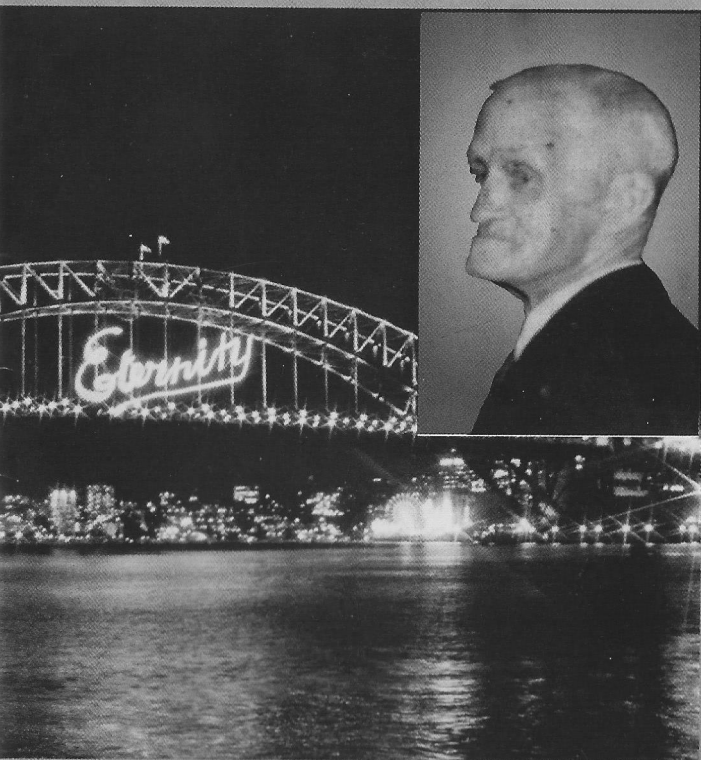


The Story of Mr Eternity

*Prepared by J R Ecob
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The New Millennium began with a bang in Sydney, Australia. On the tick of midnight 31 Dec 1999 the promised fireworks display erupted over Sydney Harbour to the delight of more than a million people, who watched from the foreshores and from a vast flotilla of watercraft on the harbour.

This was the display to end all displays. It was designed to outdo every other New Year's celebration on planet earth, and it seems to have achieved its goal. For 24 hours the world media ran continuous commentary of celebrations on every part of the globe. From remote islands in the Pacific Ocean, New Zealand, Australia, Hong Kong, across Asia to the Middle East, and on into Europe to France's Eiffel Tower and England's Millennium Dome. Then, as the earth spun at 1,000 miles per hour, across the Atlantic we saw the richest and most powerful nation on earth, the United States of America, in the freeze of winter join the celebration of a thousand years; but nothing compared with the brilliance of Sydney Harbour on 1st January 2000.

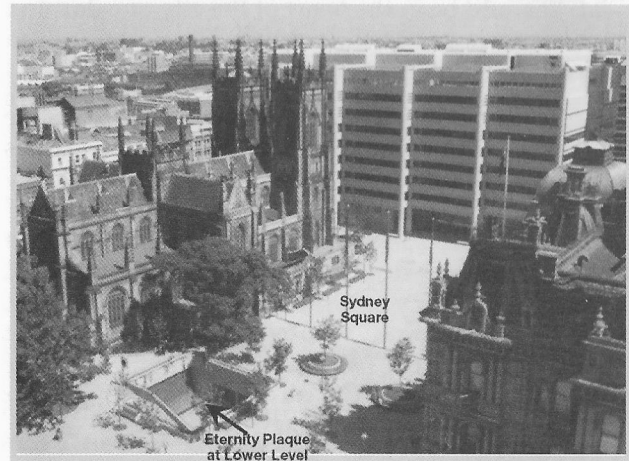
What was the reason for Sydney's success in surpassing every other display around the globe? Was it the amount of money spent on the fireworks? or the fact that Australia has such incredible skills in developing fireworks extravaganzas? Perhaps in the year of Sydney's Olympic Games it was intended to put the city in the land 'down under' at the top of the globe.

Sydney Harbour has a natural beauty unsurpassed by any harbour in the world, and the mild summer drew nearly one in three of its four million citizens to the harbourside celebrations. While much of the world shivered in the cold of a Northern Hemisphere winter, Sydney's weather was idyllic, and even the forecast showers did not eventuate.

Many may heap their plaudits on the organizers for the world-wide notoriety, but there is another reason for Sydney's New Millennium success. A reason that can be summed up in one word that hung suspended from the giant arch of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, amidst the jetting rockets exploding above and the deluge of light that poured from the roadway beneath it. **That word was "Eternity".**

Like a message from heaven flashed across the world stage to billions of souls, it shone like a beacon, warning that time is swiftly passing and we are creatures of eternity. This was a sermon in a word, the magnitude of which can only be grasped as one understands the story behind it.

