

## MEMORIAL OVAL & GATE

In 2015 nations across the world have been commemorating the seventieth anniversary of VE Day in Europe [May] and will soon commemorate the surrender of Japan in August. On 9 August, 1945, the Headmaster, T.B. Whight, called a meeting at the School with the express purpose of forming a War Memorial Appeal Committee. This committee would devise a suitable memorial to remember all those past students who took part in World War Two and, in particular, commemorating the thirty-six soldiers, airmen and navy personnel who lost their lives during the conflict. A committee of five was formed and on 1 December, 1945 the following advertisement was placed in the Townsville Daily Bulletin:

### TOWNSVILLE GRAMMAR SCHOOL 1939-1945 WAR MEMORIAL APPEAL

A War Memorial Appeal Committee has been formed for the purpose of securing funds to erect a Permanent Memorial to Old Boys and Girls who gave their lives and service at the War. The Memorial is to be in the form of a Memorial Oval and Pavilion in the School Grounds. £3000 is at least required and the support of the public, including all Old Boys is solicited.

Work on the War Memorial Oval and Pavilion could not begin until the Royal Australian Air Force had dismantled the buildings, some sixty in number, and vacated the ovals. This occurred in June, 1946 but in the process they left behind the base of the concrete buildings and a variety of other building materials. In Mr Kim Allen's History of the School he writes that the ovals were littered by piles of timber and other rubbish. Undaunted by this initial setback the committee set about raising money for the project. By October, 1946, close to £1200 had been raised as follows: £993/10/6 from donations, £12/1/6 from an Old Girls' Dance, £57/6/9 from a Ball, £9/5/3 from a Stall at a Sports Meeting, £56/18/0 from the pupils at the School and £10 from the 1st Football team. It is interesting to note the contribution from the 1st Football team. The boys were obviously keen to have a home field to play on. They were to be disappointed because Mr Whight left at the end of 1946 and in 1947, under the headmastership of Mr Logan, little work was undertaken on the Memorial Ovals. This was to change with the appointment of Mr Blank as Headmaster in May, 1948. A former master at the School, who had served with distinction as a navigator with the RAAF during the War, Mr Blank approached his appointment with formidable vigour.

One of the first tasks that Mr Blank commenced was to develop the War Memorial Oval and to provide adequate sporting facilities for the students. At Speech Day in 1948 Mr Blank announced that plans and specifications had been drawn up to level the sports areas and build a pavilion. The plan envisaged the construction of an oval on the south-western end, with a pavilion in the corner overlooking the whole of the ground with the Sports Reserve and the sea in the background. It was envisaged that the Memorial Oval would encompass two cricket wickets, two football fields and a basketball court. By the end of 1949 the levelling and top-dressing of two fields was well advanced and an attempt was made [unsuccessfully] to install a watering system.

Financing the project would always be a problem and on 2 March, 1949, a special combined meeting of the Trustees and the War Memorial Committee met to discuss the project. At this meeting the Trustees proposed that they take over the project but this, at first, met with some resistance by the Committee. After much debate the project was finally handed over to the Trustees with the proviso that the Trustees erect the Pavilion as envisaged in the original plan and that the Oval be fenced. In return the Committee handed over the funds raised plus the £924 subsidy from the government. Further to this the Trustees would provide a further £300 gifted to the School by Treasury.



It was not until 1951 that most of the work on the top oval was completed. In his Speech Day Report of 1951 Mr Blank stated that: "I am very pleased to announce at long last that the work of levelling the sports ground has been completed. The fence has been almost completed. The Memorial Gates have been swung" In his report Mr Blank mentioned that the cost had exceeded £3000 but it was hoped to raise the rest of the money by past student donations. He also added that the project would never have been completed but for the volunteer work from past students, students and a group of Trustees. The Pavilion which was part of the inaugural plan of the War Committee was finally completed in 1955.

Many changes have, over the years, taken place on the Ovals but in essence they remain the way the Committee envisaged them in 1945. The Pavilion has gone but this was necessitated due to the poor condition of the structure. In 1995, during the VP50 celebrations, a special assembly was held at the Memorial Gates to re-dedicate the Memorial. In 1998, a Lone Pine Tree was planted close to the Memorial Gates to commemorate all those past students who fought in World War One. In 2015 six further trees will be planted on the Ovals to commemorate the six Past Grammarians who died at Gallipoli.

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