

# THE NABIAC WAR MEMORIAL

The idea of erecting a memorial in Nabiac to those who had served in *The Great War* had been discussed a number of times but save for the raising of some funds on various occasions, little else had happened until the principal of the village school, Mr G Alec Campbell, became involved.

A public meeting on 22/5/1928 began the effort and the Committee - after consolidating a number of bank accounts - had some £170 available.

By 9/2/1931 the memorial design - which was said to have been the work of Mr Campbell - was accepted and the site chosen was in a declared park beside the police station.

Robert Croker (a war veteran) was awarded the contract to build the memorial and he let it be known he would only employ other war veterans to help him. It was also decided those to be named on the memorial would be:

*all native born residents of the district, regardless of where they enlisted, and persons resident in the district and who enlisted in the district would be eligible for a place on the Honour Roll.*

ANZAC Day, 1932 dawned bright and clear and the regular service was held in the Agricultural Hall after which the Manning River District Brass Band formed up on Nabiac Street opposite the hall. A contingent of some 60 Returned Soldiers fell in behind, 30 Boy Scouts then followed, 20 Girl Guides were next and 25 Cubs brought up the rear. This small cohort then marched to the new memorial where the dedication service was to be held in the presence of a huge gathering.

To begin the ceremony Mrs Sarah Jane Croker was invited by Mr Campbell to release cords to unveil the Memorial's inscriptions. This she did with the words: *On behalf of the citizens of the Wallamba district I unveil this monument in memory of those who fell and those who served in The Great War.*

Mrs Croker had been chosen to unveil the memorial because she was the mother of three soldiers who had fought in *The Great War*: 2005 Private Robert Croker (the memorial's builder), 2010 Private Harry Croker (who was killed on 19/7/1916) and 394A Private Wyllie Croker (who was killed on 22/9/1917). Both Robert and Harry had taken part in the Battle of Fromelles and while Robert had been wounded in the left arm and returned to Australia for discharge, Harry was listed as *Missing In Action*. His status was to remain as that until 2008 when German burial pits at Pheasant Wood were discovered. Harry's remains were later identified using family DNA (provided by a grand-niece and grand-nephew) and he now lies in Plot III, Row B, Grave 7 of the new Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) Military Cemetery.

Captain-Chaplain G E Williams of the Second District Base HQ then dedicated the memorial which bears the following inscription: *Erected to Perpetuate the Names of the Men of this Watershed who Served in the Australian Imperial Forces in the Great War, 1914-1918. Strong in their Pride and Free.*

Mr Campbell also explained the various symbols included in the memorial. The top of the column is in the form of a Celtic Cross and he said this was one of the most ancient forms in the British Isles. Attached either side of the Cross is a sword and in this position they represent The Swords

