

Surveyors of Arabia

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ABSTRACT

When it comes to well-known characters of the twentieth century, it would be most likely that the name "Lawrence of Arabia" would make the top ten list. Even before delving into his history such a title projects charisma, adventure and heroism derived

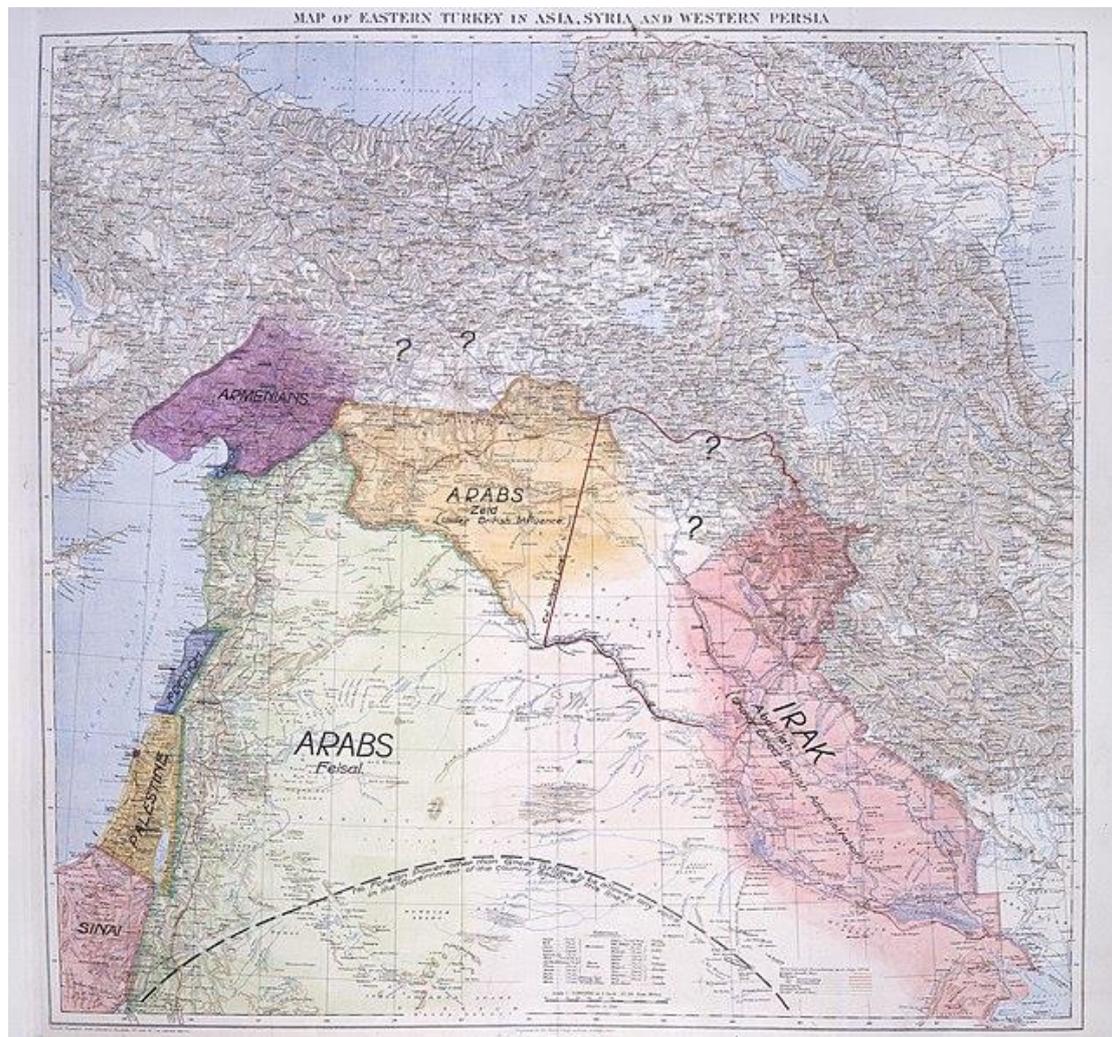


Figure 1. Map of Arab lands in the Middle East.

