

Our Living Memorials

AVENUES OF HONOUR IN THE CITY OF CASEY

Our Living Memorials

AVENUES OF HONOUR IN THE CITY OF CASEY



©City of Casey, Victoria, Australia

November 2001

ISBN 0 9579886 0 5

This book is copyright. No part may be reproduced by any process except in accordance with the provisions of the *Copyright Act 1968* and with the written permission of the City of Casey.

For further enquiries:

City of Casey

PO Box 1000

Narre Warren, Victoria 3805

Australia

Tel: (03) 9705 5200

www.casey.vic.gov.au



F O R E W O R D

Nothing shocks a society more than the carnage of war. The First World War, fought between 1914 and 1918 in the Middle East and Europe, sent a wave of disbelief and horror through the young Australian nation. At the end of the War, communities across Australia banded together and erected memorials, both living and in stone, to honour the men and women who served in defence of their country.

In the City of Casey there are seven Avenues of Honour planted to commemorate the contribution and sacrifices made by local volunteers in World War I. While these Avenues were planted following World War I, they stand as living memorials to those who served in the wars that followed.

Avenues of Honour are just one way that we remember and pay respect to those who served their country. Other ways of remembering include cenotaphs, events and ceremonies, and special days such as Anzac Day and Remembrance Day.

The Avenues of Honour in the City of Casey are presented here to encourage future generations to protect and maintain them in respect of the memory of those who served their country and those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

This book was produced by the City of Casey, in consultation with the community, to help our citizens identify and appreciate our precious living memorials—our Avenues of Honour. This document takes a regional perspective, looking at the history of the local area and including towns and people from outside the current boundaries of the municipality. It also places the local history in the context of what was happening nationally and abroad.

This book is a community effort that involved the contributions, dedication and resources of a number of local individuals and organisations. We thank all those who contributed, including the Berwick and

Cranbourne Sub Branches of the Returned and Services League of Victoria, Casey-Cardinia Library Corporation, the Beaconsfield Progress Association, the Berwick and Pakenham Historical Society, Miss Elizabeth Whiteside, Mr Cyril Molyneux, Mr and Mrs William Hudson, Lieut. Commander John Lodder, Mr Clifton Emanuel and Mr Brian Hetheron. Special thanks go to Mr John Hughes who instigated and supported this project from beginning to end and wrote the original draft. The preparation and publication of this book was made possible through funds provided by the City of Casey and the Commonwealth Department of Veterans Affairs.

**City of Casey
Victoria, Australia
November 2001**



THE CITY OF CASEY — AN HISTORICAL OUTLINE

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1851 Colonial Victoria separates from New South Wales.</p> <p>1850s Rural settlements and townships develop throughout the region.</p> <p>1860 <i>19 June.</i> The Cranbourne District Road Board is proclaimed with authority to develop local roads. (District Road Boards were the first form of local government.)</p> <p>1862 The Berwick District Road Board is proclaimed.</p> <p>1865 Berwick Road Board Offices and later Shire Headquarters High Street, Berwick established.</p> <p>1868 <i>24 February.</i> Shire of Cranbourne is proclaimed.
<i>5 May.</i> Shire of Berwick is proclaimed.</p> <p>1875 The new Shire of Cranbourne Offices open including a Courthouse and Post Office. Previously, Council meetings were held at the Cranbourne Hotel.</p> | <p>1912 Berwick Shire Headquarters is re-located to John Street, Pakenham.</p> <p>1950s Cranbourne Shire extends its Sladen Street offices to accommodate more staff. (Before the Second World War, there were only four office staff.)</p> <p>1963 Portion of the Ferntree Gully Shire separates and is renamed the Shire of Sherbrooke.</p> <p>1973 Berwick Shire splits. Pakenham becomes the Shire of Pakenham. Doveton and Berwick ridings become the City of Berwick, proclaimed on 1 October 1973.</p> <p>1978 Cranbourne Shire builds new offices on Sladen Street.</p> <p>1994 <i>22 April.</i> City of Cranbourne is proclaimed.
<i>15 December.</i> City of Casey is proclaimed (an amalgamation of the Cities of Berwick and Cranbourne).</p> |
|--|---|

The City of Casey is one of Australia's key growth areas. In the last quarter of the 20th century, 120,000 people moved in to Casey, and in the first quarter of the 21st century, a further 120,000 people will make Casey their home. Casey's population is expected to peak in excess of 300,000 people, making it one of Australia's most-populated municipalities.

The City of Casey covers an area of approximately 400 square kilometres and is located 40km south-east of Melbourne.



Contents

C O N T E N T S

Foreword	3	Our History	22
The City of Casey—An Historical Outline	4	At the Turn of the Century—The Local Scene	22
Avenues of Honour—Living Memorials	6	Australia and the British Empire	25
Avenues of Honour in the City of Casey	7	The Conflict in Europe	26
Beaconsfield Avenue of Honour,		Australia Answers the Call	28
High Street (Old Princes Highway), Berwick	8	Coming Home	30
South Gippsland Highway, Cranbourne	10	Bibliography	32
Memorial Drive, Narre Warren North	12		
Harkaway Road, Harkaway	14		
Church Street, Berwick	16		
South Gippsland Highway, Tooradin	18		
Wilson and Scanlan Streets, Berwick	20		



Living Memorials

AVENUES OF HONOUR — LIVING MEMORIALS

Now when I pause beneath your tree,
And never will the thought of spring
visit our minds, we'll remember you.

(Sylvia Lynd – poet)

Throughout Australia, Europe and America, Avenues of Honour have been planted by local communities to remember the efforts of past generations who served in wars and conflicts around the world.