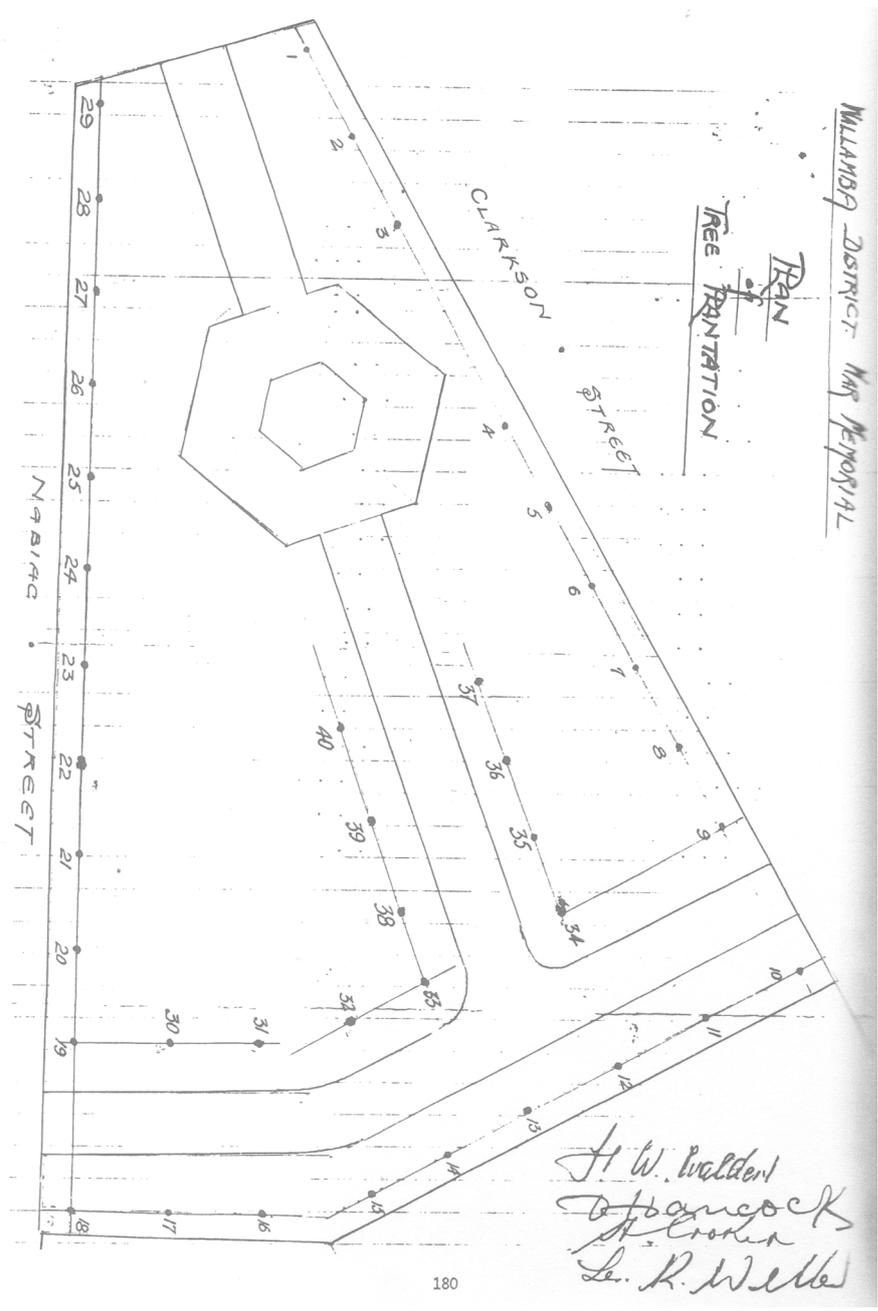


Following the unveiling by Mrs Croker, the dedication by Captain-Chaplain G E Williams, the playing of 'The Last Post' (by 5 trumpeters) and a two minutes silence, Mr Campbell (seen here on the right) again invited Mrs Croker to lay the first wreath on behalf of the soldiers' mothers and this photograph shows her doing that.

The Manning River Times item of 27/4/1932 then listed by name the laying of a further 8 wreaths before members of the public were invited to lay their own tributes and the item related: *... the bases of the memorial were literally covered with beautifully fashioned wreaths of all designs.*

This photograph has been provided courtesy of Daph Croker, Gloucester.

of Justice. At the foot of the column is a circular form on which is inscribed the names of all the parts of the British Empire. Below this are the five marble slabs on which are engraved the names of the 200 soldiers who enlisted from this watershed. A small cross has been placed beside the names of the forty soldiers who were killed. Located within the column and behind the Honour Rolls is a casket containing a document from the Manning Shire Council and copies of local newspapers. Below this is the Stone of Remembrance with the words **LEST WE FORGET** formed in lead as are the names on the Honour Rolls. The memorial stands on three steps and this figure occurs frequently in scriptures. These steps have three diameters and are composed of three materials: stone, bronze and iron. Above the middle marble slab facing East Britain is named and is flanked on either side by the daughter dominions who shared with the motherland, the sacrifices of The Great War. Above the dedication tablet has been placed the rising sun emblem and to see it one must stand in the West and face the East. It was intended to represent the bright morning star that would bring peace and contentment to the obedient amongst men.





