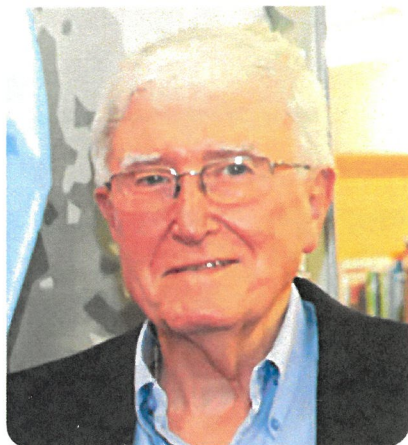


# Botany Historical Trust

NEWSLETTER MAY 2023







**Robert Hanna**

# PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Since my last report in the December 2022 newsletter there has been more sad news for the Botany Historical Trust.

Clarence Jones, a long serving member of the BHT Executive, died suddenly on 14 March this year. You will recall that the Mayor, Dr Christina Curry, presented Clarrie, as we knew him, with his life membership of the Botany Historical Trust at last year's Trust Christmas function.

Clarrie served on the Trust's Executive from 1997 until 2021. Clarrie played a key role in the success of the Botany Historical Trust. His commitment to, and love for the Botany community, its past, its present and its future, is to be commended.

Clarrie was an old Botany Boy. He grew up in Booralee Street, Botany, which was the location of Botany's Fishing Town.

Clarrie's family were part of that fishing community. Clarrie recalled the history of that area, and many other incidents and events in Botany over his lifetime, many of them humorous ones.

I attended Clarrie's funeral at Little Bay, along with fellow Executive members, on 24 March. The Nurses Memorial Chapel, where the service was held, was full to overflowing. On behalf of the members of the Botany Historical Trust I express my sincere and heartfelt sympathy to Clarrie's family, and will remember his service to the BHT.

On a brighter note, a BHT member, Carole Nestor, expressed an interest in filling a vacant Executive Committee position. Since then, Carole has submitted her nomination, which I have forwarded to Bayside Council with a recommendation that she should join the Executive.

With another ANZAC Day commemorated recently, you may recall I had an article in the June 2022 newsletter on Private George Couper and Corporal John Dymond who were killed in action in World War I. I have an article in this newsletter on brothers Alfred and George Benham, and George Cecil Armstrong who also served in World War I. While George Benham survived the war, Alfred Benham and George Armstrong were killed in action. Their war service is part of this community's history.

A separate wartime story of a Botany Boy who was killed in World War II has recently come to my attention. Oscar McFadden was a Flight Sergeant in the RAAF who served with RAF Bomber Command Squadron 166. Oscar, who lived in Bay Street, Botany, was the radio operator on a Lancaster Bomber that went missing on a raid over Germany in May 1944. The crew were never found.



Why I mention Oscar is that his name does not appear on the Botany War Memorial with other men from Botany who died on active service in World War II. With the support of the Botany RSL Sub-Branch, I am hoping we can have Oscar's name added to the memorial. If there are any members of the BHT who knew the McFadden family, and have any further information on Oscar, I would be grateful if they could contact me through Bayside Council.



On 5 April Leonie Bell gave a talk at the Mascot Library on "Stannumville: Suburb in the Sand", a history of a temporary housing settlement in the old Botany Municipality during World War I. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend Leonie's presentation, which I am told was well received.

I am hoping that the BHT will have news shortly on forthcoming excursions to places of interest. As always, I wish to thank Bayside Council staff for their continuing support of, and assistance with, Trust activities. In particular; Bobbi Mayne, Alison Wishart, Kirsten Broderick and Cate Kloos.

Congratulations to our former Mayor and BHT Patron, Ron Hoenig, who since the recent State elections, is now the Minister for Local Government. Also, congratulations to Michael Daly, Member for Maroubra, who is now the NSW Attorney General.

**Robert Hanna**  
President, Botany Historical Trust

**2023 MEETING SCHEDULE: 6 FEBRUARY, 1 MAY, 7 AUGUST AND 6 NOVEMBER**

**THE COMMITTEE**



**Robert Hanna**  
President

**Christopher Hanna**  
Senior Vice President

**Jacqueline Milledge**  
Vice President

**Richard Smolenski**  
Treasurer

**Jo Jansyn**  
Councillor

**Jennifer Muscat**  
Councillor

**Peter Orlovich**  
Committee Member

**Warren Hensley**  
Committee Member

**Denis Muller**  
Committee Member

**Vacant**  
Secretary



We have Committee Member positions vacant and we invite members to apply.