In Australia, the mothers, fathers and families of soldiers who died on foreign fields in World War I (1914–1918) wanted a fitting memorial to their sacrifices. The *Melbourne Argus* published a Memoriam notice from the family of a man who had died on 25 April 1915 in the first minutes of the Australian fighting. After the war, the mother added a note: 'If only I could see your grave I would die happy'. The former Deputy Director of the

Australian War Memorial in Canberra, in an ABC radio program, 'Encounter', commented on the function of memorials in the grieving process:

War memorials were to a large extent meant to assist her to cope with her grief although she would never see the actual grave in which her son lay. In Australia, the War Memorials in almost every small country town transformed the physical and metaphysical landscape. They were the people's monuments.¹

In Australia, avenues of trees were a popular memorial choice that reflected the desire of the local community to commemorate the deeds of

their men and women in living memorials rather than cold, stone cenotaphs. Native Australian species were often chosen over the traditional European trees to signal national independence and pride; the avenues of flowering gums at Tooradin and Harkaway are examples. These avenues were also free of religious association, which is symbolic of how the war had reached across many cultures and faiths, so that a monument common to all was appropriate.

The muster roll-call of the men and women, who were all volunteers, is enshrined by the Honour Boards and nameplates at the foot of each tree or on a nearby memorial stone. They are memorials that beautify the streets in which the brave citizens grew up, where they were nurtured and went to school, and in the lanes and byways they loved to roam.



There are seven Avenues of Honour within the City of Casey. These are located at:

- High Street (Old Princes Highway) from Beaconsfield (Cardinia Creek) to the township of Berwick.
- South Gippsland Highway, Cranbourne.
- Memorial Drive, Narre Warren North.
- Harkaway Road, Harkaway.
- Church Street, Berwick.
- South Gippsland Highway, Tooradin.
- Wilson Street and Scanlan Street, Berwick.

The Avenues of Honour in the City of Casey are, for the most part, well preserved and in good condition. The exact location of each of Casey's seven Avenues of Honour and the condition of the 468 trees were recorded in a report compiled for the Council by Arboricultural Consultants (Australia Pty. Ltd) (October 1999). The aim of the report is to ensure that the trees can be maintained, protected and replaced as they perish. The report states:

The City of Casey has a number of significant Avenues of Honour, the most well-known being between Berwick and Beaconsfield, and the South Gippsland Highway, Cranbourne. There are also smaller Avenues to commemorate servicemen in the Harkaway, Narre Warren North, Berwick and Tooradin areas, which have a number of substantial and beautiful trees. It is with these in mind that this report was produced.²

In keeping with the recommendations made in the report, the City of Casey is committed to a regular maintenance program to ensure the trees are kept in good condition for generations to come.

Some of the assessments and recommendations from the report are used in this publication to describe the condition of the trees in the Avenues of Honour.

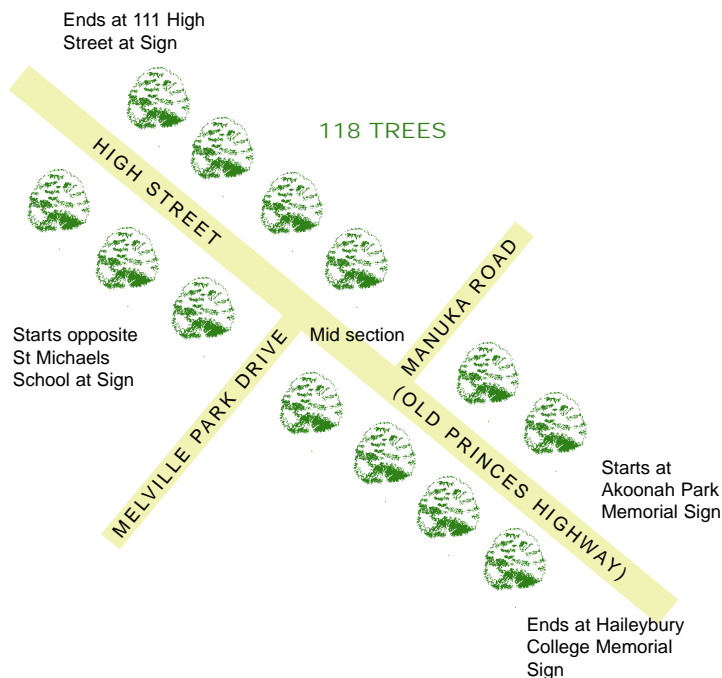
² Arboricultural Consultants (Australia Pty Ltd), Report on the Avenues of Honour, October 1999.

Avenue of Honour

BEACONSFIELD AVENUE OF HONOUR, HIGH STREET (OLD PRINCES HIGHWAY), BERWICK

The Berwick Shire Council placed a special message in the Pakenham Gazette, 25 October 1929, in recognition of the Beaconsfield Avenue of Honour:

Miss Ada Armytage had planted an avenue of honour between Beaconsfield and Berwick and Cr. McGregor moved that a letter of thanks be sent to her expressing the appreciation of council and rate payers.





'The original memorial plantings consisted of 123 trees (heritage study of Berwick). This has been reduced to 118. I would advise that introduced Oak and Ash be removed and established replacements planted to return the Avenue to its original 123 trees.' (Aboricultural Consultants (Australia Pty Ltd), Report on the Avenues of Honour)



BLACK POPLAR (*POPULUS X CANADENSIS ROBUSTA AND POPULUS DECTOIDES*)

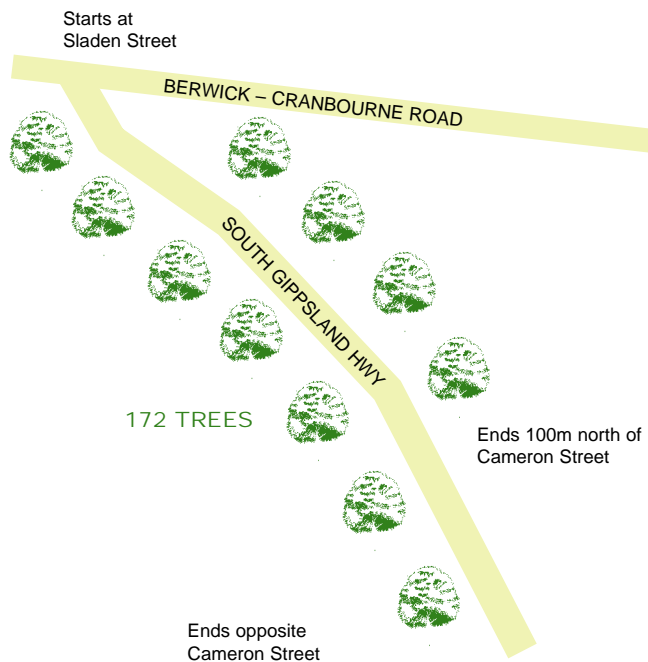
123 TREES ORIGINALLY PLANTED IN 1919. THE PLANTING WAS FACILITATED BY ADA ARMYTAGE OF 'HOLM PARK', BEACONSFIELD.