It is ANZAC Day, 1936 and this photograph shows several groups of people in the process of planting the forty memorial trees in the park.

The building in the left background is the village police station.

This photograph is from the collection of Les Weller, Nabiac.

In 1936 (Daryll Moran's book *The History of Failford and the Wallamba River District* [p. 179]) the Committee again became active and began work on a beautification scheme for the grounds surrounding the Memorial.

Although advice was sought and received from both the curator of the Botanical Gardens and Government Architects, their suggestions could not be fully implemented but a tree planting programme was undertaken.

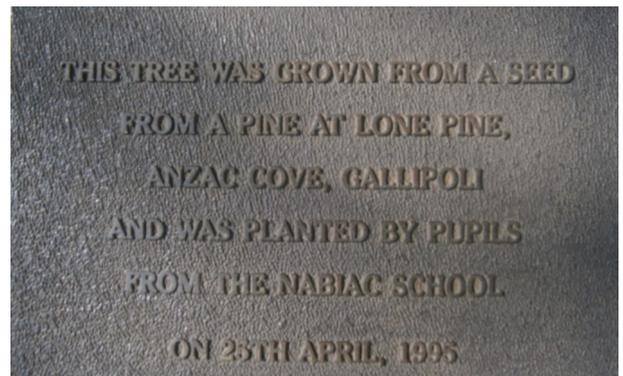
As a part of this effort Misses Maude Greaves and Joyce Hancock were asked to draw names and numbers from hats to effect the allocation of the trees to be planted in honour of each fallen soldier named on the Memorial. The position of each tree is shown on the park plan here.

Sadly, the extent of the tree planting programme is hardly visible to-day and there are several reasons for this: the selection of the tree species to begin with was quite poor and when combined with several droughts through the years, the toll has been heavy; when Nabiac Street was redirected across the bottom of the park in the 1960s, this effectively took out trees 1, 2, 28 & 29; the digging of a zigzag trench across the middle of the park (from between trees 6 & 7 across to between 22 & 23) for VDC training following the fall of Singapore in 1942 took several more; and the inclusion of a number of pieces of playground equipment in the 1950s almost eliminated those that still remained.

A study of the park plan reveals only four trees remain from the original planting: 4, 6, 26 & 27.

Over the years there have been a number of other trees - of various species - planted in the park though it should be said probably the most significant addition was on ANZAC Day 1995 when the pupils from the village school planted a small pine tree that had been grown from seeds collected from the Lone Pine on Anzac Cove.

As a Bi-Centennial gift to the village, the Nabiac RSL Sub-Branch prepared and added to the lower section of the Memorial, another five marble panels which name and commemorate those members of this district who served in World War 2, Korea, Malaya/Borneo and Vietnam. A wooden flag pole (visible in the above photograph) had been installed in the park between trees 33 & 34 but sadly it succumbed to a vandal attack in 2010. The local Council was approached and a new metal pole (with and internal rope) was provided.



## OTHER WAR MEMORIALS/COSTRUCTIONS IN THE DISTRICT

### Nabiac Public School.

This marble memorial was erected in 1919 and is in the school's foyer.

It lists 33 students from the school who saw service in *The Great War* and small crosses indicate those who were killed.



### St Paul's Anglican Church.

This wooden framed, glass fronted, hand painted memorial panel is fixed to a sidewall in the church and contains 35 names.

These were members of the congregation who saw service in *The Great War* and a stylised cross has been included to indicate those who were killed.

### Wang Wauk Soldiers Memorial Church Honour Roll.

Due to falling attendances, this church was moved from Wang Wauk (a location rather than a village to the south of Nabiac) and attached to the rear of St Paul's Anglican Church in 1978.