If you are interested please email: **council@bayside.nsw.gov.au** for the attention of the Botany Historical Trust





# BOTANY ANZACS WORLD WAR I



**In our June 2022 newsletter, I told the story of two World War I soldiers whose names are on the Botany War Memorial: Corporal John Dymond and Private George Couper.**

**Two more boys from Botany who served and died in World War I, were Alfred Henry Benham and George Cecil Armstrong. Alfred's older brother George Benham's story is also included, though he survived the war.**



Alfred Benham is most likely the first boy from Botany to be killed in action in World War I. He enlisted in the AIF on 14 May 1915. He was only 20 years old at the time, and therefore needed his parents' permission to enlist. His mother gave her permission. Alfred had previously spent two years in the army cadets, and two years in the militia. He lived with his family in Tenterden Street, Botany.

After basic training, Alfred arrived in Egypt and was posted with the 13th Battalion to Gallipoli. On 8 August 1915, the 13th Battalion was involved in an attack on Abdel Raman Bar, in what was known as Australia Valley.

On 9 August, the Unit Diary records that the 'enemy advanced on our left but were practically wiped out by our fire.' The Battalion lost 13 men killed, and 15 were wounded in action.

Alfred had achieved the rank of Corporal by this time. He was one of the 15 wounded in action, having sustained a gunshot wound to the head. He was evacuated to the No. 19 General Hospital in Alexandria on 13 August, where he died of his wounds on 15 August. Seven days later, on 22 August, another Botany boy, Corporal John Dymond, also of the 13th Battalion, was killed in the attack on Hill 60.

A poignant reminder in the Army records of the time is the process of informing next of kin of a death, and the return of personal possessions. Alfred's mother received these in due course, however, was bemused to find a pair of false teeth and a pipe, neither of which were Alfred's. She returned these to the AIF. Alfred's pocket watch was returned to her, and this is one of the items donated to Bayside Council by the relatives of his family.

For those who watched the recent ABC series *Back in Time for The Corner Shop* that is set in Botany, there was a reference to Alfred Benham. The Ferrone family featured in the series covering the 1850s to the 1990s.





Alfred Benham's pocket watch

Their coverage of the period from 1910 to 1920 recalled the story of Alfred and mentioned he may have been in their shop before the First World War. The Ferrones attended last year's ANZAC Day Dawn Service at the Botany War Memorial and laid a wreath at the Memorial.

Alfred's older brother, George, who survived the war, enlisted on 26 August 1914, just after WWI started. Previously, he had been in an artillery unit in the militia for six years, attaining the rank of acting sergeant major. On joining the AIF, he was posted to artillery units with the rank of sergeant.

In September 1915, he served with Second Brigade, First Division in Gallipoli. In 1916 he was posted to artillery units on the Western Front and was promoted to officer rank as Second Lieutenant on 25 November 1916. He was further promoted as First Lieutenant on 27 December 1917.

George's army records show that while in France he was wounded twice, was gassed, and suffered influenza. Consequently, he spent considerable time in convalescent hospitals in England. He returned to Australia in 1920 and a certificate of appreciation given to him by Botany Municipal Council is on the front cover of this issue.

George Cecil Armstrong, a market gardener from Stephens Road, Botany; enlisted in the AIF on 10 August 1915 at the age of 20 years. Like other boys from Botany, he was posted to the 13th Battalion. Prior to enlistment, he had spent 4 years in the citizen militia. In September 1916, the 13th Battalion was at Pozieres in Belgium, on the Western Front. His unit was sent to a place known as the Crater, where it relieved a Canadian Unit. Up until then the unit had been held in reserve.

The Unit Diary records that on the morning of 21 September, the trenches received heavy shelling and enemy fire and one soldier was wounded. George Armstrong's records show that he received a gunshot wound to the abdomen on 21 September. He was taken to the Number 8 Casualty Clearing Station, where he died of his wounds the following day.

Regrettably, it seems that George was the only casualty on that occasion. His mother received a pension of £1 per fortnight after the war.