This significant Avenue of Honour was initiated by local philanthropist Miss Ada Armytage and today consists of 118 trees that were planted in recognition of the Beaconsfield men who served their country. It begins opposite Akoonah Park and continues to 111 High Street, (Princes Highway) Berwick. It is clearly marked with signs at each end indicating that it is a World War I Memorial. The Avenue is unusual as Hybrid Black Poplars, which are listed on the Victorian register

of significant trees, have been planted. The Avenue has high local and regional significance and creates a spectacular entry to Berwick from the vicinity of Cardinia Creek. All the trees are in very good condition.

Avenue of Honour

SOUTH GIPPSLAND HIGHWAY, CRANBOURNE



The following extract from the South Bourke and Mornington Journal, 21 August 1919, explains details of the planting:

The site chosen is from the Shire hall along the Tooradin road, and will, in the near future, look quite picturesque, the trees selected being Portugal oaks, with solid red gum tree guards—made by Messrs Kennedy and G. Hunter, returned men.



ENGLISH OAK (*QUERCUS ROBUR*)
PORTUGUESE OAK (*QUERCUS LUSITANICA*)

59 TREES PLANTED IN AUGUST 1919.



The Cranbourne Avenue of Honour was unveiled on 9 August 1919 by the Shire President, Councillor D. McGregor. This original part of today's Avenue consisted of 59 trees representing the men and two nursing sisters who came from the Cranbourne district. It was planted by the Cranbourne Patriotic Association, which had worked throughout the war to raise funds for soldier comforts.

Like the Avenue in Church Street, Berwick, the location was selected because it was outside the original Cranbourne school site that the

servicemen and women had attended. The school was demolished in the 1970s.³

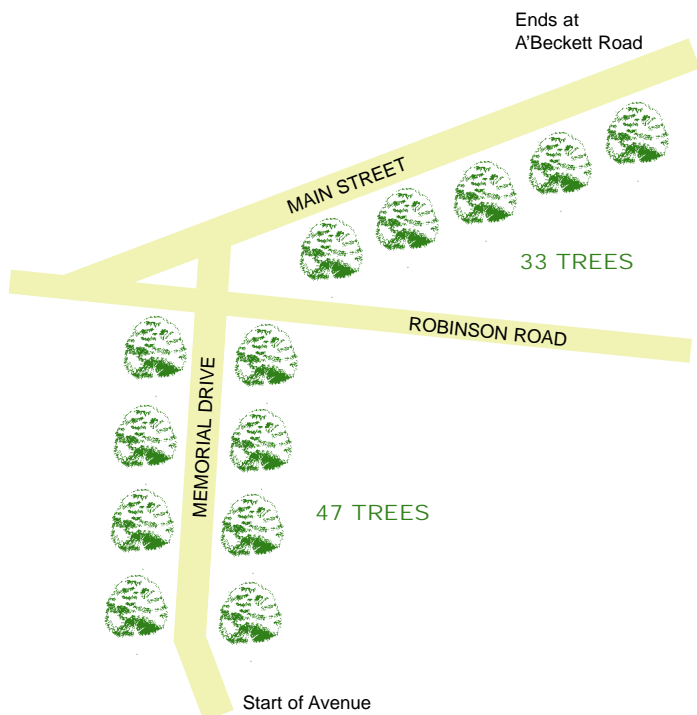
Today this Avenue of Honour consists of 172 trees. Additional trees have been planted in recognition of later conflicts. The Avenue commences at Sladen Street, Cranbourne and continues along the South Gippsland Highway to Cameron Street. It includes mature trees in good condition as well as some younger trees planted in the past 10 years to continue the effect or to compensate for earlier losses.

³ Claire Turner, *Cranbourne and Its War History*, 2001, unpublished manuscript, Local History Archive, Narre Warren Library, Victoria, Australia.



Avenue of Honour

MEMORIAL DRIVE, NARRE WARREN NORTH



The following extract is from the South Bourke and Mornington Journal, 25 September 1919, and describes the value of a beautiful living memorial for the public at the time:

60 trees have been planted in honour of local soldiers, and these (in years to come) will have the effect of beautifying the place. Eleven of the trees are to specially honor [sic] men from the locality who have paid the supreme sacrifice.



ENGLISH OAK (*QUERCUS ROBUR*)

60 TREES ORIGINALLY PLANTED IN 1919.



The Narre Warren North Avenue of Honour was officially opened in September 1919. There were 60 English Oak trees planted to honour local soldiers. The Avenue, as in other townships, was a real community project. There were working bees for the tree planting and for making guards and nameplates. Ladies provided afternoon teas and many townsfolk donated money and time to the project.

