General Sir John Monash

Civil engineer, soldier, public administrator (1865–1931)

John Monash was born in Melbourne on 27 June 1865 into a Prussian-Jewish family. He was educated at Scotch College and Melbourne University. By 1895 he had degrees in arts, engineering and law and had qualified as a municipal surveyor, an engineer of water supply and a patent attorney. As an engineer Monash's early career was in bridge construction working for a time with the Melbourne Harbour Trust, before becoming a partner in a bridge building firm. By the turn of the century his focus had changed to building construction.

Monash's military career began in 1884 with his membership of the Melbourne University company of the 4th Battalion, Victoria Militia, and then moving to the North Melbourne Battery of the Metropolitan Brigade of the Militia Garrison Artillery. He was commissioned in 1887. By 1913 Monash had the rank of Colonel and was appointed to command the 13th Infantry Brigade. With the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Monash was transferred from the militia to active service. In 1915 he served as chief censor until taking command of the 4th Infantry Brigade (AIF). In this command he served at Gallipoli.

Promoted to Major-General, he commanded the 3rd Division, AIF in France in 1916. Monash succeeded General Birdwood as Australian Corps commander in 1918 and, in the same year, was knighted by King George V in recognition of his role in the Battle of Hamel Hill. With the conclusion of the war, Monash became Director-General of Repatriation and Demobilisation with responsibility for arranging the return of Australian troops from Europe.

Back in Australia Monash resumed his engineering career firstly as General Manager and later as Chairman of the State Electricity Commission (SEC) of Victoria. Under his leadership the SEC became an important body in developing Victoria's brown coal reserves as an electricity source and, by 1930, extending the power grid across the whole of the State.

John Monash died in Melbourne on 8 October 1931.

Records about John Monash

While the personal records of Sir John Monash and memorabilia relating to his life are held by a number of collecting institutions – the National Library of Australia, the Australian War Memorial,

and the archives of the University of Melbourne and Monash University – the National Archives holds a range of official records that refer to his dealings with the Commonwealth, many relating to his military service.

Selected records, including photographs, are listed in the table below. Additional records relating to Monash can be identified by conducting searches using RecordSearch, which is available on this website and also online in all research centres. Searches using the keyword 'monash' will identify items of interest.

Records relating to John Monash held in Canberra

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
First AIF dossier – Monash, General Sir John	1914–20	B2455, Monash Sir John
Brigadier-General John Monash – censor's reports, Philip Roth	1916–17	A7359, Box 12/46
Senator Fairbairn suggesting appointment of General Monash as Repatriation Commissioner	1919	A2487, 1919/263
Monash, Sir John – memorial	1921	A458, BR370/2
Appointment of Monash as a Member of Council of Defence	1921	A6006, 1921/2/22
Prime Minister's Department – Sir John Monash	1923	A1606, E25/1
Construction in Australia of a 10,000 ton Cruiser: Report as to cost by Lieut-Gen Sir John Monash	1924	A5954, 1930/26
Sir John Monash	1930	A458, 702/1/33
Death of Major-General Sir John Monash	1931–55	A2910, 415/1/91
Condolences – Monash, Sir John	1931–35	A461, 700/1/150
Memorial – late Sir John Monash	1932–33	A458, X370/6

Records relating to John Monash held in Sydney

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
Sir John Monash and J Malone during radio broadcast	1923	C4076, HN1037

Records relating to John Monash held in Melbourne

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
Major J Monash – C A F O Decoration	1906	B168, 1906/3198
Transfer of Major Monash to Australian Intelligence Corps	1908	MP84/1, 1849/2/24
Recommendation for promotion of Major Monash to rank of Lieutenant Colonel	1908	MP84/1, 1849/2/31
Leave of absence – Lt Col J Monash	1910	MP84/1, 2021/1/21
Local Area Officer Commanding, Australian Intelligence Corps – recommended promotion – Lt Col J Monash	1912–13	MP84/1, 311/3/126
Lt Col J Monash VD and others – period of command extended	1912	MP84/1, 430/8/39
Colonel Monash appointed to command 4th Infantry Brigade	1914	B539, AIF13/2/12

Farewell order – Sir John Monash	1918	MP367/1, 546/4/703
Discipline on Transports – Return of officers to Australia – report from General Monash	1919	MP367/1, 535/4/205
Statement by General Monash on Department of Repatriation and Demobilization	1919	MP367/1, 535/4/582
Retention of Sir John Monash's services	1919	MP367/1, 535/4/778
Death and funeral of Sir John Monash	1931–33	B1535, 746/1/27

Photographs of John Monash

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
General Sir John Monash	1918	A1200, L52801
Monash at conferring of Degrees, University of Melbourne	1930	A1200, L39603
Monash at ANZAC Day celebrations, Melbourne	1931	A1200, L39602
General Sir John Monash [portrait by Sir John Longstaff]	1945	A1200, L3061
General Sir John Monash in uniform	1945	A1200, L3310
Statue of General Sir John Monash	1958	A1200, L26630
Portrait of General Sir John Monash	1965	A1200, L52834
Photograph, General Sir John Monash	1923	A1861, 5089
Photograph of sculpture, General Sir John Monash	1938	A1861, 6854