I'm hoping that as one reads the names of those on the Botany War Memorial who died in action, one can recall their individual stories.

*Lest we Forget.*

**Robert Hanna**  
President, Botany Historical Trust



# The Benham Brothers of Tenterden Road, Botany



Rob Hanna's article on the Botany Anzacs refers to donations made to Bayside Library Service of memorabilia related to the war service of Alfred and George Benham, residents of Tenterden Road, Botany. Thanks to a series of donations, Bayside Library Service now has a significant collection of photographs, letters, documents, and memorabilia that capture the wartime experiences of the Benham brothers, their fellow soldiers, and their family and friends who lived through the war on the 'Home Front'.



The collection contains a wide range of material and is unusual in that it includes over 40 condolence cards, letters and notes written to the family members of Alfred Benham after his death on 15 August 1915 from wounds received at Gallipoli. This condolence correspondence - written at the height of Australia's pride in the achievement of our soldiers at Gallipoli - offers a rare insight into the feelings of those living through this crucial period of our history.

All the condolence correspondence expresses the writer's 'deep and sincere sympathy' for the loss of Alfred Benham, but almost every writer also expresses absolute certainty that Alfred's family will find solace in the fact that Alfred died for his country. A typical letter is one from a family friend, Mary Burns, who writes of the consolation it is to know that Alfred, 'gave his young life for his country, and that his was as much the death of a hero, as that of any of his brave comrades who fell on the shores of Gallipoli.'



Alfred Benham c.1913

The purchased condolence cards have clearly been designed to convey the same message: the death of the soldiers is rendered meaningful and heroic by the fact that they have sacrificed their life for their country. At least seven individuals chose the same condolence card to send to the Benham family. The front of their chosen card shows a picture of an angel holding a laurel wreath over the bodies of three dead soldiers. Underneath is the biblical quotation, 'Greater love hath no man than this'; this same quotation appears on a number of the other condolence cards sent to the Benham family.



The correspondence also creates a vivid picture of the strength of suburban community life in the early twentieth century. Aside from the notes, letters and cards the Benham family received from neighbours and friends, there were also ones from associations such as the Ark of Safety No 73 P.A.P.S. of A. (the local branch of this Protestant Association); the No 82 L.O.L (Loyal Orange Lodge, Botany); the Methodist Young Men's Association; the Knox Institute Mascot; and the Municipality of Botany.

The condolence letter from the Town Clerk of the Municipality of Botany to Mr J. Benham is brief, typed, succinct and completely impersonal,

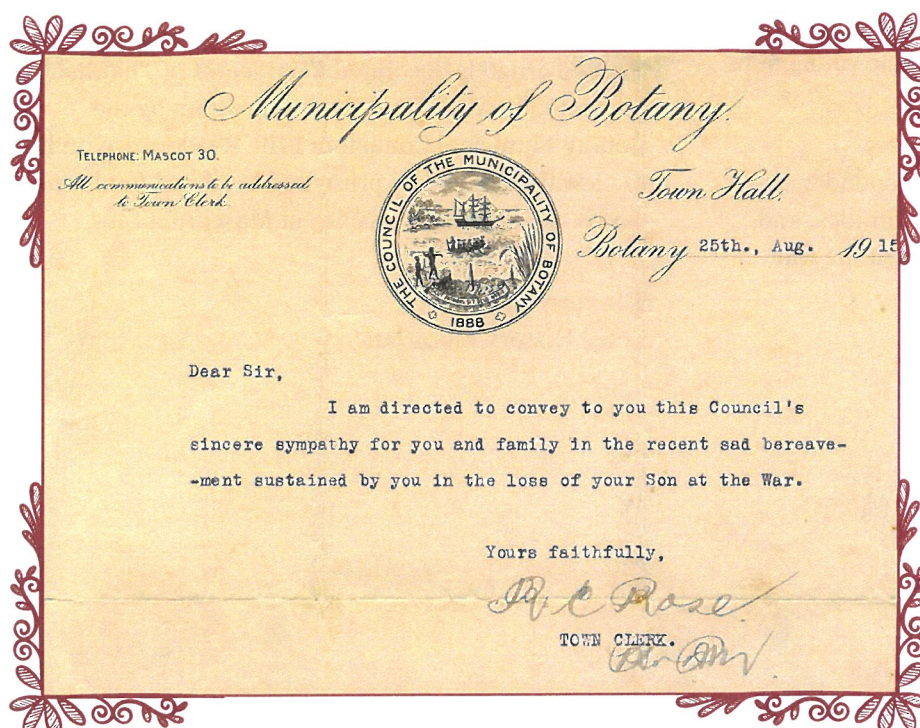
*'Dear Sir,*

*I am directed to convey to you this Council's sincere sympathy for you and family in the recent sad bereavement sustained by you in the loss of your Son at the War.*

