

The Camden Haven First World War 'Avenue of Honour' Memorial Trees, 1916-1918.
Laurieton, New South Wales.
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In 1916 the planting of the Camden Haven's Memorial Trees in Laurieton, now referred to as an 'Avenue of Honour', was the first World War 1 planting in New South Wales and the third in Australia. The Memorial Trees encompassed two streets rather than the one avenue that would become the normal practice elsewhere and were planted in Laurie Street [the main street at that time] between Norman Street and the Camden Haven Inlet and in Bold Street, between Tunis and Hanley Streets. The planting took place after Australia's first at Stirling, Mount Lofty, in South Australia on the 9th September 1915 and the second at Torquay, Greater Geelong in Victoria on the 23rd June 1916.

The World War Memorial Tree planting that took place in Laurieton on the 19th August 1916 was proposed by Robert Longworth Snr. on the 6th August 1916 and the idea was readily taken up by the community.

Robert Longworth, the town's leading timber miller at that time, was chairman of the Tree Planting Committee. Longworth's firm donated the timber for the tree guards, necessary as the local residence's cows and horses roamed the town feeding on the grass along the streets. Incidentally steers, bulls and stallion horses were not permitted to roam the town. Longworth's company also provided the labour to dig the 157 two foot deep holes. The Secretary of the Tree Planting Committee was Harry Robertson, part owner of the Robertson-Rose General Store in Laurie Street.

The Laurieton plantings are also unique in that some of the soldiers planted their own trees in 1916 before going off to war. Ernest Rose is in fact only one of three people that we can associate to a particular tree.

Within nine months of the first planting, Private Robert Laurie died at Messines, France on 12th June 1917. In the ceremony on the 17th August 1918 the wooden tree guard around Robert Laurie's Memorial Tree was replaced with a Victorian wrought iron fence, painted black with white rosettes, of the type so familiar in cemeteries of the period. The site became his surrogate grave, his tree the surrogate headstone, marked with a plaque. The plaque is unique in that the dates for World War 1 are shown as '1914-19__'. No final year is shown as the war was yet to end and the plaque was never finished.

The Laurie fence and plaque disappeared sometime between 1968 and 1978, probably remove by the then Hastings Shire Council. The fence was eventually cemented into the graves of the PS. PRINCE OF WALES, shipwrecked in 1862, at Prince of Wales Point near Pilot Beach. The plaque was cut from the fence and reappeared, painted green instead of the normal black, in the Laurie Memorial Park in Laurieton. During the ceremony in August 1918 the newspapers reported 'about 36 additional trees were planted'. The location of the trees planted for those who enlisted after August 1916 is unknown at this time.

In 1916 Laurieton was part of the Hastings Shire Council, now part of the Port Macquarie-Hastings Council, and no records of the names of those for whom the trees were planted has been found in their records to date. The only other sources of this information are the four Camden Haven War Memorials at Laurieton, Kendall, Kew and Comboyne. The names record a total of 157 soldiers who went to war from the district. 157 trees were planted in 1916, one of them in honour of Lord Kitchener. During the 1918 planting of 36 more trees, the newspaper reported that,

'some were planted in honour of men who were related to townspeople, even though they did not enlist from here'.

There are no additional names on the War Memorials to record who they were. 35 out of 192 local men died or 20%.

Some trees have died, and continue to do so through old age, lightning strikes, actions of unknown persons and removal by the Hastings Shire Council and more recently by the Port Macquarie-Hastings Council.

In March 1958 the biggest loss of Memorial Trees occurred when the then Hastings Shire Council removed all the trees on Bold Street between Laurie Street and Tunis Street to install gutters and kerbing. No footpaths or sealing of the gravel roadway occurred then, that would happen some years later.

The significance of the removal of the Memorial Trees in Bold Street forty-two years after the trees were planted seems to have drawn little attention and the newspaper report at that time even got the date of the planting wrong. Many of the parents who planted trees for their soldier sons would also have been dead by then.

Over time some individual trees were removed. Most of the removals were not recorded.

Several of the Laurie Street trees were removed in 2000, without apparent concern from the Laurieton community, to facilitate two new entrances to a retirement village. In 2007 three more trees were removed from next to the Plaza Theatre to accommodate the retirement village development.

Of those trees remaining in Laurie Street, and Bold Street, brutal pruning to accommodate electricity wires [not present when the trees were planted] has affected a significant number of them.

There is no evidence that the trees in the Laurieton Public School yard, Lake Road or the Holy Trinity Church grounds [now Longworth Park] are part of the memorial plantings. The photographic evidence is that these trees were planted around 1901 and means they could have been planted for the formation of the Commonwealth of Australia at the beginning of the 20th Century. These trees are now referred to as 'Federation Trees'.

The declaration of the Camphor Laurel (*Cinnamomum camphora*) as a Noxious Weed in many parts of northern New South Wales presents a dilemma to local government authorities to either preserve these memorial trees as heritage items or remove them as weeds.

Some attempt has been made at replacing dead Memorial Trees with an indigenous native tree, Tuckeroo (*Cupaniopsis anacardioides*). Four were planted in Laurie Street and later a number were planted in the Bold Street traffic calming islands during 2001. The Tuckeroos are not a suitable replacement tree, having only a 25 year life span.

Future Management.

During the last twenty-five years there has been no public consultation about the Memorial Trees. Today, only 29 [15%] Memorial Trees remain alive, a loss of 165 trees, out of the 193 trees known to have been planted on 19th August 1916 [158 trees] and 17th August 1918 [36 trees]. In 2014 the tree planted by Alex Rose was poisoned and the dead tree is yet to be removed by the Port Macquarie-Hastings Council (2018).

