

Recommendation : State Heritage Place

NAME: War Memorial Oak

PLACE NO.: 26348

Address: War Memorial Drive, North Adelaide, SA, 5006

SUMMARY OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE:

Description:

The War Memorial Oak tree was planted on Wattle Day, 29 August 1914, by the Governor of South Australia, Sir Henry Galway. It is located in Creswell Gardens on the corner of War Memorial Drive and King William Road, North Adelaide, in the Adelaide Parklands adjacent the Adelaide Oval. It is a large English Oak (*Quercus robur*) with a canopy approximately 30 metres in diameter. It is set in a triangular lawned area, around 25 metres from the road (War Memorial Drive) behind the Sir Ross Smith monument. It has a small, green painted, timber sign with a bronze plaque reading 'The War Memorial Oak planted by His Excellency The Governor Sir Henry Galway on Wattle Day August 29th 1914'. The sign (c.1917) is immediately adjacent the tree, on the North-eastern side with the plaque facing North-west.

Note - An Arborist has not been consulted as part of this recommendation.

Statement of Heritage Significance:

The War Memorial Oak is significant because it marks the outbreak of World War One in August 1914. It was intended not only to commemorate the war but also inspire national sentiment and patriotism. It is likely to be the State's earliest memorial to World War One.

Relevant Criteria (Under Section 16 of the *Heritage Places Act 1993*):

- (g) **It has a special association with the life or work of a person or organisation or an event of historical importance**

The War Memorial Oak marks an event of historical importance, that is, the outbreak of World War One in August 1914.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the War Memorial Oak tree and sign at Creswell Gardens, War Memorial Drive, North Adelaide, be provisionally entered in the South Australian Heritage Register as a State Heritage Place.

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ASSESSMENT OF HERITAGE VALUE:

Criterion (g)

The War Memorial Oak has a special association with an event of historical importance. It marks the outbreak of World War One having been planted on 29 August 1914; 25 days after Britain declared war on Germany. With the British Empire at war, Australia too was at war. The world had not known a war of this magnitude and even in the early months of the conflict, it was widely anticipated to be cataclysmic.

It is likely to be the State's, and possibly Australia's, earliest memorial to World War One. The young Oak with its Imperial associations was a symbol of not only the strength of Britain and its Empire but also a young Australia. It commemorated the greatest war year South Australians had ever known and was planted with forethought of what the war might bring. It marked a time of great trial and aimed to build national sentiment and foster patriotism.

As the war progressed and the unprecedented loss of life was realised, the War Memorial Oak reminded South Australians of the sacrifice made by, and debt they owed to, Australian forces. With the battlefields in distant Europe and lost soldiers never to return to a South Australian grave, this early public memorial may have provided a site for mourners. This living memorial would grow from a sapling to a substantial tree and represented life, growth and hope in a time of death, decline and loss. It provided a living memory of the dead and as a site of remembrance, it honoured them.

The War Memorial Oak was clearly intended for future generations of South Australians. Anticipated to stand for 500 years, its purpose was not only to commemorate the war but also inspire patriotism.

BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

The War Memorial Oak was planted by the Governor of South Australia Sir Henry Galway on Wattle Day, 29 August 1914 shortly after the outbreak of World War One (1914-18). Planted in a prominent position, in Creswell Gardens (est. 1909) on the corner of War Memorial Drive (dedicated in 1925) and King William Road, North Adelaide, in the Adelaide Parklands, the English Oak represented 'soundness, strength, solidity and restful beauty, [and] so well typified the characteristics of the British nation ... [it would] during centuries to come commemorate for many generations of their children's children the greatest War Year and the most critical time of national trial that the world had ever known' (*The Register*, 17 August 1914, p.13).

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World War One

Britain had declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914 and Australia enthusiastically 'pledged full support for Britain' (Australian War Memorial online). Australia's Prime Minister affirmed 'Remember that when the Empire is at war, so is Australia at war' (NAA online). As a former British colony which had only recently been federated in 1901, Australia had a close relationship with Britain and the decision to go to war as a British ally was unquestioned. It was a defining event when a national identity was forged.

Recruitment began one week after Britain's declaration of war and on 1 November 1914 the First Division of the Australian Imperial Force left Australia. In September Australian Forces captured New Guinea (NAA online). It was not long before Australia was actively involved in the conflict. World War One remains Australia's most costly war, with over 400,000 men enlisted, 60,000 killed and around 150,000 wounded. Approximately 35,000 South Australians enlisted and of those, over 5000 lost their lives (Jeffery 2001, p.592). 'Families and communities grieved following the loss of so many men, and women increasingly assumed the physical and financial burden of caring for families' (Australian War Memorial online). It had a profound and lasting effect on Australian and South Australian life.