Of the 60 trees, there was one for every soldier who enlisted from the district and whose name is on the school honour roll. The site of this Avenue was described at the time as being 'on the road

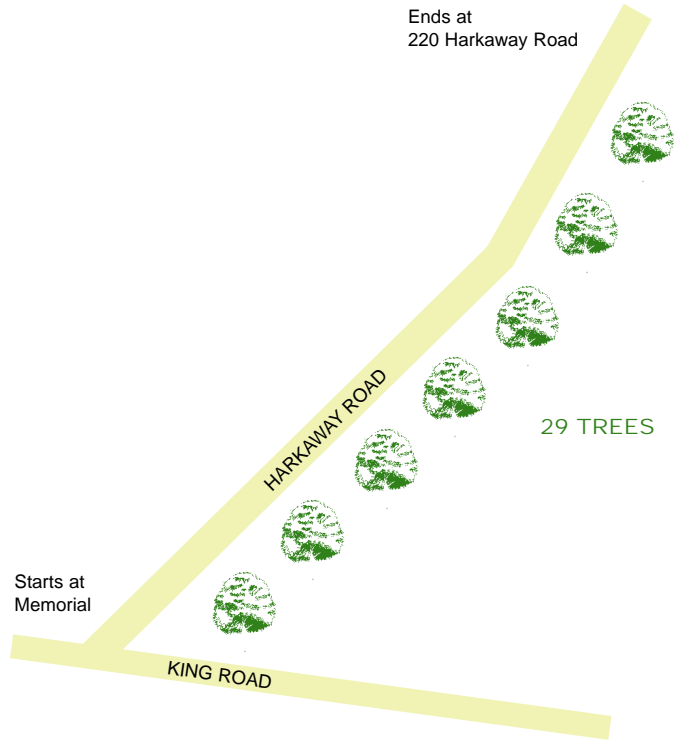
from the station, leading past the smithy, Church of England, and old store'.

The Narre Warren North Avenue of Honour was opened by Berwick Shire Councillors W. G. a'Beckett, R. H. Kerr and Mr. H. Barr and a dedication ceremony was conducted by Cpl. Forsyth of the Returned Soldiers' League.



Avenue of I Conours

H A R K A W A Y R O A D , H A R K A W A Y



The feeling behind creating a lasting memorial for the soldiers was expressed in the South Bourke and Mornington Journal, 16 October 1919:

One thing is certain, we must gather our forces together for the building of a worthy monument, not simply in honor of the dead, but in duty to the living—so that the great things won in war may be enshrined and perpetuated.



RED FLOWERING GUM
(*EUCALYPTUS FICIFOLIA*)

29 TREES ORIGINALLY PLANTED IN 1919.

This is a significant planting of 29 trees on the east side of Harkaway Road starting at the War Memorial adjacent to the Harkaway Road and King Road round-a-bout. As there are no accurate street numbers in this area, the nameplates dedicated to each tree have been used to help provide a positive location. The memorial stone was unveiled by Councillor George Rae on Anzac Day 1959. Like the Tooradin Avenue, natives have been chosen to represent the national pride that evolved from Australia's participation in the War.

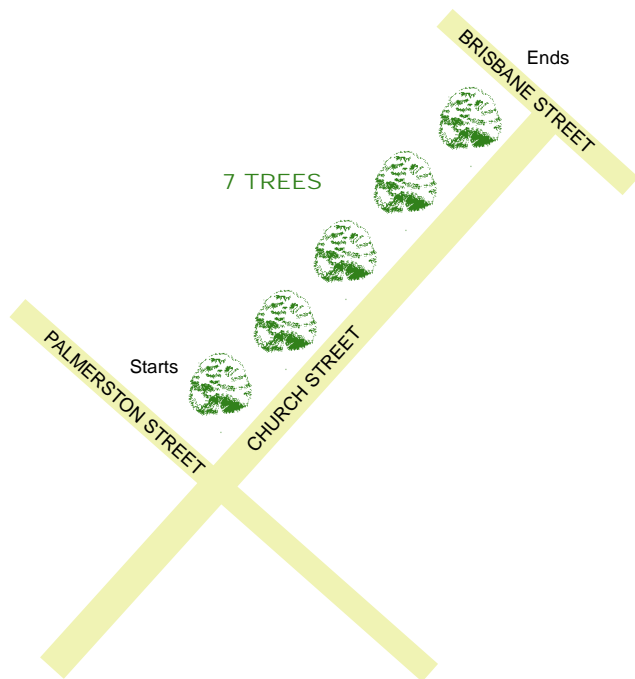
Interestingly, avenues of trees were mostly planted during the final months of the war or

immediately after it ended, but planning for building stone memorials was generally reserved until 1919 and 1920. Rural communities, like Harkaway, initiated their own tree planting as a means of expressing their respect for the soldiers who fought. The stone memorials that often followed required lengthy planning, which sometimes involved conflict over design and expense.

Over the years, some trees have been replaced with Oaks, which are now in a poor condition and could be replaced with Red Flowering Gums to provide continuity to the Avenue.

Avenue of Honour

CHURCH STREET, BERWICK



On 19 June 1919, the South Bourke and Mornington Journal recorded a solemn reunion of the boys from the Berwick Boys Grammar School:

On Sunday, June 15, more than 50 of the old boys of the school from various parts of the state, journeyed to Berwick...Many old scholars could not be reached as over seventy of their number had enlisted for active service abroad.



PIN OAK (*QUERCUS PALUSTRIS*)
 ENGLISH OAK (*QUERCUS ROBUR*)

NINE TREES ORIGINALLY PLANTED IN
 1919.

This site commemorates the boys from Berwick Grammar who fell in World War I. The Avenue consists of seven oaks planted on the west side of Church Street, Berwick, starting at Palmerston Street through to Brisbane Street. The Avenue continued to be a reunion site for former students and the school remains today as a private residence.

