

# **A Century of Community**

## **Yesterday Bickford Soldiers' Memorial Hall – Today Harold Hawthorne Memorial Hall**

A speech given on the 11 November 2020 at Harold Hawthorne Community Centre by Rosemary Ritorto, Local History Officer of the Town of Victoria Park Library.

*[Title slide, AKA slide 1, showing]*

### **Introduction**

It was the best of times...

It was the worst of times....

This famous introduction to a novel by Charles Dickens, I think aptly describes the community spirit that was alive, and working in this area one hundred years ago.

Australia had come out of the War to end all wars.

We were a nation grieving the loss of so many of its men. Western Australia and Perth especially, was a small, tight knit community. Western Australia had a population of just over 308,000 in 1918. We had lost 15,000 since 1914.

All around our great state and indeed the nation, there was talk of memorials. The municipality of Victoria Park was among the first to unveil a memorial to the fallen in 1915 in Memorial Gardens on Albany Highway.

The citizens of Bickford (now Carlisle) had lost 16 brave men by 1918, whose names would later be written on an honour plaque with those from World War II. But whose names would forever be tied to this place and this time. Captured in the hearts of their loved ones and etched in our history through the very story of the Bickford Soldiers' Memorial Hall.

These were the worst of times as we had lost so much as a nation, the flower of our youth was gone. Yet these were the times that were heading into the best or better times...

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## **Bickford Park and Bickford Gardens**

James Peet founder of the Real estate company Peet and Co. was selling land in the two estates, that are now Carlisle, in the early 1900s, and onwards through the war and the Depression. In this map of Bickford Park estate from 1909, Rutland Avenue is shown as Queen Street (its original name) and Memorial Avenue is seen as Venus Street.

It is not known exactly where the name of Bickford came from, but it seems as though it may have been the surname of a famous gardener and botanist. However research is still underway in this regard. By the time that the original Bickford Soldiers' Memorial Hall was being built in 1919 the Perth City Council had approved the change of name of the suburb from Bickford to Carlisle.

## **Bickford Soldiers Memorial Hall**

Continuing on with the theory that from 1919, Carlisle, this small and very rural suburb of Perth was heading into the Best of times... We witness the main support to my theory – that of the building of the Bickford Soldiers' Memorial Hall.

A little home on 2 and ½ acres was selling in the Bickford Gardens Estate in 1918 for £180. There was a great community spirit with schools and other facilities being built.

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On the 17<sup>th</sup> of July 1919 the Bickford Soldiers Memorial Hall Association Incorporated bought the plot of land on which this current hall now sits from James Peet, land agent for the amount of £33.

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As the Western Mail newspaper from 3 June 1920 reports, it was “while the war was in progress [that] residents of Victoria Park East, now known as Carlisle, decided to commemorate the services of the men who enlisted from the district, by the erection of a public hall, and a splendid site was obtained immediately opposite the north-eastern approach to the local railway station. As the result of a series of entertainments, augmented by contributions from sympathisers, over £300 was raised, and a band of voluntary workers undertook to carry out the building operations, without payment of any kind. Their efforts were supplemented by a contingent of bricklayers and plasterers from the repatriation continuation classes with the result that the hall, with a seating capacity of over five hundred, replete with stage, dressing-rooms, and all up-to-date conveniences, will be formally opened by his Excellency the Governor on Saturday”. So reported an article in the Western Mail, 3 June 1920 (p. 21.)

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The volunteers, as you can see here, did not have the same safety gear that we have now. Only one injury however, was ever reported in the newspapers of the time and that was of Mr Albert Harrison, a volunteer worker, but not a local soldier from what research shows, was assisting the electricians in positioning wiring for the hall “when he met with a painful accident, [he] fell a distance of 15 feet, and sustained such severe

injuries as to necessitate his removal to the Perth Public Hospital, where he is still undergoing treatment" (Western Australian, 1 April 1920, p. 6)

No mention of Mr Albert Harrison's death or recovery was mentioned in the newspapers, so hopefully he pulled through.

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The women and children also worked hard to support the building work and provided delicious refreshments on the weekends, when work was taking place on construction of the hall.

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This slide shows the hall nearing completion. The front façade is finished, complete with finials at either end of the gable. You can also see below the left window a frame for the memorial tablet, which would be unveiled for the official opening day of the hall.

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As you can see from the photograph on the screen the opening ceremony was a bright, happy and very patriotic affair, with flags flying and quite a gorgeous looking star fitted with electric lights on the front façade.

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The inside of the hall was set for a celebration, with refreshments similar to our banquet, just like we will enjoy today.

### *[Slide 10]*

As you can see from the pictures the tables were adorned with palms and tables lovingly set with napkins.

The Governor, His Excellency Sir Francis Newdegate, formally declared the hall open on 5 June 1920, and in his speech he “expressed the pleasure he experienced in visiting Carlisle, his Excellency paid a tribute to the spirited and self-denying efforts of the men who had gone forth to battle for the Empire. The district had done its share nobly and the memory of those who had fallen would be perpetuated for all time by the splendid building which it was his privilege to declare open” (WAN 9 June 1920, p. 6)

The Bickford Soldiers’ Memorial Hall represents the best of times – a community who came together to grieve, to heal, to remember and to live. The hall was built by volunteers, among them those who had served and returned home to try and fit back into society. They built the hall in honour of their fallen mates.

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## **Soldiers Stories**

### **WWI**

Carlisle lost 16 sons in World War I. They were Labourers, telegraphists, bottlers and carbonators. Horsebreakers, Stovemakers, Merchant Seamen, Clerks and Brushmakers. They lived in the streets around this lovely spot: in Mint Street, Hawkestone, Beatty Avenue, Weston Street, Orrong Road and more.

