

Our Tommy wins another honour

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The statue of Sir Thomas Bent on November 3rd 1913. His only grandchild, Nancy, later Mrs. Cyril Miller, stands beneath the Statue with J.H. Taylor, then Town Clerk of Brighton.

The Victorian branch of The National Trust of Australia has 'promoted' a local landmark so familiar, many of us hardly notice it as we travel along Nepean Highway. The larger than life statue of Sir Thomas Bent has stood at the end of Bay Street for a long time with only one small move in 1980, and looks set to stand there forever.

Art magazine, 'The Southern Sphere' noted in 1912 that Margaret Baskerville, the first woman sculptor in the Commonwealth to be entrusted with the creation of a public memorial, was getting on well with her task. At the studios at 24 Church Street, Baskerville had nearly finished a small model of the statue. It was an excellent portrait of the late Premier of Victoria and would show Bent in a characteristic attitude. The one time Premier and Speaker of the parliament, not to mention the ofttime Mayor of Moorabbin and Brighton was cast as a 9ft. (3m.) bronze set on a 12ft. (4m.) grey granite plinth. He could hardly have dreamed of a more magisterial presence, plumb in the middle of his former Parliamentary constituency.

Baskerville's statue was classified in 2003 by the Australian Heritage Commission as being of historic and social significance to the state of Victoria.

The statue has significance as the first large public commission given to a woman sculptor in Victoria.

It is also significant that because of its monumental scale. A new technique of welding the bronze sections of the statue with an oxyacetylene jet was introduced.

Margaret Baskerville (1861?-1930) was one of the founders of the Yarra Sculptors Society and a member of the Victorian Artists Society. She studied in London and Europe. Baskerville, along with husband painter Charles Richardson presented many items to the City of Brighton. Their former studio, next to the now Dendy Plaza complex in Church Street, burned down in November 1978 when stored rubbish caught fire.

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