from such an exotic and evocative image. To fuel the great notoriety of this colourful individual his book "The Seven Pillars of Wisdom" became a best seller after World War II with such a universal recognition of the man that a number of movies were

made in an attempt to portray his fascinating life to an audience craving for courageous figures to try and cast off to the furthest memories the horrors of that diabolical conflict. Well, you probably know by now that I would be very unlikely to research and write a story unless that person happened to be a surveyor? Well, you know me all too well! Yes T.E. Lawrence was a surveyor in the Middle East prior to, during and after this major war, but to my unending surprise, I also found three other notable people who surveyed in the Arabian area before and around the same epoch as Lawrence – Gordon of Khartoum, Lord Horatio Kitchener and Gertrude Bell. This paper will follow the lives of these four historic icons, featuring their mapping and surveying exploits in addition to looking into their personal interactions and joint activities. To my immense delight I even found some movie clips from the 2015 movie "Queen of the Desert", in which our very own Aussie starlet, Nicole Kidman, is depicted carrying out some survey work in the desert in her role as Gertrude Bell, the archaeologist! Rarely written about (if at all?) the amazing feats of these four surveyors in the parched and arid environment of the sandy sun-bleached dunes, put their historic contributions onto another plateau of achievement to rightly honour them as the "Surveyors of Arabia."

INTRODUCTION

Of all places on earth, apart from Antarctica, one of the most fearsome places to carry out surveying is certainly amongst the deserts of the Arabian area. Apart from the high temperatures prevailing at all times of the year, surveyors are forced to contend with the shortage of water, shade and medical facilities at times of need. Of course, there is also the major difficulties of transportation through the sandy terrain making travel a time consuming and very dangerous undertaking. Until aerial surveying became a feasible and less expensive option, there was also the added burdens of carrying surveying and measuring equipment, food, water and motor vehicle supplies like fuel and oil. Have I painted an image of harshness and unpleasantness? Well, I did not even make a mention of sandstorms, scorpions and other airborne predators to fully illustrate the perils and extreme conditions to which all surveyors of the Middle Eastern zones were subjected.

We start our epic sandy saga with General Charles George Gordon in 1852, progressing to Lord Horatio Herbert Kitchener then moving to Thomas Edward Lawrence and Gertrude Margaret Lowthian Bell, with many connections and joint activities taking place between the characters.

THE CHARACTERS

GENERAL CHARLES GEORGE GORDON

Born on 28 January 1833 into an army family in Woolwich, England, his career in the military was assured. The family moved around often throughout the British Isles as well as overseas, but his education was stable in the Royal Military Academy in

him in the gunights of Russian snipers. One of his major roles was to construct huts and trenches. With this conflict coming to a conclusion, Gordon was sent to modern-day Romania as part of an international commission to determine the new borderline between the two Empires of the Russians and the Ottomans. While there he took up the new technology of photography, later to be elected as a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society as a result of his amateur work.

His next mission was taken up in China to quell the uprising known as the Second Opium War, where his involvement gained him the nickname “Chinese” Gordon. In 1873 the khedive Ismail Pasha of Egypt, who regularly used European contractors, appointed Gordon as the Governor of Equatoria in the Sudan. While there, from April 1874 until December 1876, he mapped the upper Nile River and set a line of stations along the river as far south as present-day Uganda. Following a short return to England, Gordon resumed service as Governor-General of the Sudan, where he asserted his authority through the suppression of rebellions, the slave trade and endemic corruption. After ill health forced his return to England in 1880 he was then back offshore again in India, China, Mauritius and Cape Colony, South Africa. When he was again dispatched to the Sudan in 1884 to evacuate Egyptian forces from Khartoum, the followers of Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi besieged the city finally killing Gordon and the other defenders in January 1885.