*Yours faithfully...'*

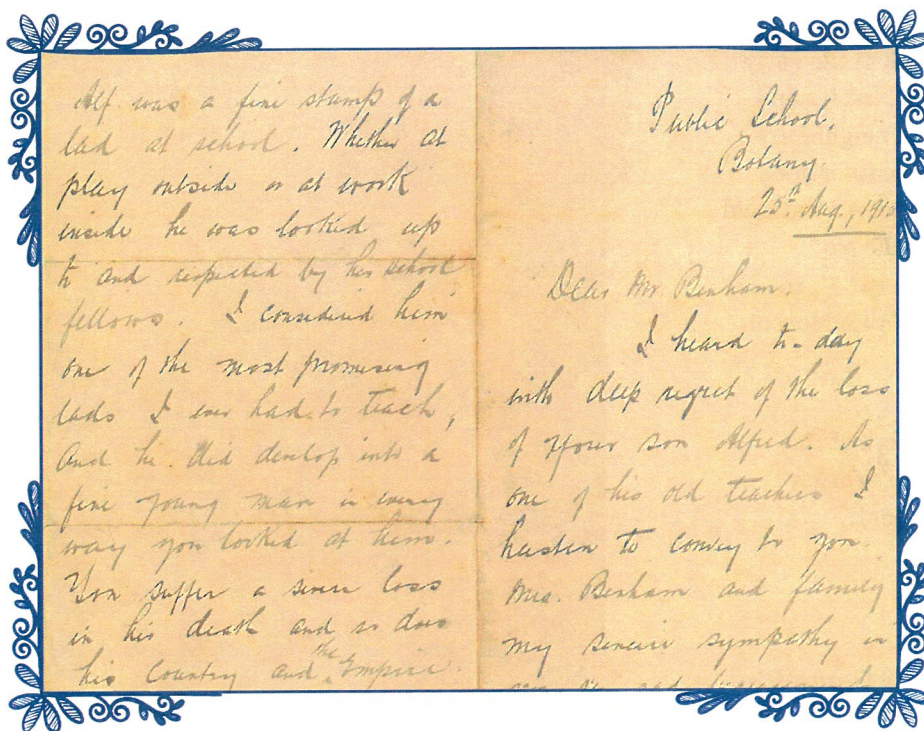


George Benham



The condolence letter sent to Alfred Benham's father by the Town Clerk of the Municipality of Botany in August 1915





A section of the condolence letter sent to Alfred Benham's father by one of Alfred's former teachers at Botany Public School

In stark contrast to this, is a three-page handwritten letter from one of Alfred's former teachers at Botany Public School, which includes a lovely description of Alfred: 'Alf was a fine stamp of a lad at school. Whether at play outside or at work inside he was looked up to and respected by his school fellows. I considered him one of the most promising lads I ever had to teach and he did develop into a fine young man in every way you looked at him.'

Taken as a whole, this condolence correspondence reveals much about our soldiers, their families, and the feelings of all those who lived through the war years.