The Port Macquarie-Hastings Council does not have a formal "Plan of Management" for the existing trees or for the replacement of trees that die. The Memorial Trees are under constant threat from pruning by the Port Macquarie-Hastings Council and the Power Supplier 'Origin'. The 'Origin' Power Supplier is responsible for most of the pruning damage done to the trees. The trees were last heavily pruned by Origin in the week of 14th March 2016.

The selection of a suitable replacement tree to replace where possible those lost and those trees that have reached the end of their safe life should be part of any future management plan. A decision will also have to be made as to what trees are replaced or re-established. The use of the short lived Tuckeroos (*Cupaniopsis anacardioides*) is not favoured.

The NSW Heritage Council Criteria for State Significance.

In 2017 an application to list the Avenue of Honour in Laurieton on the New South Wales State Heritage list was rejected as the Avenue 'did not meet the threshold of heritage significance'. A similar application for listing on the Port Macquarie-Hastings Councils Local Heritage List has yet to be accepted or declined.

The Memorial Trees are important in the pattern of cultural history of the Camden Haven, New South Wales and Australia because of the impact of World War 1 on the community and how they as a local community responded to the imposts of that war. There is a strong association with the local World War 1 soldiers in the cultural history of the Camden Haven as each tree represented a local soldier and in rare cases were planted by the soldiers themselves.

The Memorial Trees are part of the Camden Haven's everyday activities and for those who died a gravestone for the local community. The memorial trees still dominate the local town today.

The Laurieton Avenue of Memorial Trees are rare, uncommon and endangered as they are the first Memorial Trees planted for World War 1 soldiers in New South Wales and the third in Australia. They are the only memorial planted in a cross formation. Only 29 survive out of a known 193 planted.

Plan of the Remaining Memorial Trees in September 2018.



Untitled Poem.

'As you walk through the streets of the township
Of Laurieton, on either side
May be seen rows of trees, neatly planted
Which are to the people, a pride.
One asks, why so well are they guarded?
Why they're cared for, and tended so well?
Why the townspeople truly revere them?
What purport they serve, can you tell?
Each tree in the town is a symbol
It represents some soldier brave;
And to friends of each man who is fallen
Is symbolic of that soldier's grave.
To men without any encumbrance,
Some trees which they pass in this town
Seem to clearly though silently whisper:
"Take the place of my man who is down"
(Perhaps about twenty -or more)
Of the heroes thus here represented,
As heroes have died, as of yore.
Their young lives were quite willingly offered,
And their loss caused much anguish and pain;
But their deeds will for ever in memory
Be fresh while these emblems remain.
Could there be to us better memorials
Of the men who have given their best,
When the honour of Britain was challenged
And the world by the foemen so pressed?
Thus we honour the men who have fallen
And we welcome the men who remain;
And with mothers of those still in action
For their soldiers' home-coming, we yearn.'

J.H.A.ROBERTSON Laurieton, 3rd November, 1917.
Tree Committee Secretary.

Surviving Tree Species.

Tree Species: Camphor Laurel - *Cinnamomum camphora*

Laurie Street: 10

Bold Street: 9

Tree Species: Norfolk Island Pine - *Araucaria heterophylla*

Laurie Street: 5

Tree Species: Brush Box - *Lophostemon confertus*

Laurie Street: 2

Tree Species: Turpentine - *Syncarpia glomulifera*

Laurie Street: 1

Tree Species: Bunya Pine - *Araucaria bidwilli*

Laurie Street: 1

Tree Species: Forest Red Gum - *Eucalyptus tereticornis*

Bold Street: 1

Replacement Tree Species.

Tree Species: New Caledonian Pine - *Araucaria columnaris*

Laurie Street: 1

Tree Species: Tuckeroo - *Cupaniopsis anacardioides*.

Laurie Street: 3

Bold Street: 32

An extra 10 have been planted in Seymour Street between Lake Street and McLennan Street.

Memorial Trees Connected to Soldiers.

Tree L03 Laurie Street.

Tree Species: Camphor Laurel - *Cinnamomum camphora*

Tree Condition: Dead. Height 11metres.

LAT: 31 39.40' LONG: 152 47.916'

Tree History: Memorial Tree from the original plantings on 19th August 1916.

This is one of three trees that can be attached to an individual soldier. This tree was planted by Ernest Rose in 1916. The store owned by the Robertson and Rose family stood behind the tree. This tree was poisoned in 2014.

Tree L05 Laurie Street.

Tree Species: Camphor Laurel - *Cinnamomum camphora*

Tree Condition: Good Height 11metres.

LAT: 31 39. 142' LONG: 152 47. 903'

Tree History:

Memorial Tree from the original plantings on 19th August 1916. This is one of three trees that can be attached to an individual soldier. This tree was planted in honour of Robert Burns Laurie. Within nine months of the initial planting Robert Laurie died on 17th June 1917 at Messines, France. At a ceremony on 17th August 1918, when more trees were planted, the wooden tree guard around Robert Laurie's tree was replaced with a Victorian wrought iron fence of the type so familiar in cemeteries of the period. The site became his surrogate grave, his tree the surrogate headstone, marked with a plaque dated '1914-19__' as the war had not ended at that time. The fence is to be found at the PS Prince of Wales wreck grave site and the plaque at Laurieton's Laurie Memorial Park.