The Berwick Boys Grammar School was housed in the residence that remains opposite this memorial Avenue. It was built in around 1877 for

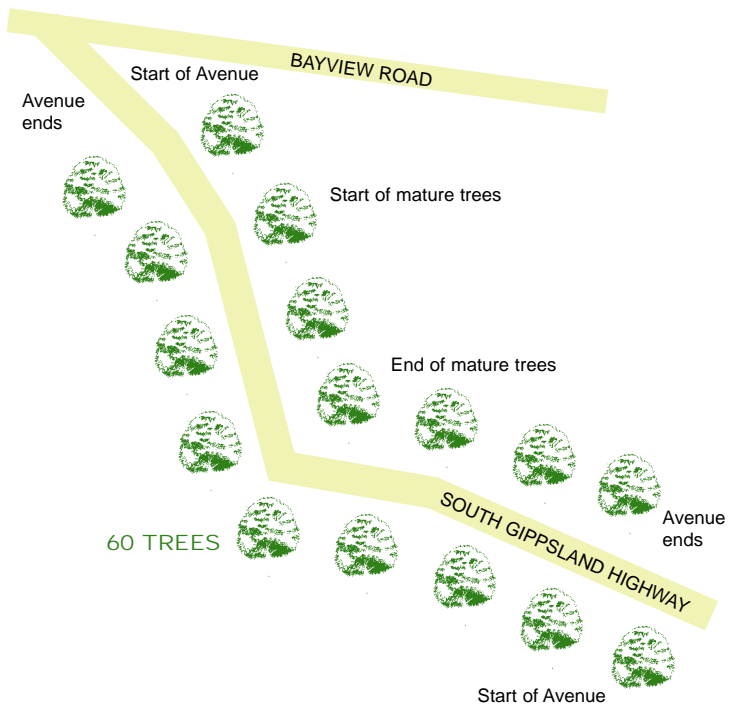
Miss Adelaide Robinson and, in 1882, was opened as a school for boys by Dr. Edward Viousseux. The school was later run by the Anglican Church as a youth centre.

The trees commemorate the following Berwick Grammar School boys: E. D'A Brunn, H. O. Elmes, E. G. Gaunt, S. Hodgson, H. L. Hope, A. E. Kent, C. H. Lyon, A. H. Miller and A. M. Robin.

All trees are in good condition, requiring only minor works.

Avenue of Honour

SOUTH GIPPSLAND HIGHWAY, TOORADIN



There was great support for this planting by Council and the community to the extent that commencing a plantation was simply assumed as a matter of course. This letter to the editor written by Tooradin riding Councillor E. Simpson Hill in the South Bourke and Mornington Journal, 19 June 1919, reinforces this:

The time for planting the above (an avenue of honour) is now at hand...I sincerely hope we shall see this principal extended all over the State, thereby beautifying our land, whilst paying a just tribute to our brave lads and heroes...



FLOWERING RED GUMS

18 TREES ORIGINALLY PLANTED IN 1918.



This planting is similar to the Wilson and Scanlan streets planting in Berwick, with the original planting consisting of only 18 trees in the centre. From this planting, the Avenue has extended north and south with 42 young Red Flowering Gum trees.

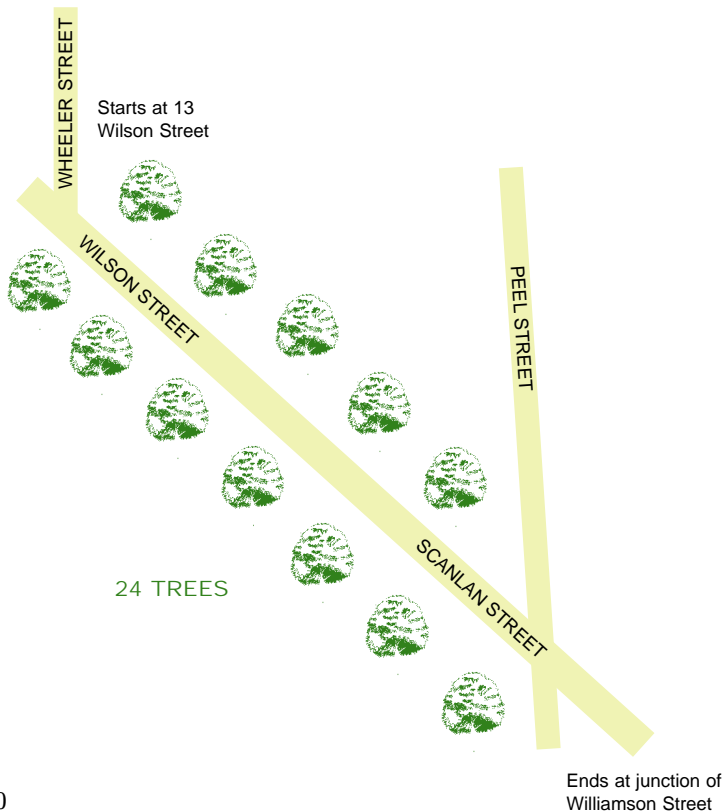
The plantings were most likely arranged by friends groups and Council over the years. The plantings continue into the Tooradin shopping

precinct, however this is probably as part of the development of the area, not as a continuation of the Avenue.

The trees are mostly in acceptable condition, needing minor tree surgery to remove dead wood and damaged limbs.

Avenue of Honour

WILSON AND SCANLAN STREETS, BERWICK



The planting of the Berwick Avenue of Honour was recorded in the South Bourke and Mornington Journal on 26 September 1918:

The planting of the Avenue of Honour was commenced on Saturday afternoon. Wilson street looked quite animated with the gathering of those interested in the proceeding. In all, 35 trees were planted, and the remainder will be completed during the week...



ENGLISH OAK (*QUERCUS ROBUR*)
PIN OAK (*QUERCUS PALUSTRIS*)

APPROXIMATELY 35 TREES ORIGINALLY
PLANTED IN SEPTEMBER 1918

Planning for the Berwick Avenue of Honour began in early September 1918. The tree planting was co-ordinated by the Berwick Progress Association, but many residents made donations of trees and tree-guards. The first tree was planted by Berwick Shire Councillor W. G. a'Beckett and, as reported in the *South Bourke and Mornington Journal*, 26 September 1918, he gave 'a telling speech on the great lesson to be learnt from the planting of these avenues'.

Approximately 35 trees were originally planted in late September 1918. The original trees appear to

have been English Oak (*Quercus robur*) and Pin Oak (*Quercus palustris*). Over the years, residents and the local Council have filled the gaps between the original Avenue trees with various species. The oaks appear to be of the original memorial planting and their size, form and spacing indicate that they are approximately 80 years old.

The Avenue appears to continue along Turner Street with Spotted Gum and Queensland Box, and although these trees are probably 50 to 60 years old, it is unlikely that they were planted as part of the Avenue.