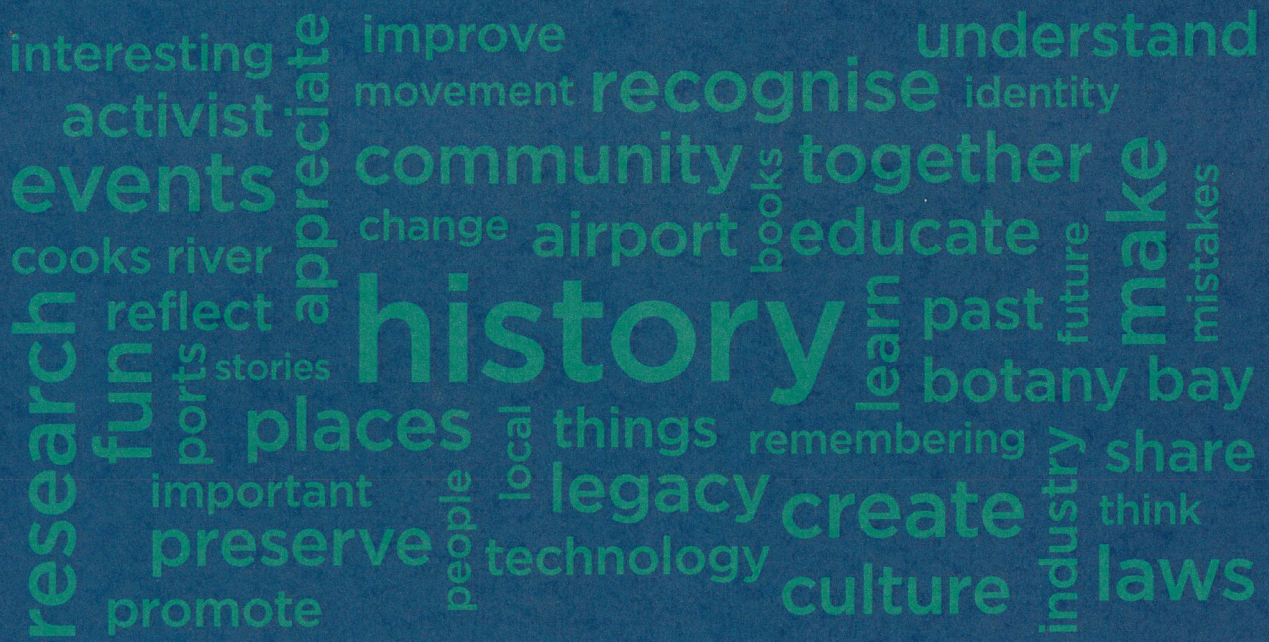
Bayside Library Service is extremely fortunate to now have this collection of World War I memorabilia in our archives and we would like to thank the donors of this invaluable material: Allan and Laurel Watts, Lyall Brown and Christine McGuigan.

Grant funding has been used to conserve and digitise the two ornately decorated Certificates of Thanks presented to Alfred and George Benham by the Botany Municipal Council in 1919. Readers are invited to view the Certificate presented to Alfred Benham, which is currently on display at Mascot Library.

**Kirsten Broderick**  
Local History Librarian







Bayside Council invites high school students and adults to participate in the

# 2023 Ron Rathbone Local History Competition

A competition for works of original research on any aspect of the history of the Bayside Council area.

**Open Category | Prize Pool \$6,000**

**High School Category | Prize Pool \$2,000**

The Open Category, designed to encourage original research into the history of the Bayside Council area, is open to everyone. Entrants may submit an entry on any aspect of the history of the Bayside Council area. This category has an overall prize pool of \$6,000, with the author of the winning entry receiving \$5,000.

The High School Category, open to all High School students, is designed to encourage students to learn about the history of the Bayside Council area and to develop their own research and writing skills. Student entrants have two options. They can either submit an essay answering the question: "Why is Bayside's local history important?"; or they can write an essay on any subject or topic they choose, as long as it is related to Bayside's local history. The High School Category has a prize pool of \$2,000.

Entries are now open and close at 5pm on Thursday 20 July 2023. Entry forms and guidelines are available at: [www.bayside.nsw.gov.au/ronrathbone](http://www.bayside.nsw.gov.au/ronrathbone)



*In March 1912, Agnes Gibson set sail for Sydney on a journey that would change her life. She kept a detailed log of her voyage, which was passed onto her descendants. One hundred years later, her grand-daughter Anne Field, put a story about her life into a bottle, and committed it to the Southern Ocean as a special tribute to her Glaswegian grandmother.*

Come along to Sans Souci Library and hear Anne tell a story of adventure, which honours the bravery of our early British immigrants and discusses our social history.

Anne is a local historian and author, and a former secondary school teacher and Local Government Councillor.

**Saturday 20 May 2023**  
**10:00am – 11:30am**  
**Sans Souci Library**  
**104 Russell Avenue**

Refreshments provided.