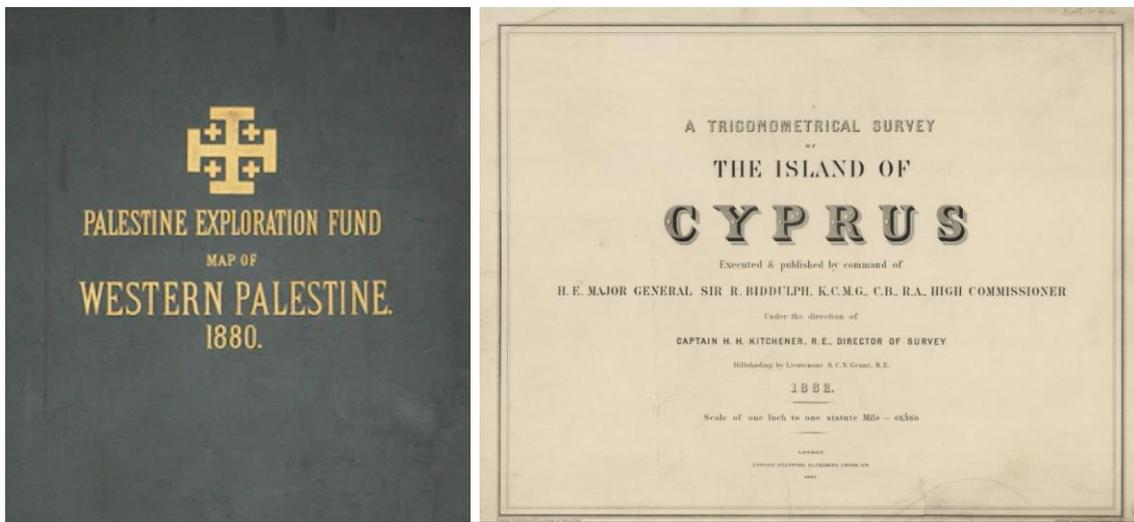
LORD HORATIO HERBERT KITCHENER



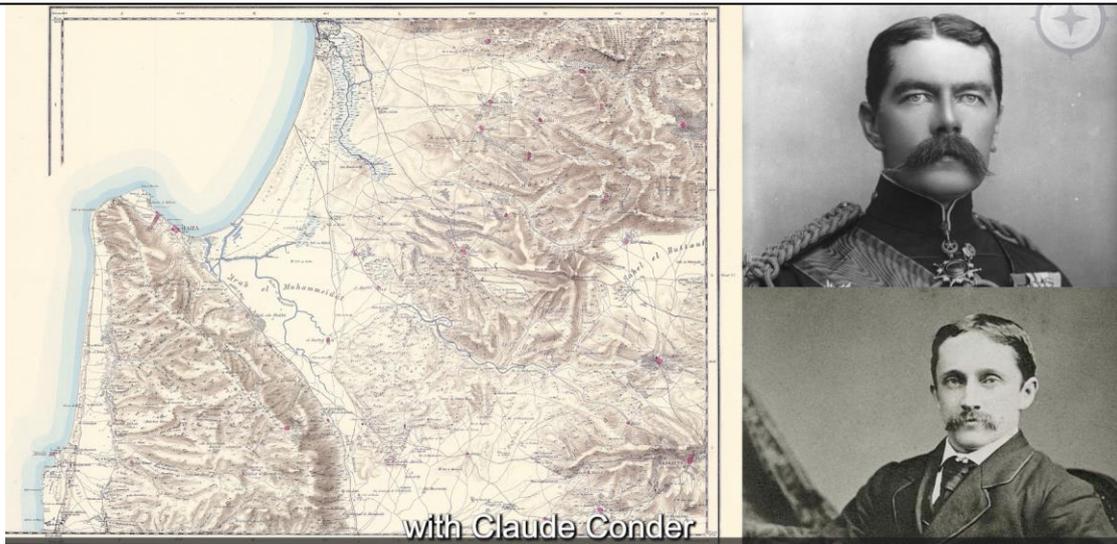
Figure 4. Lord Horatio Herbert Kitchener.

Born at Ballylongford, Ireland on 24 June 1850, Horatio Herbert Kitchener became a British military surveyor and mapper well remembered for his poster as an appeal for more men to enlist in the British army to assist in the war effort of World War I in which he is shown pointing accompanying the words: “Britons Wants You!” He was commissioned into the Royal Engineers in 1871 with survey work in Palestine and Cyprus. In 1874 he was assigned by the Palestine Exploration Fund to survey the Holy Land with Claude Conder, finally publishing the results in 26 sheets in 1880. From 1878 to 1882 he completed the trigonometric network over Cyprus which produced his most impressive atlas of maps

titled “A Trigonometrical Survey of the Island of Cyprus” dated 1882 in 15 sheets.



Figures 5, 6 & 7. (clockwise from top left) Front cover of PEF Map of Western Palestine 1880; 1882 Title page of “A Trigonometrical Survey of The Island of Cyprus” and Map sheet of Palestine with Kitchener and Conder.