OUR HISTORY



AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY— THE LOCAL SCENE

In the two decades before World War I, the area that is now within and around the City of Casey was largely dedicated to agriculture and grazing with small towns emerging to service the farming communities.

Despite an economic depression and drought in Victoria in the late nineteenth century, the area around Beaconsfield, Berwick and Cranbourne expanded from sheep and cattle runs to dairy herds producing milk and dairy products for local towns and for Melbourne. Agriculture was also expanding to include potatoes and green vegetables. Hops and grapes were grown experimentally. Wattle bark was sold to leather tanners in Melbourne and earlier had even been shipped to Sydney from Western Port.

Cattle and horses, such as Suffolk Punch horses, were bred to suit the local terrain, as well as oxen capable of hauling heavy loads. They carted

implements for clearing scrub land or drag lines for dam construction. Ayrshire cattle and racehorses were bred and flocks of South Down, Hampshire and Shropshire stud sheep were raised. A number of orchards were planted with apples and soft fruit. Timber 'getting' in the Dandenong Ranges continued to prosper but the early mining of gold and precious stones declined in the nineteenth century.

With the construction of the Melbourne to Gippsland railway in the 1880s, city dwellers began to travel at weekends to Tooradin, Narre Warren, Berwick, Beaconsfield and Officer. Tourists would hike into the hills and gullies to log timber or try their luck panning for gold or fossicking for emeralds in the Cardinia, Stony and Haunted Gully creeks. Fishing and boating were major attractions at the coastal villages, with Tooradin, known as 'The Sportsman's Paradise', being a popular holiday destination. Tourism expanded in the Dandenongs

and Upper Beaconsfield, which became known as a wonderful haven for fresh air and grand guest house accommodation.

In 1887, the railway line from Dandenong to Tooradin was opened. The boom in land prices and the drainage of the Great Swamp helped the Cranbourne Shire to become a centre for farming and social activity. Cranbourne became the first provider of bottled milk to Melbourne and also developed sand and quarrying industries.

Berwick had become an important service centre for the surrounding agricultural and dairying communities during this time. By 1900 it was well served by the railway and had a spur line to Wilson's quarry (now Wilson Botanic Park) where road and railway ballast was produced. Beaconsfield had sidings for a sawmill and sand gathered from Cardinia Creek.

Across the region, local cricket, football and tennis clubs were active and a new Boys Grammar School was opened in Church Street, Berwick. Local churches, predominantly Presbyterian, Church of England and Catholic, provided lively centres for social activity and were an important anchor for these early European communities.

Berwick's streetscape reflected its confidence in the future with features such as the Inn; the Mechanics' Institute, which was Berwick's first library; the central strip in High Street, referred to as 'The Boulevard', an enclosed section which contained a much-admired rose garden; and an area opposite the Inn where croquet was played. On the south side of High Street was a Rechabite Hall, now a



Masonic and Public Meeting House. This imposing building shows how a small community could give remarkable support to its members, and how dedicated they must have been to build such a large hall.⁵

The Berwick Sunday school, a timber structure, was built in a day by a 'working bee' and opened in 1916. Next door, on the corner, was the Post Office and Court House, another still familiar sight in the streetscape.

The following are extracts from local newspapers. They evoke a sense of what everyday life was like in the small country towns that are, today, busy urban centres.

Lamplighters walking the High Street, every evening, lighting up the oil lamps before dusk. The Border Hotel, Ye Old Berwick Inn, a popular 'watering hole' with beer served from wooden barrels, and a backroom occasionally used as a mortuary! The local band practises there before giving a performance on the green. Wagonettes meet the trains to collect the Royal Mail—with a mounted policeman sometimes in attendance.⁶



Life in the Cranbourne Shire was very similar to its neighbouring Berwick municipality during the years leading up to the First World War. Cranbourne boasted a prestigious Shire Hall, built in 1875. Its main street was lined with pines and resident businesses included a Coffee Palace and two booming hotels, which offered accommodation and business meeting space as well as the amber liquid. There were grand houses in and around Cranbourne, most notably 'Mayfield', 'Cranbourne House', 'Willowdale' and, further out, 'Harewood'. Meetings of the evangelical Mutual Improvement Society were held in the Temperance Hall, while the Shire Hall was frequently bursting with social and fundraising events. Community spirit was certainly an enduring feature of both Shires.

⁵ The Independent Order of Rechabites was a charitable society formed in Britain in 1835. Its members abstained from intoxicating liquor. The Berwick Branch of the Returned Soldiers and Sailors' Imperial League of Australia bought the premises in 1920 for its meetings.

⁶ *The Berwick City News*, 17 March 1988.

AUSTRALIA AND THE BRITISH EMPIRE

When war broke out in Europe in 1914, Australia had strong ties with the British Isles. Many immigrants had travelled to Australia during the mid-nineteenth century, seeking a new life away from the squalid urban working class conditions that had been created by the Industrial Revolution. Despite the enthusiasm to start a new life in what was thought to be a fresh and prosperous country, most of the people who crossed the 12,000 miles of ocean to reach Australia retained a strong sense of belonging to the 'motherland'. Queen Victoria had reigned for most of their generation's lifetime and the Union Jack was the symbol to which they pledged their loyalty.

Australia's goldfields attracted many immigrants from Britain, as did the vast open spaces where agricultural and pastoral skills could be put to good use. Evangelical religious organisations encouraged followers to emigrate to the underdeveloped colonies to start a new life. Agricultural ambition and religious zeal were driving forces behind European settlement in the Cranbourne and Berwick districts.

The British Empire was at its peak during 1900 to 1914. British Colonialism grew throughout the world during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837–1901). However, by the end of the nineteenth century, Britain unleashed a self-sufficiency policy for its colonies, owing to the strain that an accelerating European arms race was taking on England's resources. Military ties were cut with Australia and the first Australian army was

established. This British endorsement of colonial independence and Australia's sudden need to develop its own professional defence force, combined with other political and economic factors to facilitate the establishment of a Federated Australian nation in 1901. The Constitution for a Commonwealth of Australia was endorsed by the British Parliament and the first Australian Federal Parliament was inaugurated in May 1901 in Melbourne. Melbourne continued to be the capital until the move to Canberra in 1927.