Please RSVP by Wednesday 17 May 2023 to [cate.kloos@bayside.nsw.gov.au](mailto:cate.kloos@bayside.nsw.gov.au) or call **02 9366 3882** or **Eventbrite: [baysidensw.org/anne-field-talk](https://baysidensw.org/anne-field-talk)**



Agnes Gibson and Robert Cochrane on their wedding day, 24 April 1912. The Presbyterian Manse at Balmain, Sydney.



Anne Field about to commit her message in a bottle to the Southern Ocean, 2012

*message*  
IN A  
*bottle*





Dorothy stands in front of a photograph taken of herself and her niece in 1957

# Swimming

## IN BOTANY AND THE BAY

**ON SATURDAY 18 FEBRUARY, MAYOR DR CHRISTINA CURRY OPENED THE LATEST SOCIAL HISTORY EXHIBITION AT MASCOT LIBRARY.**

*Swimming in Botany and the Bay* shows how swimming was, and still is, an integral part of living in the Botany area. It traces the attempts by the local Council over 70 years, to build a suitable swimming facility for residents. The exhibition then looks to the future, and the re-development of the Botany Aquatic Centre.

A highlight of the launch was the fact that so many local people, who feature in the exhibition, were able to attend. The main exhibition photo shows Dorothy, who grew up in a house which backed onto Botany Bay, swimming in the water near Banksmeadow with her niece Sharon.



L-R Cllr Liz Barlow, Cllr Jo Jansyn, Yvonne (mother of Sharon, the baby in the main photograph), Dorothy (in the main photo), Mayor Dr Christina Curry, Cllr Jennifer Muscat, Rob Hanna, President of the BHT at the launch.

Mayor Curry said: "It is wonderful that Dorothy, and Sharon's mother, Yvonne, are able to join us today for the launch".

A crowd of 50 people, mostly members of the Botany Historical Trust, attended the launch.

*Swimming in Botany and the Bay* is on display at Mascot Library until **Monday 31 July 2023**

**10:00am - 6:00pm**  
**Monday to Friday**

The Library is located at **2 Hatfield Street, Mascot**



On Wednesday 5 April Leonie Bell gave an illustrated talk titled: *Stannumville: suburb in the sand* at Mascot Library. Leonie won the 2022 Ron Rathbone Local History prize for her research about Stannumville.

## Leonie Bell

# Stannumville: suburb in the sand



Leonie Bell in front of a map showing the location of Stannumville

The event was well attended by BHT members and other members of the public with an interest in local history. The talk was well received, and many questions were asked about this interesting topic that most attendees had not known about prior to the talk.

If you missed the talk but would like more information about Stannumville, you can find this here:

**[baysidensw.org/stannumville](https://baysidensw.org/stannumville)**

Leonie Bell explaining the different housing options that were available at the time



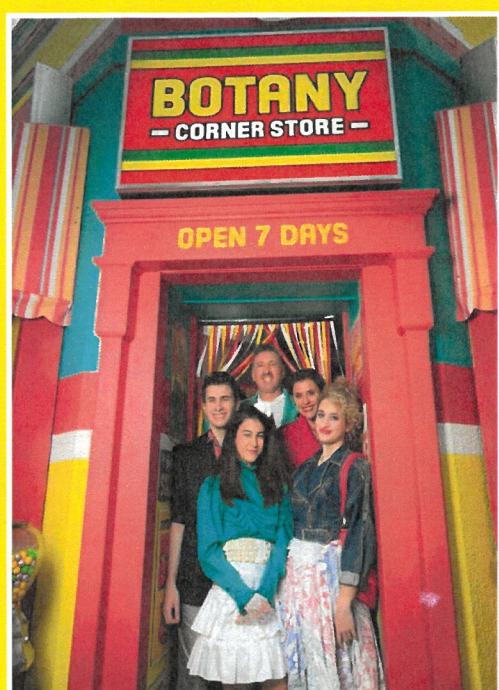


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# ABC PROGRAM

## BACK IN TIME FOR - THE CORNER SHOP -



If you've tuned in to the ABC TV program *Back In Time For The Corner Shop*, you might have recognized an unassuming former shop in Botany. The series was filmed in Botany and includes many local residents as extras, who come into the shop to buy goods and receive deliveries.

