

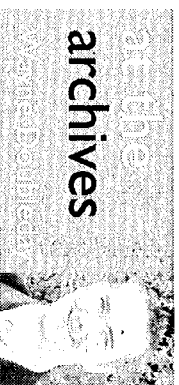
What you should know

■ The CSU Regional Archives is open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Located in the Blakenore Building at the South Campus of the university, access can be gained via College Avenue or Hely Avenue.

■ Members of the public are welcome to visit the search room, where professional archival staff can assist with enquiries. For those people unable to visit the archives in person, staff can provide a research service for straightforward enquiries for a fee of \$55 per hour, including copying and postage.

■ For further information, phone 6925 3666, email [archive@csu.edu.au](mailto:archive@csu.edu.au) or visit the website at [www.csu.edu.au/research/archives](http://www.csu.edu.au/research/archives) for a full listing of holdings and more detailed information.

# The making of the Victory Memorial Gardens Tribute to soldiers



of long after the soldiers began returning from the Great War (1914 to 1918), serious discussions began of building a memorial somewhere in Wagga.

A number of suggestions were handed about, with two gaining the most support – a memorial garden on the banks of the lagoon where the police barracks and stables were situated, or a soldiers' memorial hall, hopefully as an addition to the Town Hall. The Wagga Wagga and District Soldiers Memorial Committee was formed to decide what should be done and to raise money for the project.

By October 1919, only £800 had been raised, so the committee erected a cenotaph across the road from the Town Hall, with the names of those who did not return from the war inscribed on it. On September 17, 1922, the new cenotaph was unveiled by Brigadier-General Thomas Blaney.

Despite this, the soldiers memorial committee still wished to build a hall and continued to raise money for the project. However, due to a number of issues that arose between the committee and the council, the people of Wagga were given the vote – should a soldiers' memorial hall be built?

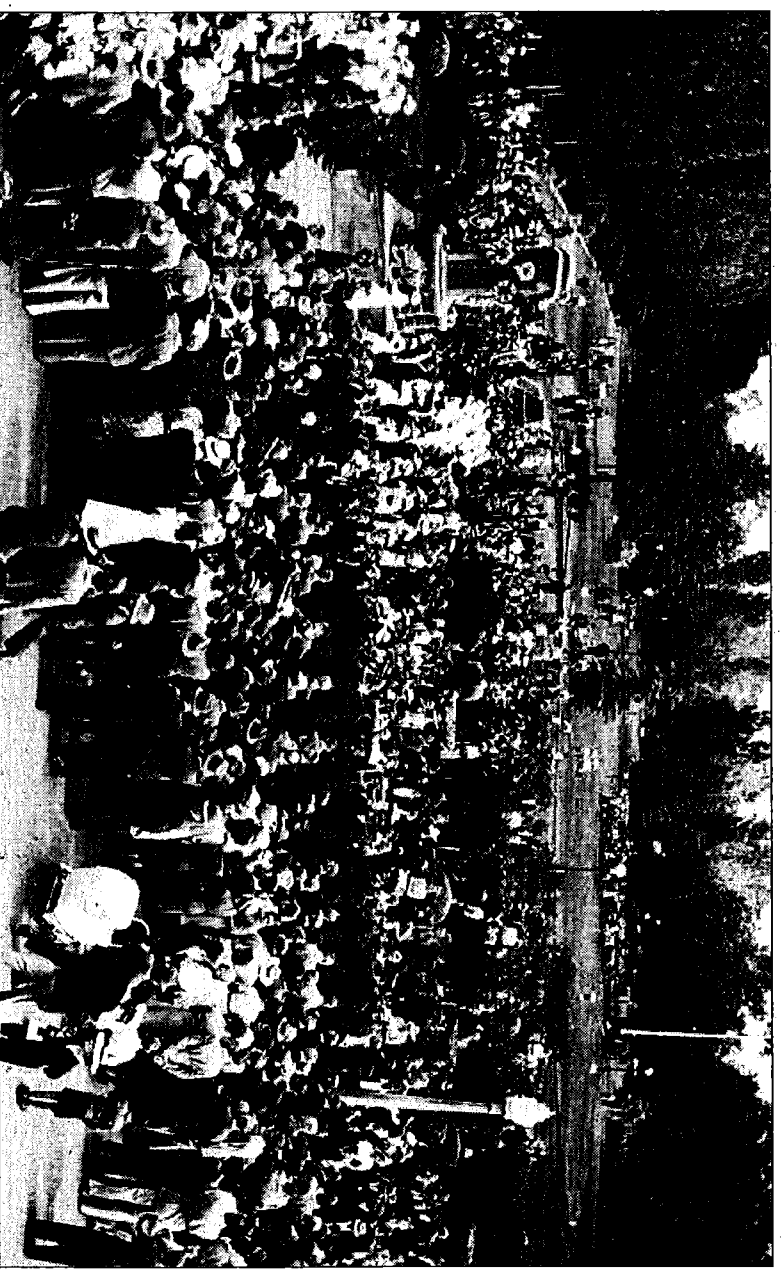
Disagreements were becoming common between the various parties involved, particularly between two men – D J Byrnes and E E Collins. Collins had previously been mayor of Wagga on two occasions – 1912 to 1913 and 1917 to 1919. Byrnes was mayor from 1923 to 1925. Collins' son had fought in the war. Byrnes himself had fought. Collins was in favour of the hall. Byrnes preferred that gardens be established.