In down-town Sydney, set in the pavement at Sydney Square, is the same inescapable word, "Eternity", in faultless copperplate writing. It was put there to perpetuate the memory of Sydney's unique citizen, Arthur Stace, otherwise known as Mr Eternity.



When the Sydney architect, Ridley Smith, unveiled the plaque in Sydney Square in July 1977, a note in the Sydney Morning Herald drew attention to Arthur's one-word sermon:

"In letters almost 21 cm high is the famous copperplate message ETERNITY. The one-word sermon gleams in wrought aluminium. There's no undue prominence; no garish presentation; merely the simple ETERNITY on pebbles as Arthur Stace would have wanted it."

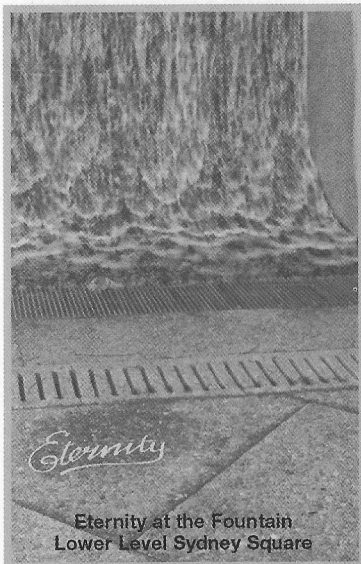
Arthur was a thin little man no more than 5feet 3inches in stature. He was uneducated and on his own testimony could barely write his name. His wife would read him his mail and he would tell her what to write in reply; yet for 33 years this incredible man rose at 5 o'clock each morning to walk the streets of Sydney and its far-flung suburbs to write with chalk in flawless copperplate style on the pavements just one word, "Eternity". Day after day, with a

commitment and passion rarely equalled, he preached his sermon to the busy crowds of shoppers and workers as they rushed along the sidewalks. It is estimated that this simple, yet profound message, was repeated over 500,000 times.

In many ways the word was mysterious, for no one knew who was responsible for this elegant graffiti that adorned the pavement.

Newspaper journalists wrote about it and people everywhere discussed it, but who was responsible? No one could predict where the word would appear next. It could be in the heart of the city one day and 20 kilometers out in the suburbs the next. It even appeared in Melbourne, 1,000 miles away.

There was no doubt the same person was responsible wherever it appeared, but who did it? Journalists referred to its author as "Mr Eternity", and each day people would remark, "*Mr Eternity has struck again!*" Occasionally his sermon changed to "*Obey God*", but quickly reverted to the simple one-word sermon, "*Eternity*". One day in 1956, after 24 years of mystery, Rev Lisle Thompson, who was Arthur's pastor at Burton Street Baptist Tabernacle, saw him writing the mysterious word on the pavement. "*Are you Mr Eternity?*" he asked. Back came the answer, "*Guilty, your honor!*"



Once Mr Eternity's identity was known interviews were arranged with the media, and the Daily Telegraph published a full report on 21 June 1956. The secret was out, and the mystery solved at last. In 1994 a TV documentary was produced on his life and shown across the nation. A Sydney poet has written his story in verse.

Arthur Stace was born in Balmain, now an inner suburb of Sydney, in the year 1884. His father was an alcoholic and his mother ran a brothel. He had two brothers, both of whom died of alcoholism. His two sisters ran a brothel.



During childhood the five Stace children had to fend for themselves in a home where domestic violence was the norm. It is said that the children frequently slept on hessian bags under the house to escape the wrath of a violent, drunken father.

Needless to say, the family grew up in abject poverty, and Arthur's childhood was a daily battle for survival. He stole to eat, and at the age of 12 was made a State Ward. He received no education.

When 14 years old Arthur went to work in a coal mine, presumably the old Balmain coal mine, and at 15 served his first gaol sentence. Even at this young age he was a heavy drinker.

In his twenties he moved from Balmain to Surry Hills adjacent to Sydney Central Railway Station. There he occupied himself with running "sly grog" for pubs and acting as "cockatoo", or lookout, for gambling houses and brothels. His whole lifestyle brought him into conflict with the police and on many occasions was he arrested and sentenced.

