These are the works that the majority of visitors to these sites would inevitably recognise for their significance to the Japanese campaign. However, they are unaware of the architectural connection between these sites. My research coincided with an increasing local awareness of the period of occupation under the Japanese. A similar rise in interest within Australia of the Anzac legacy and the quest for a national identity saw sites of difficult memories such as Changi, the Kokoda Track and the Siam-Burma Railway stimulate a growing appreciation and understanding of the period and its consequences. This resulted in ever-increasing pilgrimages and attendances at significant national events of commemoration, often led by military historians.

I hope that this study, through primarily focusing on the architecture and the process that led to its creation, will stimulate a greater awareness and appreciation of the background of an important architect and the historically significant memorial, offering another way of reading this site.