I would like to show you today, in this brief foray back in time, four images. Images of Carlisle locals who served their country bravely and never returned from World War I:

**Gunner Arthur Coombs GODDARD** was a stovemaker who lived with his parents in Forrest Street, he was 19 when he enlisted in the AIF. Suffering a GSW to the shoulder whilst serving in the Dardanelles on the 12 May 1915, he died of these wounds two weeks later on the 26 May 1915 whilst in hospital in Cairo. He was but 20 years old. In 1918 the Perth City Council renamed Cambridge Road to Goddard Street, Lathlain in honour of Arthur.

**Private Frank Ernest Rushton McDONALD** was a storeman by trade and lived in Forrest Street, now Beatty Avenue. He was six foot tall and had brown hair and blue eyes. Frank was Killed in Action in Belgium on the 20 September 1917, he was 35 years old.

**Lance Corporal Sylvester Leonard ANDREWS** was a Mercer by trade which was a merchant or trader, specifically one who deals in textiles. He was declared Killed in Action at Ypres, Belgium, on 8 June 1917, by a Court of Inquiry. He has no known grave.

**Private Harold Henry ABBOTT** a brush maker for the company Zevenboom and Co. Served at Lone Pine from late September 1915 and was Killed in Action on the 29 November 1915, just a few days after his 24<sup>th</sup> birthday.

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## **WWII**

Carlisle is known to have also lost sixteen sons to World War II. Ten of which were serving in the Royal Australian Navy and were lost with their ships. Thus, as the bronze plaque in the foyer of this hallowed hall says, "They have no grave but the cruel sea;

No flowers lay at their head.  
A rusty hulk is their tombstone;  
Avast on the ocean floor."

Among those 16, are these four local heroes, who include among their number the manager of the Carlisle Hotel, **Flight Sergeant Lionel Wilfred FLOHM**. Lionel and his wife Dorothy lived at the Carlisle Hotel, they had one son named Rodney. Lionel enlisted first in the Army and then in the Royal Australian Air Force. He was killed in a flying battle over Germany on the 21 November 1944. He was 31 years old.

**Stoker Francis Bernard KEENAN** was born in Wagin in 1916, he had blue eyes and brown hair. According to the records available Francis was not married and he lived with his mother at "Cornwall Cottage" on Orrong Road, Carlisle. Francis enlisted in the Royal Australian Navy on the 9 June 1941 only to lose his life when HMAS Sydney II, the ship he served on, was sunk in battle in the Indian Ocean on 20 November 1941.

**Sergeant Desmond Aloysius LALLY** was a Labourer who was single and lived with his mother at 71 Weston Street, Carlisle. Desmond served in the Australian Army and died of wounds in Libya on the 17 September 1941. He was 24 years old.

**Private Leonard James AUBREY**, who judging from his photo was a bright and bubbly chap, who enjoyed a good joke served also in the Australian Army. Leonard died of wounds received in action in Papua on the 2 December 1942. He was 28 years old.

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This hallowed hall's memorial history also stretches to the heroes who fell in Korea.

**Private Lawrence Desmond ANDERSON** attended Rivervale State School. Lawrence was a career soldier and enlisted in the Australian Army in March 1942. He served in Korea, where he was Killed in Action on 5 October 1951. He was 27 years old.

**Private Allen James HEAD** was born in Carlisle and served in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment. He was Killed in Action on the 17 November 1952 at age 19

*[Slide 14]*

The Town of Victoria Park lost three young men in the Vietnam War of 1962-1972: **Lance Corporal Paul Richard Van RIJSEWIJK** from 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, who was killed in action at just 21 years of age.

**Private Christopher William ROOST** who served in the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment. Christopher was Killed in Action in South Vietnam on 23 December 1968. He was aged 22.

**Private Alec Ernest BELL** was a postman from East Victoria Park. He was called up for National Service on July 13 1966 aged just 19. In 2015 the Town of Victoria Park renamed Hampshire Reserve, East Victoria Park to Alec Bell Park.

In the picture here, Alec is checking a young Vietnamese Montagnard boy for fever. The check up was part of a village Medical Civil Aid Project (MEDCAP), carried out by 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

Private 'Dinga' Bell was platoon medic on the late afternoon of 29 January 1968. In the first few moments of the contact with the enemy the Platoon Commander, 2Lt O'Brien, and all the NCOs were wounded including Private Bell who had received a direct hit from a rocket. Even though shockingly wounded, Private Bell tried to get to the other wounded. When he could not move he gave orders to another soldier as to how to help them. Even when they finally got him on to the Dustoff stretcher, Private Bell was still giving advice as to the care of the other wounded. As he was lifted up through the trees, the enemy opened fire again. The Dustoff was forced to leave the area with Private Bell and stretcher hanging underneath. It was later learned that he was dead on arrival at the hospital. He was 21 years old.

He was killed just five days before he was due to be heading home.

### **[The end of the original hall]**

#### *[Slide 15]*

So it is that in 1920, one hundred years ago this year, that the worst of times turned for the better. And even though the Great War was not the war to end all wars, as was said at the time, and the original Bickford Soldiers' Memorial Hall no longer stands, the community did not in the 1960s lose their community spirit when the old hall was lost to fire. The community still called for a spot to gather together. A place where they could meet, dance, and enjoy the freedom and lifestyle so hard fought for. So it was that by 1969 the Carlisle Memorial Hall was built on the same site as the original Bickford Soldiers' Memorial Hall. Today we know it as the Harold Hawthorne Memorial Hall and this place continues the legacy of the community 100 years ago.

*[Slide 16]*

And so I say to you today, ladies and gentleman here gathered.

We Will Remember Them.

Lest We Forget.