With the people of Wagga voting against the hall, mayor D J Byrnes wanted the money raised for the hall to be redirected towards the creation of the gardens.

In July 1924, an agreement was reached to build a memorial arch with the funds, with the soldiers memorial committee renaming itself the Wagga War Memorial Arch Committee.

Five months later, plans were drawn up for the arch and then finally approved in April 1925. Byrnes called a public meeting at the Wonderland Theatre on April 28, 1925. The Victory Memorial Gardens Committee was formed, with Byrnes as president. By June, the committee had raised just over £1117 to be put toward the gardens.

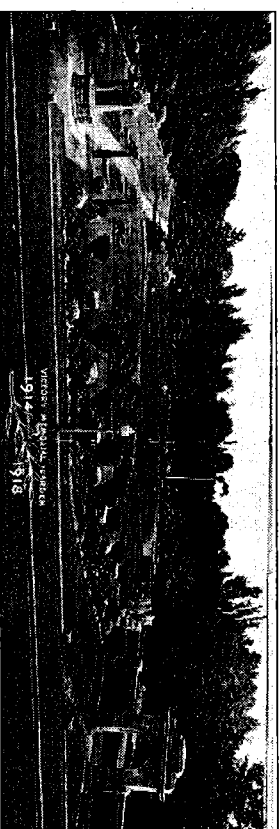
An idea was devised to hold a public competition to design the layout of the Victory Memorial Gardens. Twenty-two designs were received, with the winner being



A packed Anzac Day service at Victory Memorial Gardens circa 1945. These three images are all from the Wagga Wagga & District Historical Society collection (RW5) held at the CSU Regional Archives.



Site of Victory Memorial Gardens, prior to development, circa 1920, showing police barracks and paddocks on the left and the lagoon on the right.



The completed Victory Memorial Gardens in Wagga, circa 1950

Thomas Kerr, the chief landscape gardener of the Sydney Botanic Gardens, who had entered anonymously as "Phoenix".

June 1926 saw work on the Memorial Arch begin, which again initiated further arguments. The placement of the arch was the main point of dispute between the council and the various committees involved. The matter went before the NSW Attorney-General, but was settled out of court in July. The arch continued to be built and was finished in 1927. It was unveiled on Anzac Day by Major-General C F Cox.

Over the ensuing years, the memorial gardens have undergone a number of changes, particularly relating to additional materials to Australians who served and died in military

conflicts overseas.

The gardens have remained popular with the people of Wagga, and so it is perhaps fitting that an area that is always so full of life should also serve as the place to remember those who died serving their country.

■ **References:** Ellis, William: *The Street Names of Wagga Wagga*; Morris, Sherry: *Wagga Wagga – A History*; *The Daily Advertiser*

■ **THIS Sunday,** June 15 at 3pm, the Riverina Conservatorium of Music will be hosting a performance by Australian saxophonist Stephen O'Connell.

Stephen will join forces with Hamish Tait and Tamaris Pfeiffer in a varied and exciting program of music for saxophone, clarinet, viola and piano. The centerpiece of the program will feature three

works by Australian composer Peter Sculthorpe, in addition to the Mozart Kegelstatt Trio and different solo works for viola and saxophone.

Stephen O'Connell has had a varied and interesting career. After starting out as a high school music teacher in 1983, he quickly realised that teaching was not for him and embarked on a career as a full-time professional musician.

His primary instrument is saxophone, with clarinet and piano as secondary instruments. Over the past 24 years he has been an in-demand live and session musician who has performed countless gigs in Australia and overseas. He has been recorded on over 50 commercially released CDs that have collectively sold more than 7 million copies.

In 1998 he moved to Goulburn for a quieter life and almost immediately found himself as director of the Regional Conservatorium, thus kick-starting a new career in arts administration.

Since then, the institution has grown dramatically from approximately 130 students to the 700 enrolled today.

"The Cor" has an extensive program of ensembles, classroom courses and tuition in most instruments.

Stephen is currently president of the Association of NSW Regional Conservatoriums. In 2005, he was appointed to the Music Committee for Arts NSW by the then-premier Bob Carr, and continues in that position today.

He is committed to the successful development and implementation of music and arts education and performance programs with the view of continuing the development of arts in NSW.

For more information, contact the Riverina Conservatorium of Music on 6925 3522 or visit the website at [www.rivconmusic.org.au](http://www.rivconmusic.org.au).