Kitchener was active around Palestine around the same period as Lawrence of Arabia and Gertrude Bell. In 1896 he was victorious in conquering the Sudan, surveying and building a railway to guarantee logistical support, then on 2 September he defeated the Dervishes at Omdurman. He was tragically killed while aboard the *HMS Hampshire* which sunk after striking a mine off the Orkney Islands on 5 June 1916 while on his way to Russia on a fact finding mission. Some theories have since surfaced purporting that the sinking of Kitchener’s vessel was not a mine accident but a deliberate assassination of the Lord himself by a double agent for the Germans who was notorious for his affiliations with the Germans in both World Wars.

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THOMAS EDWARD (T.E.) LAWRENCE aka LAWRENCE OF ARABIA

When it comes to legendary real-life figures of the twentieth century one whose name would be well recognized would certainly be Lawrence of Arabia. Born Thomas Edward (T.E.) Lawrence at Gorphwysfa in Tremadog, Caernarfonshire (now Gwynedd), Wales on 16 August 1888, at an early age his family moved to Polstead Road, Oxford where he went to Oxford High School for boys. In 1907 he attended Oxford University studying at Jesus College. Developing an early fascination with medieval knights and chivalry he travelled on bicycle to inspect old cathedrals, Crusader temples and castles. After a period of studying medieval pottery at Magdalene College he seized the chance to become an archaeologist in the Middle East, sailing for Beirut in 1910. Major influences for his archaeological endeavours in Arabia were Gertrude Bell and D.G. Hogarth of the British Museum in Jerablus.



Figure 8. T.E. Lawrence.

With an amazing linguistic prowess Thomas was able to speak fluently in French, German, Latin, Greek, Arabic, Turkish and Syriac. He also absorbed the Arabic culture seeking to identify himself with the locals. His adoption of the native dress and customs endeared him to the native Arabs winning him the loyalty and admiration of the locals wherever he ventured. Thus was born the man whose actions predicated the description of him as “Lawrence of Arabia”.

In 1914 Lawrence assisted to map the Negev Desert which was expected to be used by the Ottoman regiments, being surveyed under a cloak of secrecy as an archaeological dig, but in fact for purely military purposes.



Figure 9. Lawrence of Arabia in full dress.

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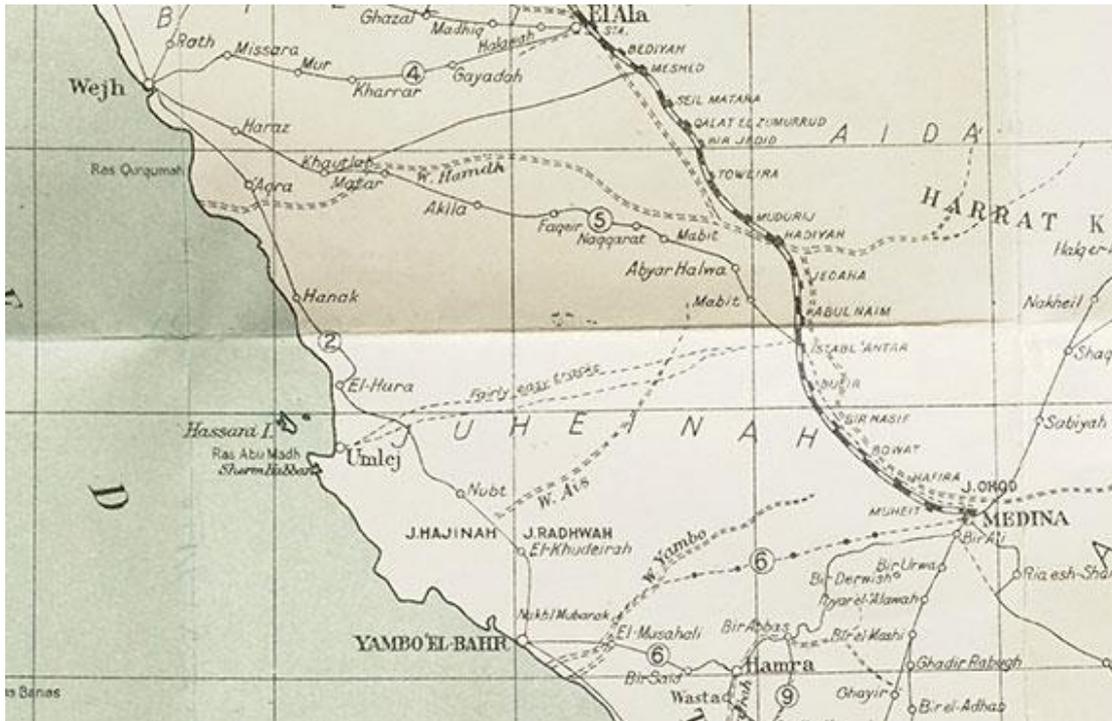


Figure 10. Map of the Hejaz by T.E. Lawrence 1917.