With the church came this Honour Roll, which lists the 26 members of that congregation who saw service in *The Great War*.



## The Reverend John Albert Knox Perry Memorial Parsonage



John Perry was a Methodist Minister based (twice) in Bulahdelah. Nabic was on the northern edge of his parish and he visited the village regularly riding his horse *Starlight*. He enlisted in the AIF in 1917 (7772 Private John Albert Knox Perry) but was killed on The Western Front on 24/8/1918.

At the Quarterly Meeting of the Nabic Methodist Church Committee in January, 1919 it was decided that, when a Parsonage was erected beside the church, it would be named in honour of the much-admired minister.

The Parsonage was eventually built in 1938 (at 46 Nabic Street) and this photograph was taken at the dedication of the building.

### The Methodist Church, Failford.

This church was built in 1924 but in time began to suffer the same problem that befell the Wang Wauk Soldiers Memorial Church: a lack of a congregation. In 1971 the church was moved and attached to the rear of the Nabic Methodist Church (44 Nabic Street) where it now serves as a hall.

The church came with three stained glass windows and this one commemorates the two brothers who came from Failford and who died in *The Great War*: 2010 Private Harry Croker and 394A Private Wyllie Croker.



## The Failford Cemetery.

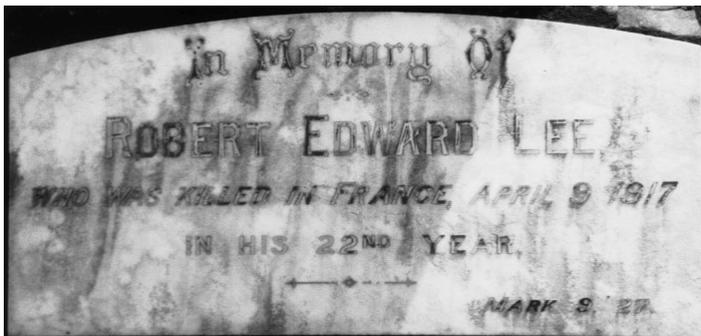
Following the deaths of their respective parents these three memorial panels were created and attached to their headstones in the Failford Cemetery just north of Nahiac. They commemorate the lives of:



### 2nd Lieutenant Hugh Breckenridge

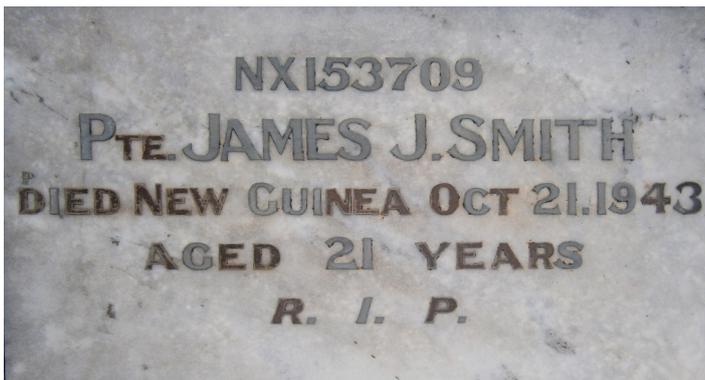
who was a member of the family who created the village of Failford. Hugh was with the 19<sup>th</sup> Battalion when he was killed during the *Second Battle of Bullecourt*.

He was buried in Plot VI, Row C, Grave 14 in the Queant Road Cemetery near the village of Buissy, France.



### 4512 Private Robert Edward Lee

who was a member of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion when he was killed during the battle for *The Outpost Villages* near Hermies on 9/4/1917. He was buried in Plot II, Row G, Grave 11 in the Hermies Hill British Cemetery.



