

## 4. THE STONE OF MEMORY

The Stone of Memory, East London

by **William Martinson**

The Buffalo River mouth, around which the town of East London was established in 1848, was far removed from the land allocated to the 1820 Settlers in the Lower Albany district. Nevertheless a small scale memorial related to the mass settlement scheme was installed in East London, on Settlers' Way on the West Bank. Known as 'The Stone of Memory' it is now situated on the southeast corner of Union Ave and Botha Road in Selborne, in close proximity to Clarendon High School for Girls, The Guild Theatre and Selborne College. A history and description of The Stone of Memory is set out below.

The East London City Council decided in July 1953 that "part of the main road to Collondale Airport, which is the oldest approach to the city, is to be renamed Settlers' Way in honour of the 1820 Settlers." On 8 September 1953 the Daily Dispatch reported that the Mayor, Mr. David Ross Thomson addressed a gathering of about 300 people who had attended a tree planting ceremony along the newly named Settlers' Way, on 7 September 1953, to mark Settlers' Day in the city. Settlers' Day was a South African Public Holiday which celebrated the contribution of the English Settlers to South Africa on the 1st Monday of September, and had been instituted in 1952.<sup>1</sup>

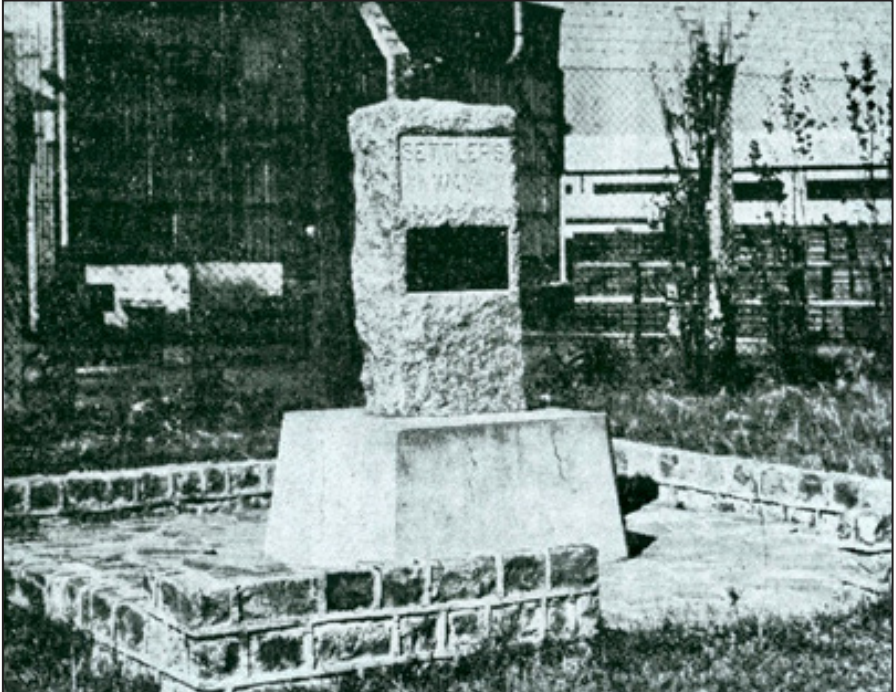
Two years later Settlers' Day was again commemorated in East London with the unveiling of the Stone of Memory. It had been erected on the corner of Settlers' Way and Whitworth Road - probably at the south east corner of the intersection - in Gately Township on the West Bank. It is likely that the memorial

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<sup>1</sup> The Settlers' Day public holiday was abolished in 1979. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public\\_holidays\\_in\\_South\\_Africa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_holidays_in_South_Africa) Accessed 5 February 2021)

was an initiative of the 1820 Memorial Settlers' Association following the renaming of the road as Settlers' Way. The Stone of Memory had been carved in Cape Town by South African sculptor, Ivan Mitford-Barberton, and was sent to East London via train.