Wattle Day

Wattle Day had its origins in the late nineteenth century. In 1889 in Adelaide, the Wattle Blossom League was formed as a women's auxiliary to the all-male Australian Natives Association (ANA) (est. in Melbourne in 1871 and in Adelaide in 1887); a friendly society which agitated for Federation. President of the Adelaide ANA, William J. Sowden (later editor and part proprietor of *The Register* newspaper) chaired the Wattle Blossom League's inaugural meeting on 13 May 1890. However it was never well organised and was consequently short-lived (*South Australian Register*, 13 May 1890, p.6) (Wattle Day Association online). In 1899 in Victoria a 'Wattle Club' was established and its founder suggested establishing a 'Wattle Day' (Wattle Day Association online).

However, ultimately, Wattle Day was the creation of the Wattle Day League established in Sydney in 1909, later known, after the federation of wattle leagues (c.1913), as the Australian Wattle Day League (*The Register*, 18 August 1910, p.4). In Adelaide, Sowden was responsible for establishing the state's Wattle Day League following his travels to Sydney (*The Register*, 1 September 1910, p.4). The Wattle Day League promoted patriotism and inspired national sentiment by celebrating Wattle Day on the first day of Spring, 1 September, or the nearest desirable date. The native Australian golden wattle flower was its emblem symbolising hope and optimism. The League established an annual programme of tree planting.

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The first Wattle Day was held in Adelaide and Sydney on 1 September 1910 (*The Argus*, 2 September 1910, p.7). Indeed the first ever wattle planted in Australia by a vice-regal representative on Wattle Day, after the federation of wattle leagues, was in Adelaide on 1 September 1913 (*The Advertiser*, 1 September 1913, p.17).

After World War One the Australian Wattle Day League shifted its focus from patriotism to fundraising. Although it was envisioned that Wattle Day would become a national public holiday, 'it could not be celebrated on a single day; wattles are not at their best in each state at the one time. Anzac Day may have provided a focus for national sentiment' (Bede 2002, p.632). However in 1992, the Commonwealth of Australia declared 1 September each year 'National Wattle Day' throughout Australia (Wattle Day Association online).

The Planting of the Memorial Oak

In Adelaide in 1914, following the outbreak of the war, there was no greater time for patriotism and to build national sentiment than the highly successful Wattle Day. It was a day of 'national importance' and was covered extensively in the local newspapers (*The Advertiser*, 29 August 1914, p.17). Celebrations had begun the previous day with the weaving of garlands and the decoration of national and patriotic statues with wattle by Australian Wattle Day League members in association with members of the ANA. Many of the city's prominent public buildings including the entrances to Government House, Parliament House, the General Post Office and Town Hall were festooned with wattle. Horses and motor cars were also adorned. Even private shops had wattle displays on their buildings and in their windows. Wattle sprays were sold to fundraise for the Mayor's Patriotic Fund and Kindergarten Union. Although celebrations were focussed in the city of Adelaide, other regional towns such as Gawler hosted their own events.

Early on the Saturday morning, 29 August 1914, various Adelaide charitable institutions such as the Adelaide Hospital, Children's Hospital, Destitute Asylum, and Home for Incurables were visited by the Australian Wattle Day League. During the course of the morning a number of wattle trees were planted in various public gardens and parks across the city including Elder Park and Osmond Gardens. However the main event took place in Creswell Gardens where a vice-regal party was in attendance (*The Register*, 31 August 1914, p.7).

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At 11am the formal tree planting commenced where the Federal and State President of the Australian Wattle Day League, Sowden and the local Vice-President, Herbert Solomon led proceedings. The Governor of South Australia, Sir Henry Galway and Lady Galway were guests of honour. Eight wattle trees were planted across the grounds by: the Galways; the Minister for External Affairs, Mr P.McM. Glynn and Mrs Glynn; Mrs A.H. Peake; the Mayor of Adelaide, Mr A.A. Simpson and Mrs Simpson; Lady Butler and Mrs W.J. Sowden. This was followed by the most important ceremony of the day when Sir Henry planted a memorial oak tree 'to commemorate the greatest war in the history of the world' (*The Register*, 31 August 1914, p.7). It was a small, young tree, declared as 'historic' from the outset, chosen to reflect Australia as a 'young' country and to convey that 'its infancy was synonymous with the beginning of the great cataclysm in Europe' (*The Register*, 31 August 1914, p.7).