Despite the official beginning of Australia as an independent nation in 1901, the country, along with other British colonies such as parts of Africa and Canada, continued to bend heavily under British influence. Loyalty to the Crown was, on the whole, genuinely felt by the people. The background of a majority of the population explains why there was such enthusiasm to assist with the defence of British interests in Europe through the 1914–1918 War. At the outbreak of war, most Australian families had immediate family ties with Britain. If Britain was not the birthplace of an Australian soldier, it was almost certainly the birthplace of one or both of his parents.



THE CONFLICT IN EUROPE

There are many theories about what caused European nations, the leaders of which were almost all closely-related family, to mobilise their youth into the bloody conflict that was World War I. They range from philosophical opinions that the modern world had reached a cultural crisis of overindulgence, to political debates about Germany's economically-driven ambitions for Empire. Tension had been building in Europe during the first decade of the twentieth century. The philosopher Nietzsche (1844–1900) wrote: 'I test the power of a will according to the amount of resistance it can offer and the amount of pain and torture it can endure and how to turn it to its own advantage'.⁷ He prophesied an era of great wars.

Whatever the cause, the catalyst for World War I was the assassination of a political leader of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Archduke Ferdinand and his wife Sophie were shot dead by a Serbian nationalist in Sarajevo in June 1914.

The Austro-Hungarian Empire had recently invaded the Balkan States of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Serbia wanted these states to be independent and tension mounted over the occupation until Austro-Hungary, and its powerful ally Germany, declared war on Serbia and Russia in August 1914. Germany mobilised its forces into Belgium, violating this small country's neutrality and prepared to attack France. Britain, fearing that the English Channel was under threat, declared war on Germany shortly after.

⁷ B. Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, Routledge, 1946.



European nations had forged a deadly combination of modern technologies with age-old theories of warfare. Britain and Germany lead the competition in a furious arms race that produced a navy of new ships along with a series of never-before-used killing machines, like the dreaded machine gun, grenades, barbed wire, mustard gas and airplanes that dropped missiles onto the helpless people below. The result was a style of warfare that confused traditional cavalry and infantry charges with high-speed machine gun assaults and poisonous waves of modern science's chemicals and gases. It was a war that quickly became a stalemate because both sides were forced to dig into the ground for protection from these new weapons of destruction. It soon became apparent that the winner would be the side with the most men left standing.

The politicians decided that the only way to win this bizarre new war was to send as many men to the slaughter as possible, in the hope that the sheer increased numbers of men would provide the highest probability of winning at the final count. To attract the numbers, a full-blown propaganda machine was launched, with images of the 'German Beast' eating babies that begged men to destroy the 'German Hun'. Soldiers were also conscripted to fight.

Millions of words have been written in an attempt to understand why it was believed that such numbers of men and women had to die in the name of a cause that no-one could really define then or now.



AUSTRALIA ANSWERS THE CALL

Australia 'answered the call' of its allies and became part of the world-scale tragedy that was the First World War. Britain and France called on their colonies to defend British interests against what became known as the 'German Beast'. Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey explores the rationale behind Australia's allegiance to Britain's cause:

Some historians now express their puzzlement that Australia, once the war began in Europe, should almost unthinkingly see herself as bound to go to war. Why did not Australia pause, they ask, before making this momentous decision to fight vigorously on the far side of the world? Australia did not need to pause. The decision to fight on Britain's side, come what may, was unconsciously made years earlier, and made with massive support from public opinion. Her trade was largely with Britain. Her naval defences depended on Britain. She even entrusted, in most matters, her foreign policy to Britain. Without

doubt, self-interest as well as emotion knotted her to Britain. Australia relied on Britain to keep Japan at bay and to prevent France and Germany from intruding into Australia's sphere of influence in the south-west Pacific.⁸

Our young men joined up originally in the belief that the war would be over by Christmas. The majority believed the glamorous posters that advertised the war as a great opportunity to travel and enjoy some good quality sport. The campaign at Gallipoli put an end to this image of the war. Approximately 8,000 Australian and New Zealand soldiers were killed over the eight months that it took Britain to withdraw.

Gallipoli actually caused a new wave of more serious applications by Australian men to join up. This is largely when the boys from Berwick and Cranbourne decided to go and fight in the name of those Australians who had paid the ultimate price at Gallipoli. These men trained in Egypt and were sent to the Western Front, where they fought at far less publicised battles such as Fromelles where 2,000 Australians died in a single night and more than 3,000 were wounded—a frightening example of the many catastrophic military assaults that were carried out during the course of this war.

A poignant tragedy is embedded in local memory. A recruiting drive for the Light Horse, AIF, was held

during the celebrations of the Diamond Jubilee of the Mornington Farmers' Society, held in Berwick in November 1916. Horses were paraded and Berwick's hotheaded young men were challenged to mount and display their talents. They were afterwards persuaded to be sworn in as soldiers and many lost their lives on the Western Front.

Local volunteers were drafted into military formations and, after training at such camps as Broadmeadows and Seymour, were sent to Egypt for further training. A Camel Corps was formed with volunteers from the Infantry Brigade. Australian volunteers joined the Flying Corps and learnt to fly in primitive wooden string and glue 'kites'. Later they flew on operations in France and Palestine.

Many local men from Berwick and Cranbourne Shire districts were in the 15th Brigade, under Brigadier General 'Pompey' Elliott. One such local man was Cpl. T. C. Whiteside from Officer. He was the son of the local Presbyterian Minister and had run a family orchard. His letters, which are astonishingly profound for a young man of just 21, were written to his parents from the front in France. Like many Australian soldiers, Whiteside was seriously wounded in the fateful Battle of Fromelles in July 1916. He wrote:

⁸ G. Blainey, *A Shorter History of Australia*, William Heinemann, Australia, 1994, p. 153.