With his spy cartography projects completed, Lawrence launched himself into a guerrilla warfare campaign against the Turks, providing the Arab troops of Emir Faisal, son of Sherif Hussein of Mecca, with ammunition and training in successfully attacking the Ottoman supply lines, especially the Hejaz railway in the area which he knew intimately from his own surveys.

Before his bombing raids for Faisal, Lawrence was heavily engaged in archaeological projects as shown on the adjoining map. While working in these areas of Arabia he came in contact with Gertrude Bell, whose pioneering work in the ancient history of the Middle East was even more surprising as she was the only woman present in the region. There was certainly more than just a casual acquaintance between Lawrence and Bell when the number of joint activities and meetings of the pair are considered. In the 2015 movie “The Queen of the Desert”, there is even a vague suggestion of a romantic connection of the couple.



Figure 11. Locality plan of archaeological digs attended by T.E. Lawrence in Arabia.

GERTRUDE MARGARET LOWTHIAN BELL

Our fourth Arabian surveyor is Gertrude Margaret Lowthian Bell born on 14 July 1868 at Washington Hall, Durham, England. A distinguished scholar at Queen's College in London she went on to be the first female graduate of Oxford University



Fig. 12. Gertrude Bell in English and Middle East dress.

taking first place along with a first class honours degree in Modern History. She was to travel the globe to many ancient sites and become adept in French, German, Arabic and Persian.

She was to discover new ruins along the Euphrates River with

her archaeology pursuits taking her to Mesopotamia (now modern day Iraq and parts of Syria and Turkey). While there she visited the ancient remains of Ukhaidir, travelling to Babylon then back to Carchemish. She consulted two other archaeologists about these sites, T.E. Lawrence who was assistant to Reginald Campbell Thompson at that time.

Her contacts in the Arabian region together with her personal knowledge were extensive, and she was regarded highly by the British Home Office who made her the Chief Political Officer to the British Resident in Baghdad by 1917. She became a representative at various colonial negotiations and conferences attending the Cairo Conference of 1921, along with Sir Winston Churchill and T.E. Lawrence. She carried out her own site surveys which are re-enacted by our very own Aussie actor Nicole Kidman, who plays the lead role in the 2015 movie "Queen of the Desert." With great sadness she overdosed on sleeping pills in Baghdad on 12 July 1926.



Figure 13. Nicole Kidman carries out some site surveying as Gertrude Bell in the movie "Queen of the Desert".

CONCLUSION

The difficulties and challenges confronting any surveyors who carry out work in desert environments are significant, but to also carry out such work during times of war introduces the added element of extreme danger. Surveyors have overcome all obstacles before them when it comes to performing their tasks, but over and above these hardships there is always the capacity of the surveyor to understand local customs, but these four professionals demonstrated linguistic and cultural abilities at an amazingly advanced level of interaction and assimilation. Lawrence of Arabia stands as an iconic figure of the modern age whose mysterious and exotic persona fuelled the various movies and imagination of the world, but I prefer to hail him as another resourceful surveyor who solved his problems of access and communication in a very unique style.

APPENDIX A

Lord Horatio Kitchener's Cyprus Survey.