The program also features the Botany War Memorial at Booralee Park, and that episode was filmed on Anzac Day 2022. If you look carefully, you will see BHT President Rob Hanna's back, as he lays a wreath.

The program producers wanted the name of a local lad, who might have bought sweets at this corner shop, who fought at Gallipoli and whose name was engraved on the war memorial. Council's Local History Librarians did a substantial amount of research for the show and were able to put them in touch with Alfred Benham's relatives (see Rob Hanna's article in this edition for more on Benham).

And, in a strange coincidence, another Bayside Librarian lived in the back of the corner shop (which features in *Back In Time For The Corner Shop*) from 2000-2018 and helped her husband to run the shop. *Back In Time For The Corner Shop* is available to view on abc iview.

## BACK IN TIME FOR THE CORNER SHOP

WITH ANNABEL CRABB





# AIR RAID SHELTER

## IN MASCOT

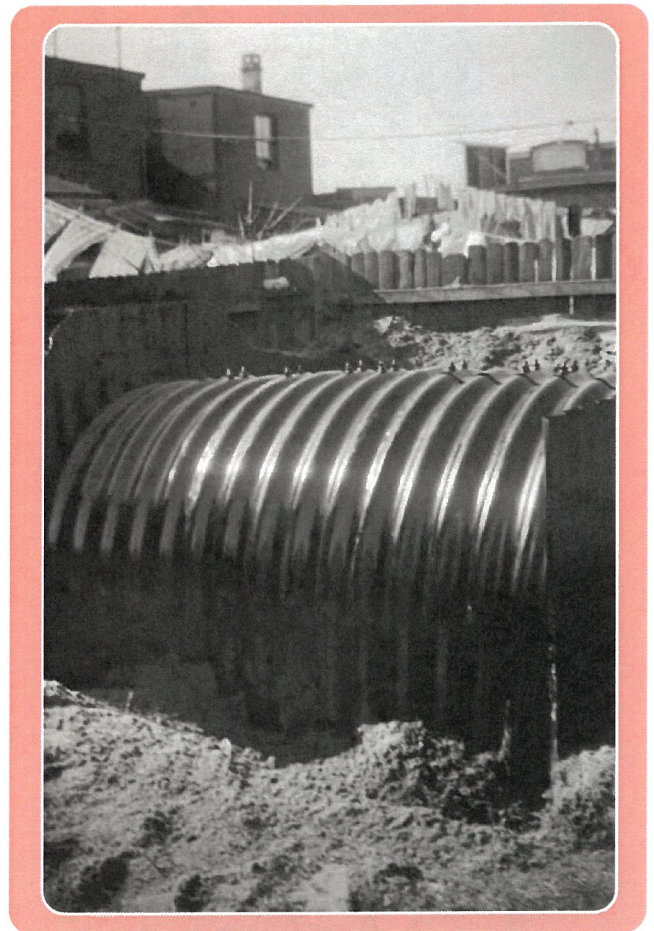


Barry McGrath recalls how air raid shelters were provided in his neighbourhood.

When World War II commenced, we lived in Hardie Street (between King and Hollingshed Streets), Mascot, which was about half a mile from the aerodrome and a short walk from the (former) Rosebery and Ascot racecourses, both of which were being used as army camps in the early 1940s. The three combined made our neighbourhood a prime target for enemy bombs (or so we thought), should the Axis Alliance ever attack the east coast of Australia.

As a three-year-old boy, I didn't know this background. The first time I realised that the war was serious, was when my Dad dug a very large hole in the backyard. Digging a hole 15 feet (4.5 metres) square and six feet (1.8 metres) deep was not that hard, as most of Mascot was white sand iced with topsoil. After many evenings of digging after dinner, our hole was now ready to be lined and converted into an air raid shelter.

In an ingenious bit of recycling, Dad, and three of our neighbours, were able to buy large wooden crates for a nominal price from enterprising air force engineers at the local pub. These crates had been used to deliver disassembled aircraft, such as the Kittyhawk P-40.



An Anderson Air Raid Shelter being built at 405 Gardeners Road, Mascot, 1942. Image courtesy Australian War Memorial, no. 4103613.





A P-40 Kittyhawk at Milne Bay, 1942. Photograph by Thomas Fisher, image courtesy Australian War Memorial, no.026647.

