



Innovative Tile and Stone
Installation Systems

John Leak Monument, Australia Project Spotlight: April 2012



LOCATION:
Rockhampton
Qld, AU

LEAD ARTIST:
Liz Hills
Rockhampton, Qld, AU

ARTISTS:
Adrienne Wall & Melinda Clayton
Rockhampton, Qld, AU

MOSAIC SUPPLIERS:
OzMosaics
Coorparoo, Qld, AU

Specialty Art Glass
Jindabyne, NSW, AU

STAINED GLASS SUPPLIERS:
Hartley Williams
Brisbane, Qld, AU

The Leadlight Workshop
Taree, NSW, AU

LATICRETE SUPPLIER:
OzMosaics
Coorparoo, Qld, AU



World War I War Hero Commemorated by Amazing Mosaic Monument

by Ron Treister

The term "ANZAC" is an acronym for the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, which consisted of the Australian Imperial Force and the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. The ANZACs made their mark fighting during World War I in Gallipoli, Palestine and the Western Front. Every year on April 25th in Australia and New Zealand, ANZAC Day is celebrated to commemorate the date of the Gallipoli landings. One of the most decorated yet unsung ANZACs hailing from that period was Private John Leak.

In 1916 during the Battle of Pozzières in France, enemy machine guns were stifling the ANZACS advance. Both sides were launching bombs at each other, but the enemy's bombings outranged those of the ANZACS. Private Leak jumped from his trench, charged right towards a huge amount of close range machine-gun fire, threw his grenades into the enemy's position... and then, thrust himself into the enemy's dugout, bayoneting three unwounded bombers. The skirmish continued, and the enemy, with its overwhelming numbers, pushed back the ANZACS. Leak was the last to withdraw at each stage and ultimately, when reinforcements arrived, the ravaged ANZAC team recaptured the position and won the battle. For this courageous and selfless action, he became the first Queenslander to receive the Victoria Cross, the highest and most prestigious award for gallantry in the face of the enemy that can be awarded to British and Commonwealth forces.

Recently, a beautiful monument was designed and subsequently unveiled to commemorate John Leak's bravery beyond the call of duty. Created by talented and highly professional Rockhampton mosaic artists, this memorial not only is testament to the respect and admiration felt by those who knew him. It is also a great example of the dedication and national pride of the remarkable artists who wished to honour him.

According to mosaicist Liz Hills, "The John Leak monument is a contemporary take on the more

traditional 'needle and plinth' style military monument. It is in the style of a blade with angular lines at the top that reflect the lines of the Mt. Archer Ranges, which can be seen as a natural backdrop to the monument. The Archer Ranges are also suggested in the mosaic via the dark blue tiles behind John Leak's head, as a reference to the city of Rockhampton.

"A large 'blast hole' at the top right-hand side covered with gold metallic tiles, signifies a range of military-related themes from explosions and the general devastation of war, to the rising sun emblem of the ANZACs. This blast hole is also in recognition of Leak's documented dislike of war and his aversion to glorifying it," continued Hills.

Because the monument overlooked a children's playground and park, the artists found it appropriate to include educational information detailing John Leak's life and military achievements, The Victoria Cross, The Battle of Pozzières and the symbolic significance of those plants featured on the mosaic and included in the surrounding garden design. The front of the monument features a large mosaic portrait of John Leak in his uniform, which appears to be rising out of a field of poppies wrapping around the entire base of the monument. The red poppies are a reference to those which grew in the battlefields of Europe, and became an international symbol of remembrance.

The background around John Leak's portrait is an artistic rendering of the battlefield. Circular mosaics adorning the top and sides of the monument represent the constant bombardment of explosions the ANZACs were faced with at the battle of Pozzières. A raised blue ridge of small tiles running horizontally around the middle of the monument are reminiscent of the ridge that made the town of Pozzières a significant military target. Finally, the rivers of red circular tiles symbolize blood and the devastating, inhumanity of trench warfare.

The back of the monument features a large image of the Victoria Cross, made out of bronze coloured mosaic tiles

in keeping with the materials used in the actual medal itself. The use of gold, bronze and silver tiles lends a richness and grandeur to the monument which is certainly befitting of a VC recipient.

"In so many ways, the monument recognizes the courage, trauma and sacrifice of those, like Private John Leak, who served their country during war and also acknowledges our responsibility to continually work for the peace they fought hard to achieve," stated Hills.

The entire monument was an artistic creation consisting of thousands of colourful mosaic tiles held together by The LATICRETE® System. LATICRETE materials were provided by Sandy Robertson of OzMosaics, also a mosaic artist, whose tour de force mosaic performance a few years ago for the Australia Zoo (in honour of Steve Irwin) also depended solely on LATICRETE installation products.

LATICRETE® Hydro Ban® was used to seal and waterproof the concrete base. The artists selected this product because being situated on the riverfront in Rockhampton, the monument with its mosaics needed to be flood-proof. "We selected LATICRETE PermaColor™ Grout mixed with LATICRETE 4237 Latex Additive. These products had come highly recommended from Sandy Robertson of OzMosaics," added Hills.

"LATICRETE Hydro Ban was extremely easy to apply and had great coverage. Apart from providing a great waterproofing membrane, it also provided an even base for the application of the mosaics. LATICRETE PermaColor Grout mixed with LATICRETE 4237 Latex Additive also were very easy to use. We used a couple of different coloured grouts to complement the key features in the mosaic; they blended together really well," continued Hills.

Hills was asked to work on the John Leak Monument by Robert Schwarten, local State Member of Parliament, after he saw the military themed mosaics she had created with students at a local primary school. The fact that Schwarten wanted to celebrate John Leak as an atypical war hero really inspired Hills. She stated, "I was intrigued by the combination of his being both non-conformist and hero; the fact he was a decorated soldier who oddly enough, really didn't believe in war. It was important

to me to capture a sense of these complexities in the design of the monument and mosaic."

As the project developed and the scope of it grew, Hills decided to bring in another mosaic artist, Adrienne Wall. The two of them worked in conjunction with a team from the Queensland Department of Public Works and the Rockhampton City Council on the project. As time elapsed, a third mosaicist, Melinda Clayton, became involved. A number of friends added invaluable assistance cleaning and polishing the mosaic, and there was additional strong local support and encouragement from the local community, as well.

"Most war military monuments are quite austere and designed to keep people at a distance," said Hills. "However, because the monument is located across the road from a children's playground, we wanted the mosaic to be colourful, tactile and inviting so all people (especially children!) would want to gaze at it, explore its details and touch it. We used smalti, mirror, glass and ceramic tiles as well as some donated war memorabilia to provide a range of beautiful colours and textures to the work. Several of the bomb blasts protrude out from the mosaic to give a three-dimensional effect. The usage of LATICRETE materials throughout the creation was invaluable in ensuring that the pieces would be securely bonded to the substrate."

The artists didn't use any pre-mounted mesh mosaics. Rather, all the mosaic pieces were individually made by them. The designs made in the studio produced by gluing the tiles on to mesh. From there, the artists then glued those mosaic panels in separate sections to the concrete base on-site. "The use of LATICRETE materials was important in providing both the strength and flexibility required for pieces that would need to be transported to, and installed, on-site," concluded Hills.

The John Leak Monument project was funded by the Queensland State Government and managed by the Rockhampton Regional Council.