When the Great War of 1914-18 began, Arthur escaped the life he was living and enlisted in the AIF. He was sent to the battlefields of France, where he served as stretcher-bearer and drummer. He witnessed the horrors of warfare in the trenches under heavy artillery bombardment in freezing conditions, and received injuries that impaired the sight of one of his eyes. In 1919 he returned to Australia and was discharged still suffering from shell shock and the effects of mustard gas poisoning. Back home in Sydney, Arthur found it easy to renew old acquaintances and soon slipped into a life of alcohol, gambling and crime. He wandered the streets feeding out of rubbish bins. Methylated spirits became a cheap escape. He found he could buy a bottle for sixpence and that would keep him

in drunken oblivion for a whole day. Next day he drank water to reactivate the methylated spirits. He could thus get along on threepence a day! On his own testimony, Arthur had become "a petty criminal, a bum, and a metho drinker".

Alcohol which had destroyed his father was now controlling him, and on one occasion he staggered into a police station and begged to be locked up, but the officer refused. Evangelist John G Ridley, who knew Arthur personally, records that he staggered away saying,

"When I don't want them to put me in, they do it: now when I want them to put me in they shut me out."

By 1930 the world was in the grip of the Great Depression. Unemployed men walked the streets searching for help wherever it might be found. One port of call was St Barnabas Anglican Church in Broadway, where Archdeacon RBS Hammond ran "A Meeting for Needy Men".

The Archdeacon was a strong evangelical with a great concern for people. In his meeting he presented the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the only solution for man's need, and afterwards supplied each man with a cup of tea and a rock cake.

On the 6th August 1930 Arthur Stace wandered into this "Meeting for Needy Men" and found 300 seated in the hall. Looking around he noticed a few well dressed men standing near the door and he turned to the man sitting next to him, who was one of Sydney's best known criminals, and asked, "Who are they?" The reply came back, "I'd reckon they'd be Christians." Arthur said, "Well look at them and look at us. I'm havin' a go at what they've got."

After the gospel had been presented and each man had received his rock cake and tea, Arthur made his way out of the hall, across Broadway into Sydney

University Park. There, under a big Morton Bay fig tree he fell on his knees to the ground and with tears of repentance streaming down his face cried out, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!"



That cry was the pivot on which Arthur's life turned. His was a genuine conversion to Christ, and for the next 37 years his life was a living testimony to God's saving and keeping power. At that instant God heard his cry and he became a child of God. He could say, as the hymn writer has put it, "My sins which were many are all washed away!"



Later Arthur testified:

"I went in to get a cup of tea and a rock-cake, but I met the Rock of Ages."

Let those who doubt that God can hear the sinner's cry, and answer in infinite love and power to lift him into glorious liberty from sins slavery, take heed to the testimony of this hopeless little metho drinker and petty criminal who, by the grace of God, became Mr Eternity. And let it be known by all that Arthur Stace is not the only one to experience the mercy of God. Millions have found the joy of salvation by trusting the Saviour. Not all had the same unfortunate background. Not all were enslaved by the fearsome drug of alcohol, but all needed to be saved.

The Bible says,

"If any man be in Christ he is a new creature, old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

When Arthur Stace turned to God and found mercy he realized that every other person needed to do the same. That is why, for 33 years, he walked the streets from the early hours of the morning preaching his one-word sermon, "Eternity".

"Eternity", to him was the everlasting destiny of every soul to be spent in heaven or hell, and concern for his fellow man drove him on day after day. He knew the forgiveness of God in his own life and wanted others to have the same assurance.

In Nov 1932 Evangelist John G Ridley MC conducted an evangelistic mission at the Burton Street Baptist Tabernacle in Darlinghurst, where Arthur was attending. John Ridley had also served in the fields of

France and had won a Military Cross for bravery in battle. A German bullet had passed through his face and impaired his speech; but God had wonderfully restored him to become a most eloquent, forceful preacher, and an outstanding evangelist. Little did he realize what impact his sermon would have on Arthur Stace when he preached on the text Isaiah 57:15. *"Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity"*

Stressing the word eternity, the preacher cried, *"Eternity! Eternity! I wish I could sound or shout that word to everyone in the streets of Sydney. Eternity! You have to meet it. Where will you spend eternity?"*

Arthur Stace recalled that meeting. He said, *"Eternity was ringing through my brain, and suddenly I began to cry and felt a powerful call from the Lord to write 'Eternity'. I had a piece of chalk in my pocket, and outside the Church I bent down right there and wrote it....The funny thing is, that before I wrote it I could hardly write my own name. I had no schooling and I couldn't have spelled 'eternity' for a hundred quid. But it came out smoothly, in a beautiful copperplate script. I couldn't understand it, and I still can't".*

Over the next 33 years that one word, "eternity", was repeated more than 500,000 times, all over the city of Sydney, in country towns and in Melbourne; wherever he went.

It is an amazing turn of Divine providence that the Sydney architect, Ridley Smith, who unveiled the plaque inscribed with the word "Eternity" in the pavement of Sydney Square in July 1977, was the son of missionary parents serving with the China Inland Mission. His father named his son Ridley because of his great respect for Evangelist John Ridley, the very preacher who was used to change Arthur Stace into Mr Eternity.