We went down to the trenches to our relative positions. Did not get there without some trouble for communication trenches were under heavy high explosive fire. Our Platoon sergeant, Wally White, was killed and a private got buried. Never learnt who he was...We hugged the trenches for a few hours while the curtain raiser, the artillery duel, was on. When its chief job was done, viz. wire cutting, the hour was up. The first thin line of heroes get on the parapet and make off for the opposing lines. The first few lines fare the best—for the terrible machine-gun is deadly once he sees the game is properly on. It looked like putting up cardboard ninepins in a hurricane—only it was human beings who were facing up to it.⁹

Cpl. Whiteside recovered from his wounds, went back to the Western Front only to again be wounded.¹⁰ This is but one story of many of the local men who were wounded or killed.

After the initial German advance through Belgium, a



line was held at the Marne and for more than three years, became a battle of attrition with huge casualties on both sides. Most of the fighting was from trenches which, in the wet lowlands of Flanders, became a quagmire of mud. The fortunes turned when the Americans entered the war but the bloody conflict lasted until November 1918 when an armistice was agreed and a peace treaty signed at Versailles in 1919. Millions of soldiers, both sides included, perished during the course of this war that changed the world forever.

⁹ *A Valley in France: First World War Letters*, Elizabeth Whiteside (ed), 1999, self published, Beaconsfield, p. 49.

¹⁰ On his return to Beaconsfield, Cpl. Whiteside took an active part in local sporting bodies and in community affairs becoming Shire President during the Second World War. He was a prominent orchardist and community worker.

COMING HOME

By the time the War ended in November 1918, a total of 329,000 Australians had served overseas, some 60,000 were killed and more than 151,000 were wounded. Families and friends started to raise money for welcome home parties and to erect memorials to those who would not return. This signalled the beginning of a new period of readjustment.

It is impossible to begin to understand the hardship endured by returned soldiers and their loved ones when faced with the task of bridging four years of separation and exposure to the life-altering experience of the bloodiest war in modern history. Returned soldiers were plagued with the mental and physical effects of the war for the rest of their lives.

The challenge of getting on with life after experiencing the horrors of war was compounded by the outbreak of a catastrophic influenza epidemic. The deadly disease had spread from Europe to Australia on the ships that brought the troops home. Many celebrations had to be postponed or were held in the open air at railway stations, tennis clubs and football fields.

National plans had been made to settle some of the returned soldiers on the land. The *Discharged Soldiers Settlement Acts of 1916 and 1917* were passed by the States and the Commonwealth and they guaranteed to meet the cost of settlement. Locally, the Koo Wee Rup Swamp area in the Cranbourne Shire and parts of Narre Warren and Berwick initially provided agricultural blocks to



accommodate nearly 300 returned soldiers.

The soldier settlement scheme became very controversial. Many returned men did not have experience in farming and faced many years of financial struggle with the onset of the Great Depression and serious drought.

This is the climate in which the Avenues of Honour were planted around Australia at the end of the First World War. Communities were eager to demonstrate their appreciation and build memorials that would assist the grieving process.





LEST WE FORGET

The Avenues of Honour in the City of Casey are a beautiful and enduring memorial to the people who served at war. These living memorials are significant for all of us today and for future generations. They give us an opportunity to reflect on and remember those who went before us and contributed so greatly to the way we live today.

The following extract from the *South Bourke and Mornington Journal*, on 3 April 1919, demonstrates the excitement of a local community upon their soldiers' return and is typical of other celebrations held throughout the district.

Berwick was en fete on Saturday. The occasion being the welcome home of recently returned soldiers. The committee spared no pains to make the function a success and had the hearty cooperation of the Tennis Club and loyal citizens. Reception was held

on the tennis courts and the atmosphere seemed charged with the feeling embodied in the words 'Welcome Home' in their deepest meaning. Cr. Pearson represented the committee in a fine speech—gave expression to the delight of relatives and friends in having 'our boys' safe home again. Sgt Thomas responded in a real soldier's speech—few words, but to the point.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Material for this book was gathered from a variety of sources including historical works, local newspapers, private collections and local societies and libraries. The following is a list of sources used and some recommended reading:

Arboricultural Consultants (Australia Pty Ltd), *Report on the Avenues of Honour*, report to City of Casey, October 1999.

Bean, C. E. W. *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–18*, Angus and Robertson, Australia 1937.

Berwick-Pakenham Historical Society, *In the Wake of the Pack Tracks*, Victoria 1982.

Blainey, G. *A Shorter History of Australia*, William Heinemann, Australia 1994.

City of Berwick and Australian Heritage Commission, *Heritage of the City of Berwick*, Victoria 1991–92.

Clark, M. *A Short History of Australia*, Mentor Books, Penguin, Australia 1987.

Gunson, N. *The Good Country—Cranbourne Shire*. Shire of Cranbourne 1983.

Turner, C. *Cranbourne and Its War History*. (Unpublished manuscript) Local History Archive, Narre Warren Library, Victoria, Australia, 2001.

Whiteside, E. (ed). *A Valley in France: First World War Letters*, self published, Beaconsfield 1999.

Local Newspapers

The Berwick City News

Pakenham Gazette and *Berwick Shire News*

South Bourke and Mornington Journal (later the *Dandenong Journal*)

Radio Program

Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 'World War One—Encounter' (radio documentary) Radio National 2000.

Collections

Beaconsfield Progress Association. (03) 9796 1361

Berwick Pakenham Historical Society Collection. (03) 5943 2271

Casey-Cardinia Local History Archive.
Narre Warren Library (03) 9704 7696
www.cclc.vic.gov.au

Cranbourne Shire Historical Society Collection. (03) 5998 3643

Other Contacts

Australian War Memorial (02) 6243 4211
www.awm.gov.au

Berwick RSL Sub Branch (03) 9707 5587

Cranbourne RSL Inc (03) 5996 2769

Casey-Cardinia Library Corporation
Narre Warren Library (03) 9704 7696
www.cclc.vic.gov.au