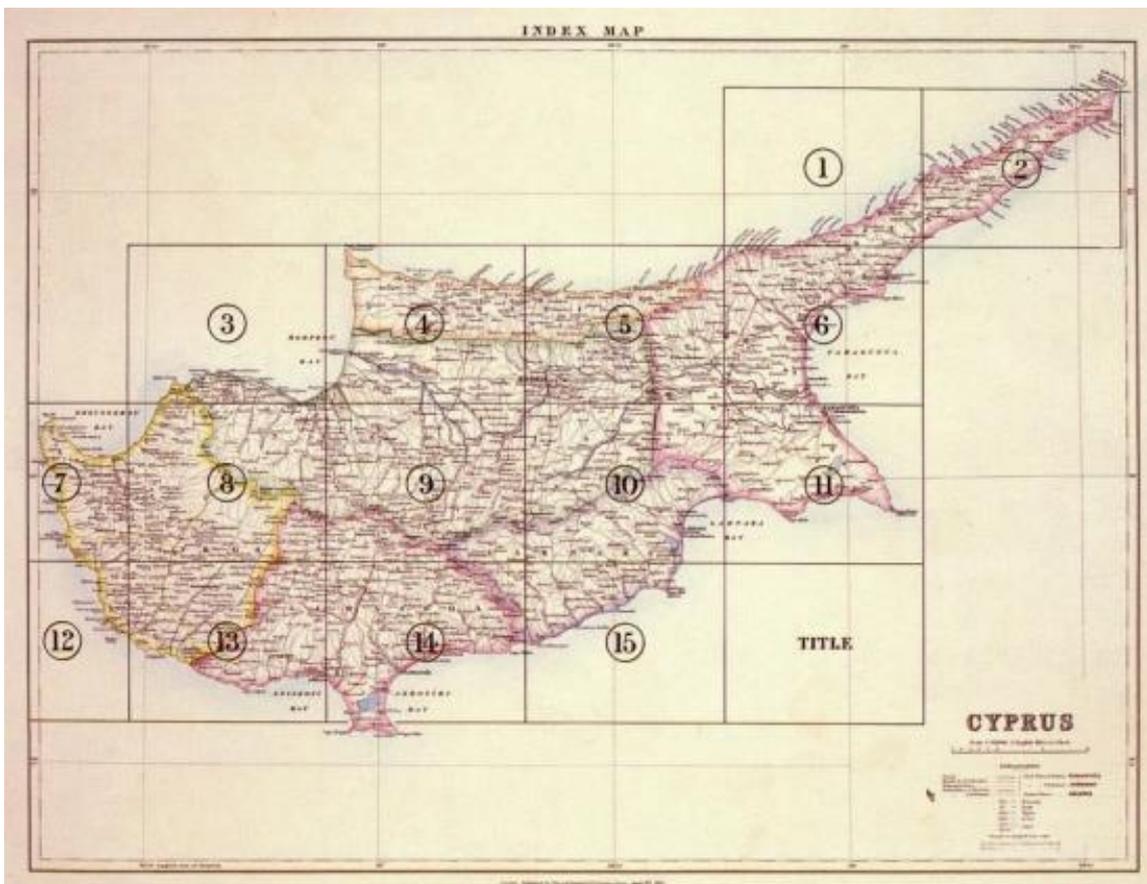


Figure 14. Index Map of the Triangulation Survey of the Island of Cyprus by Lord Kitchener 1882.



Figures 15. Lord Kitchener and his survey staff in Cyprus in 1883. Kitchener is seated next to the theodolite just to the right of centre (above)



Figure 16 (left) The 1979 stamp issued by the Cyprus Postal Service for the Centenary of the Cyprus Survey by Kitchener.

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BIOGRAPHY

Private land surveyor since 1973, **Bachelor of Surveying** (UNSW 1978), **MA** (Egyptology) from Macquarie Uni., Sydney (2000), **Registered Surveyor NSW** 1981. Now Director of Brock Surveys at Parramatta (near Sydney). Papers presented on six continents including Brunei, Nigeria, Morocco, Papua New Guinea, Hawaii, Bulgaria, Finland, Colombia and all states/territories of Australia as well as Norfolk Island. Stalwart of FIG International Institution for the History of Surveying & Measurement awarded **FIG Article of the Month March 2005, January 2012, June 2014 & April 2017**. Institution of Surveyors NSW Awards – **Halloran Award 1996** for Contributions to Surveying History, **Fellow ISNSW 1999 & 2002 Professional Surveyor of the Year**. First international **Life Member** of the Surveyors Historical Society (USA), Rundle Foundation for Egyptian Archaeology & Parramatta & District Historical Society, Friends of Linnwood (House), **Foundation Member** Australian National Maritime Museum & Friends of National Museum of Australia. **Member** of Bradman Crest, International Map Collectors Society, Royal Australian Historical Society, National Trust of Australia, Hills District Historical Society, **Friends** of May's Hill Cemetery and St. John's Cemetery.

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