It was reported that the Adelaide City Council (ACC) and the League considered the essential difference between a monument which by its special nature might offensively flaunt the victories of the battlefield, and a memorial tree, intended to be a chronological landmark of the Great War Year – of the most stupendous conflict ever known, and of the beginning of the most cohesive force which has yet been begotten in the history of the British nation. The bulk and vigour of the memorial oak will in all probability wax for many generations before it will wane; and it is no undue stretch of the imagination to suppose that half a thousand years hereafter the inscription ... will be read with patriotic pride under its wide-spreading branches by the young Australians of the far-distant days to come when Australia may boast a prosperous population of a hundred millions (*The Register*, 28 August 1914, p.4).

Sir Henry declared that the oak was a symbol of 'Old England' quoting the naval song 'Heart of oak are our ships, Heart of oak are our men' (*The Register*, 31 August 1914, p.7). Although planted in war, it would grow in peace and serve as a reminder of the strength of the British Empire. He hoped that it would 'stand as a permanent record of a time of great trial borne by united and steadfast communities ... [and] be a stimulating landmark to the rising generation of the State' (*The Mail*, 29 August 1914, p.2).

It was believed that the tree would 'keep the people in perpetual memory of great events which had now just begun in Europe ... Perhaps 500 years hence ... the children would gather on Wattle Day under the shadow of the great oak tree and read the suggestive lines placed there by their predecessors. And their patriotism would be fired as they thought of the deeds that Britons had done in years gone by' (*The Register*, 31 August 1914, p.7).

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On the day, the Mayor of the ACC consented to exhibit an inscribed plate recording the day's proceedings (*The Register*, 31 August 1914, p.7). By 1917 the plaque was in place and Sowden hoped that it would remind future generations of the 'enormous debt they owed to the Australian Boys of today' (*The Register*, 3 September 1917, p.5).

After the tree planting, celebrations continued throughout the day. In the afternoon a demonstration was held by school children who marched from the Queen Victoria Statue to the Exhibition Building, watched on by a crowd of approximately 4000 people lining the city streets. A programme of speeches, singing and music followed.

In the following year the Australian Wattle Day League erected Australia's 'first monument to the fallen heroes' of World War One (Inglis 1998, pp.78-9) (*The Advertiser*, 8 September 1915, p.12) (Kwan 2001, p.347). The granite obelisk with the inscription 'Australasian Soldiers Dardanelles April 25 1915' was unveiled by the Governor-General. It is located in the South parklands; originally in what was known as Wattle Grove (off Sir Lewis Cohen Avenue) but was later, in 1940, moved west to Lundie Gardens (Jones online). From its establishment to the 1920s Wattle Grove provided a site for memorial services however there is evidence that on 13 October 1915 at the site of the War Memorial Oak a refreshment marquee was set up in Creswell Gardens as part of the first Anzac Day Pageant (held in place of the Eight Hours procession) (*The Register*, 12 October 1915, p.2). Later in the adjacent Pennington Gardens East, the Women's Memorial Garden with the Cross of Sacrifice, unveiled in 1922, became the popular site for Anzac Day services (Inglis 1998, p.282). After much delay the South Australian National War Memorial, honouring the fallen of World War One, was finally erected in 1931 and remains the focus of Anzac Day and Remembrance Day services.

REFERENCES:

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SITE RECORD:

FORMER NAME:	Not Applicable		
DESCRIPTION OF PLACE:	The War Memorial Oak tree was planted on Wattle Day, 29 August 1914, by the Governor of South Australia, Sir Henry Galway. It is located in Creswell Gardens on the corner of War Memorial Drive and King William Road, North Adelaide, in the Adelaide Parklands adjacent the Adelaide Oval.		
DATE OF COMPLETION:	Not Applicable		
REGISTER STATUS:	Description:	Nominated	
	Date:	2 December 2009	
CURRENT USE:	Description:	Not Applicable	
	Dates:	Not Applicable	
PREVIOUS USE(S):	Description:	Not Applicable	
	Dates:	Not Applicable	
ARCHITECT:	Name:	Not Applicable	
	Dates:	Not Applicable	
BUILDER:	Name:	Not Applicable	
	Dates:	Not Applicable	
SUBJECT INDEXING:	Group:	Monuments and memorials	
	Category:	Memorials – Built/Statues/ Plaques/Trees	
LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA:	Description:	Adelaide	
LOCATION:	Unit No.:		
	Street No.:		
	Street Name:	War Memorial Drive	
	Town/Suburb:	North Adelaide	
	Post Code:	5006	