### NX153709 Private James Smith

who was a member of the 2/27<sup>th</sup> Battalion and saw service in New Guinea in World War Two. Sadly, he succumbed to illness and was buried in Plot B2, Row A, Grave 1 of the Port Moresby (Bomana) War Cemetery

## The Wallamba War Memorial Hospital, Nabiac.



Nurse Sarah Jane Nixon built this hospital (37 Nabiac Street) in 1915. By the end of World War Two however, Sarah was married, the mother of three children (with another two adopted children besides) and age was beginning to take its toll. The hospital was also struggling and in 1947 the Nabiac Sub-Branch of the RSL purchased the facility from her and renamed it The Wallamba War Memorial Hospital.

A maternity wing was added in 1960 but newer regulations were becoming more difficult to meet for small country hospitals such as this and it closed in 1981.

In 1986 the newly formed Nabiac Memorial Neighbourhood Centre Committee purchased the building and it began a new life. The old maternity wing (on the left of this photograph) is now a childcare facility, a commercial kitchen was installed to cater for Meals on Wheels, a Community Technology Centre occupies two rooms and an Op-Shop operates from several other rooms.

So successful has the Op-Shop become, it has been forced to construct a large metal shed behind this building to accommodate its services. The profits from this operation helped fund the construction of the village swimming pool, the new playground equipment behind the tennis courts and improvements to the Memorial Park.



## The Nabiac Aerodrome.

As the Japanese Imperial Army moved rapidly south in 1941/1942 an urgent expansion of our country's defences was called for and in 1942 an advanced operating aerodrome was constructed to the south of Nabiac with access via Glen Ora Road.

The air field consisted of four gravel runways, two concrete bomb dumps, buried fuel tanks and several camouflaged hangers for the RAAF Avro *Anson* and Douglas *Boston* aircraft which were stationed there. Allied victories in New Guinea and The Coral Sea however, meant the aerodrome was never used as planned and it was decommissioned after the war.

All that now remains of the war time base are the four gravel runways and two concrete storage facilities. The photograph here is of the northern bomb dump and the building has a floor about a metre above the surrounding ground with a large porch in front. It was built of 220 mm reinforced concrete and measures approximately 9 x 6 x 3 metres high.

With no other established aerodromes in the area after the war, *New England Airways* and then *Butler Airways* used it for a short period before the Wallis Island aerodrome at Forster opened in 1952. In 1954 the aerodrome at Taree was established and it still services the district to-day.

The Central North Coast Sporting Car Club now owns the aerodrome and they hold regular events on its gravel runways.

Other War Memorials in the district include:

**The Coolongolook And District Honour Roll** (in the village hall)

**The Krambach War Memorial Honour Roll** (in the village hall)

**The Krambach Memorial Avenue Of Trees** (both sides of the village main street)

**The Krambach World War Two War Memorial** (in front of the village hall)

**The Failford War Memorial** (near the entrance of *The River Inn Caravan Park*)

**The Darawank War Memorial Park** (beside The Wallamba River at Darawank)

For further information about Nabiac [www.nabiac.com](http://www.nabiac.com)

### **Some additional photos and information**



*The President of The Manning Shire Council, Mr Herb Milligan, is shown here speaking at the dedication of the Nabiac War Memorial on 25 April, 1932. Mr Milligan was a resident of Nabiac. The Memorial is just out of shot to the left and Mr Milligan (and those seated in the photograph) are on a small dais that was constructed especially for the dedication. The elderly man seated to the right is Mr G Alec Campbell, the former principal of the Nabiac Public School and the man credited with the design of the Memorial. The man seated to the left (with his arm on the rail) is Mr Elliott McMaster who was the Secretary of the committee who built the Memorial.*



*This is a photograph of the Nabiac War Memorial has been taken immediately after the dedication and shows the number of wreaths that were laid during the ceremony.*

*Pictured are **the three sons of Sarah Jane Croker**, the lady shown laying a wreath at the beginning of this text.*

*These photographs have been taken from *The Sydney Mail* of 18 July, 1917 (p. 28). Robert built the Nabiac War Memorial while his two brothers were killed in the war.*

*Left to right  
Wyllie, Harry and Robert Crocker.*