The Stone of Memory comprised a rectangular rough-hewn grey granite obelisk, surmounting a tapered concrete plinth block and surrounded by a rectangular stone paved area with a low hammer dressed stone wall. It was unveiled on Monday 5 September 1955 by Mr. N Gilfillan, the national chairman of the 1820 Memorial Settlers' Association. The unveiling was followed by another tree planting ceremony where the first tree was planted by the Mayor, Councillor H. N. Goddard. Some of the 36 new trees were to be planted by children.



Memorial at original site on Settlers' Way. Daily Dispatch, 17 August 1962

The front face of the memorial had an inscription in large carefully incised V-cut Roman letters on a smooth faced rectangular panel reading:

SETTLERS  
WAY

Below this was a second faced rectangular panel, on which was mounted a cast bronze plaque<sup>2</sup> with the following inscription:

THIS WAY  
NAMED IN MEMORY OF THE 1820 SETTLERS  
WAS OFFICIALLY OPENED WITH A  
TREE-PLANTING CEREMONY  
BY HIS WORSHIP THE MAYOR OF EAST LONDON  
COUNCILLOR D ROSS THOMPSON  
ON SETTLERS DAY  
7 SEPT 1953.

By 1962, increasing industrialisation of Gately Township caused the context of the memorial to be compromised. It was now badly placed in proximity to the back of a factory and was almost completely obscured from the road. This prompted the proposed transfer of the memorial stone to Settlers' Heights – also on the West Bank. The prime movers behind the idea of re-siting the memorial were Mr. L. Bagshawe-Smith (honorary Vice-chairman of the 1820 Settlers' Association) and Mr. T. W. Greenwood (Secretary).<sup>3</sup>

The 1820 Settlers' Association was granted six acres (2.4 hectare) of land by the East London Municipality and the relocated memorial was positioned at the highest point of

<sup>2</sup> The wording plaque appears subsequently to have been stolen and appears to have been replaced with a Perspex panel, with the lettering engraved on the back face and defined with black paint.

<sup>3</sup> Whitworth Road has since been subsumed into the adjacent Mercedes Benz Factory site.

## 04 The Stone of Memory

the site. The Municipality further intended to develop another 20 acres (8.1 hectare) of ground around the memorial with indigenous flora to form an attractive natural open area. The Divisional Council made a R100 grant to relocate the memorial - which was added to the R1 000 provided by the 1820 Settlers' Association.

The new site overlooked the East London Grand Prix Circuit and was in close proximity to the Berkshire stocking factory. The memorial was placed on a rectangular paved stone base, surrounded on all four sides with five broad stone steps



Memorial at second site on Settlers' Way, circa 1965.  
Photograph provided by Bev Young



Detail of front face of memorial at second site on Settlers' Way, circa 1965.  
Photograph provided by Bev Young

forming an architecturally appropriate base – measuring 25 feet (7.6m) by 14 feet (4.3m). The memorial stone no longer had a concrete plinth and was now detailed with a recessed shadow line at the junction with the stone base. The official opening of the relocated memorial by Mr. Ian Mackenzie – the national Chairman of the 1820 Settlers' Association – was scheduled to take place on 15 October 1962.

The relocated memorial had the name SETTLERS WAY carved in v-cut letters on a dressed rectangular panel, below which was mounted a plaque with the following inscription:

THIS STONE OF MEMORY  
WAS UNVEILED BY THE NATIONAL CHAIRMAN  
MR. IAN MACKENZIE ESQ.  
17TH OCTOBER 1962  
IT PREVIOUSLY STOOD ON SETTLERS WAY

Ten years later, the Settlers' Heights site was apparently needed for industrial development and it was decided that the memorial stone should again be moved. By February 1972, it was reported that work had started on building a plinth for the memorial stone on an open piece of ground between the Guild Theatre and Botha Road in Selborne. An official unveiling ceremony was to be arranged once the work had been completed on the plinth and gardens laid out around the memorial.

The new site for the memorial was apparently designed by the East London Municipal architect, Brian Watson. The memorial was placed on a low stone-built platform with two minor steps. The southern side had an additional step to accommodate the natural fall in the ground.