The crates arrived on the back of a lorry, which drove up our back lane on a Saturday afternoon. They had to be delivered on a Saturday afternoon, as most men worked a five and half day week in the 1940s, and a couple of men would be required to manoeuvre the large crates. Our neighbours helped to lift a crate off the lorry, and then lift it over the back fence and onto the roof of Dad's shed. Then they slid the crate across the flat roof and carefully tipped it into the prepared hole before cutting out a doorway. We repeated the process for our neighbour Roy, except this time, due to the location of Roy's pitched roof garage, a couple of men had to stand in Roy's hole to help manoeuvre the enormous box into position.

Mum recalls: "There may have been long queues of volunteers at the Army Recruiting Centre, but there was definitely a shortage of men at Hardie Street, Mascot, who wanted to jump in a big hole and have a heavy crate dropped on them."

Once in place, the top of both boxes, which would become the roofs of our air-raid shelters, were given a coat of used sump oil that Roy had souvenired from work. They would have preferred to seal the complete outside of the boxes, but this would have required leaving the boxes in the back yard over three weekends while all sides were painted and praying for dry weather.

On top of the crates, the men put some second-hand corrugated iron of questionable quality and replaced the topsoil and grass. According to Mum, Roy lamented: "the war will be over in less than two years, so I don't know why we are wasting good drinking time on bloody manual labour!"

The air raid shelters were a fine example of cooperation and ingenuity but, unfortunately, not a resounding success. An underground stream ran through our yard and even in the lightest rain the water was knee deep in our shelters. This was not the case for our neighbours on the opposite side of the lane. Their houses fronted Wilson Street (now Johnson Street), but we shared Hardie Lane. The shelters at the back of two houses in Wilson Street and Johnson Street were joined by a tunnel and had carpet on the dirt floors, a table, chairs, bunk beds and an extension cord from the house providing electricity – a veritable underground granny flat!

The war lasted for a total of six years, but the bombing raids never came. The nearest threat was when a Japanese submarine fired shells over Bondi Beach on 8 June 1942. On this occasion, as with all other occasions when the air raid sirens sounded, the residents of Hardie Street gathered in the street for a chat about what to do.

I was seven years old when the war ended and lived in Hardie Street until I was 25 years old. Does anyone know what happened to the air raid shelters?



# BAYSIDE COUNCIL DAWN SERVICE 2023



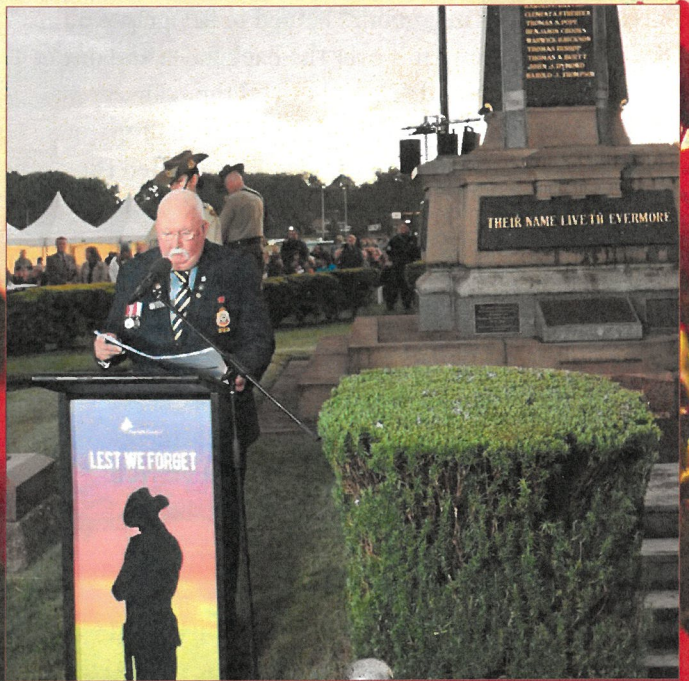
The Hon. Ron Hoenig, MP, Cr Jo Jansyn, Mayor  
Dr Christina Curry, Cr Jennifer Muscat, Deputy Mayor  
Cr Scott Morrissey with children from Botany Public School



Members of the Botany RSL Sub Branch



Les and Robyn Haggett, Botany RSL Sub Branch



Chris Hanna, Botany RSL Sub Branch