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SITE RECORD (Cont.):

LAND DESCRIPTION:

Title Type: CR
Volume: 6074
Folio: 515
Lot No.:
Section: 1626
Hundred: 106100

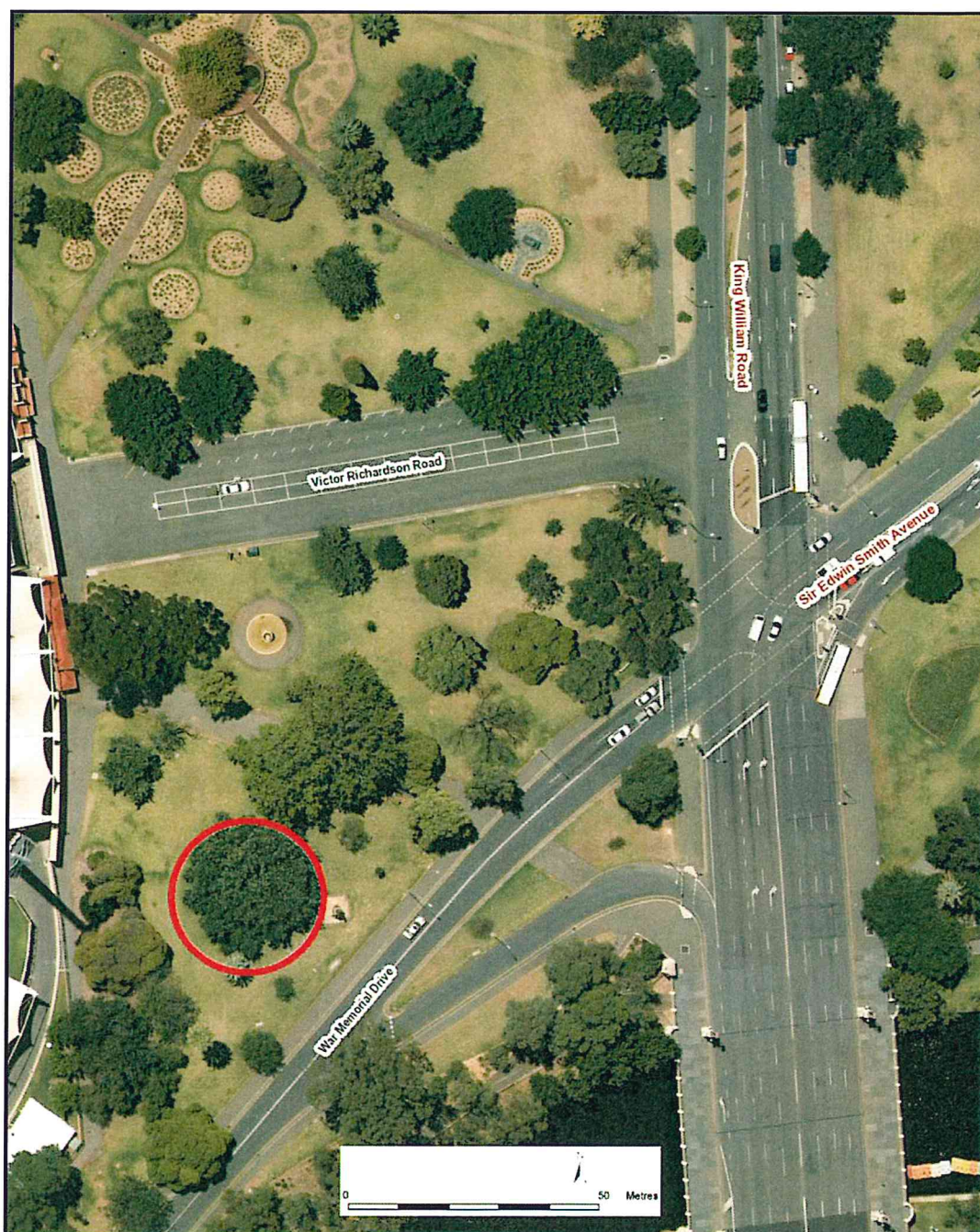
OWNER:

Name: Corporation of the City of
Adelaide
Address: GPO Box 2252
Town/Suburb: Adelaide
Post Code: 5000

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War Memorial Oak – Site Plan

NAME: War Memorial Oak
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The War Memorial Oak tree looking North-west



The War Memorial Oak plaque located immediately adjacent the tree