An article in the Daily Dispatch of 17 May 1972 regarding the re-erection of the memorial noted that:

*“The 1820 Settlers’ Memorial Stone, which has been removed from its original site on Settlers’ Way in East London because of industrial development there, has now been erected near the Guild Theatre in the city. Seen examining the re-cut stone yesterday were (left to right) Mr. H. H. Driffield, an East London historian; Mr. G. Chapman, chairman of the East London branch of the 1820 Settlers’ Association; Mrs. A. O’Carroll, the association’s Welfare officer; and Mr. T. Greenwood, secretary of the branch.”*



Detail of front face of memorial, 2021.  
Photograph: W Martinson



Memorial at third site with  
Guild Theatre in the background, 2021.  
Photograph: W Martinson

The incised wording on the relocated stone - in a utilitarian squared font now read:

**1820  
SETTLERS  
  
THIS STONE  
OF MEMORY  
WAS ORIGINALLY  
ERECTED ON  
SETTLERS' WAY  
IN  
1953**

The longer inscription was accommodated by creating a single larger dressed rectangular panel for the full height of the memorial. The 'memory' of the position of the original inscription panel remains however on the front face of the memorial, with four circular fixing holes still visible on the upper edges of the faced panel.

An article in the Daily Dispatch of 4 September 1973 mentions a tree-planting ceremony that was held to celebrate Settlers' Day, which took place opposite the site of the Settlers' memorial.

In March 2021, Philip May of Osmond Lange Architects - and his son Kevin - built a digital model of the Stone of Memory, using a photogrammetry software called Alice Vision Meshroom. The process has two main stages. The first stage is to generate a sparse point cloud, computing the SfM (Structure-from-Motion) node. The second stage is to generate a dense geometric mesh surface.



Plan of memorial from 3D digital model. Philip and Kevin May, 2021

The digital photographs require a fast shutter speed and reduced lens aperture to avoid blur and ensure a large depth of field. An ISO 100 setting was used to reduce 'noise'. Some 900 photographs were taken during the initial attempt, however the quality of some of the images was impacted on by low levels of natural lighting. Overgrowth and accumulated debris around the memorial had also concealed portions of the periphery of the plinth



After a comprehensive cleaning session a second attempt was made during which a total of 527 photographs were taken, each in the order of 16 Megapixels. The images were then imported, their metadata analysed and the scene set up in Meshroom to begin stage one of the process.

A Structure-from-Motion node was initiated to begin the process of positioning and orientating the camera positions of each of the 527 imported images. This resulted in a set of calibrated images from which a sparse point cloud was generated.

A high polygon count 'dense' geometric mesh was generated which was simplified to a low polygon count mesh using the automatic mesh decimation tool. The original 50 million polygon mesh was accordingly reduced to 5 million polygons and the texture re-generated.



Perspective view of 3D digital model. Philip and Kevin May, 2021



Rear elevation from 3D digital model. Philip and Kevin May, 2021

The final result was a low polygon count textured mesh in OBJ file format. The resulting 3D digital model was used to produce the architectural plans, elevations and three dimensional drawings which accompany the article - a useful and very accurate as-built record of the Memorial in 2021.

The important outcome of the photogrammetry was that the organic plan form of the plinth was now accurately plotted. Constructed in a grey quarry stone the external outline of the stepped plinth forms a curvilinear shape without a formal axial or geometric relationship to the Stone of Memory.

The Stone of Memory remains an interesting urban artefact in the townscape of East London and a link - albeit slender - to the 1820 Settlers and their contribution to the development of East London and South Africa.

## Sources:

Daily Dispatch, 9 July 1953

Daily Dispatch, 2 September 1955

Daily Dispatch, 17 August 1962

Daily Dispatch, 18 October 1962

Daily Dispatch, 11 February 1972

Daily Dispatch, 17 May 1972

Daily Dispatch, 4 September 1973

East London Industrial Areas: Chiselmurst, Gately & Arcadia. The Bodleian Industrial Analysis Maps, Bodley Publishing House, Published by Rand Mines, 4.10.1968.

Archived copies of articles from the Daily Dispatch and the map kindly provided by Glenn Hartwig, Reference Librarian at the East London Public Library.



Detail of front elevation from 3D digital model. Philip and Kevin May, 2021