Many stories have been told of this humble servant of Christ, for that indeed was what he was. From



the day he met Christ under the fig tree in University Park he felt he had a debt of love to pay. He was like the street woman who came into the house of Simon the Pharisee, and washed Jesus' feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. He loved much because he was forgiven much.



Although no one knew the identity of Mr Eternity for 24 years he did not go unnoticed. He recalled being apprehended by police.

"Twenty three times", he said, "I have been questioned (by the police) but I've never been arrested....the police have been very good to me. I know there's a rule about defacing the footpaths, but I've got authority from a higher Source."

Once, in his early days, a policeman apprehended him with, *"What are you doing writing on the pavement?"* "Well," replied Arthur, *"it is a word from the Bible which I want the people to read; and don't forget that when you were sworn-in to the Police Force you placed your hand on that Book."* With that the officer turned away and Arthur continued his silent, sacred ministry.

Some tried to erase the word from the pavement, and one man followed him placing the letter 'm' before "eternity" making it "meternity". It was then that Arthur increased the size of the first letter and, as he said, *"I tricked the bloke and made it a great big E"*.

Arthur was a tireless worker for God. He was 46 years old when he was saved and married at 57. He was employed as a cleaner in the city, but wherever he found an opportunity shared the gospel of Christ with his fellow creatures of eternity. For many years he preached on the corner of George and Bathurst Streets in the heart of Sydney. His method was unusual. First he would place his Bible on the ground, and then cover it with his hat. Next he would begin walking around the hat, pointing to it and calling out, *"Look, it's alive! It's alive!"*

Soon people would gather round; and then he would remove his hat, take up his Bible and proclaim, *"It's alive! The Word of God is living and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword...."* quoting Hebrews 4:12 from the Bible.

In this way he got his audience, and never failed to tell the good news of the Saviour who had changed his life and given him hope for eternity.

Although Arthur could not read the Bible he had memorized much of its contents and quoted it faultlessly. In Church services he had no need of a hymn book for he had memorized every verse. He was blessed with an incredible memory.

His ministry included leading prayer meetings in his Church at Burton Street, regular street meetings, helping at the Buckland Street Hostel, and the Francis Street Night Refuge.

On the 30th July 1967, in a nursing home, Mr Eternity suffered a stroke and passed over into the immediate presence of his Lord and Saviour. When he entered the nursing home in 1965, he remarked, "I don't think I'll leave here under my own steam."

It is said that the word "Eternity" can still be discerned on the bell in the old Sydney GPO Tower. How he put it there no one will ever know, but on the 1st of January 2000 that one-word sermon tolled far beyond the revellers on Sydney Harbour, to possibly 2 billion viewers around the entire globe; not once, but again and again that message rang out.

Was the celebration worth all the millions of dollars expended? I venture to say that this was the most cost effective sermon ever preached; and it was the message of a little man who had no theological qualifications, had never been ordained to the Christian ministry, and who, up to the age of 46 years confessed himself "a petty criminal, a bum, and a metho drinker".

Arthur Stace has sown the seed, God will give the increase and Eternity will reveal the harvest.

Now I understand why Sydney's New Millennium celebration had to be the best in the world.



God had a Millennial Message for all mankind, and that message is summed up in the Gospel of Christ.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Life at best is very brief,
Like the falling of a leaf,
Like the binding of a sheaf,
Be in time;
Fleeting days are telling fast
That the die will soon be cast,
And the fatal line be past,
BE IN TIME!

Sinner, heed the warning voice,
Make the Lord your final choice,
Then all heaven will rejoice,
Be in time.
Come from darkness into light,
Come let Jesus make you right,
Come and start for Heaven tonight,
BE IN TIME!

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God unto salvation to **everyone who believes**. Death is but the gateway to eternity, and there are two eternal destinations. What you do with Jesus Christ determines your eternal destiny.

What will you do with Jesus?
Neutral you cannot be.
Some day your heart will be asking,
What will He do with me?

The Bible says,

"For by grace (undeserved favour) are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast (Eph 2:8-9).

"As many as received Him, to them gave He power, to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name" (John 1:12).

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About this publication

Information for this publication has been gleaned from J G Ridley's tract, "*The Passing of Mr Eternity*", from Mr Bruce Leghorn, and author's personal knowledge of this unique servant of Christ. Photographs were kindly supplied by Ramon Williams of Worldwide Photos.

Free copies of this publication are available on request.

Also a complimentary copy of the Herald of Hope magazine, and "*Keys to Bible Prophecy*" studies may be obtained on request. Please address all correspondence to :

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