



## THE IMPACT OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR ON WODONGA AND ITS SURROUNDS

### PLACES AND STORIES

#### **PLACES**

- Fighting the war on the home front
- War-time Wodonga
- Moving from war to peace, Wodonga, 1945-1949
- Cross river places linked to war-time and post-war Wodonga



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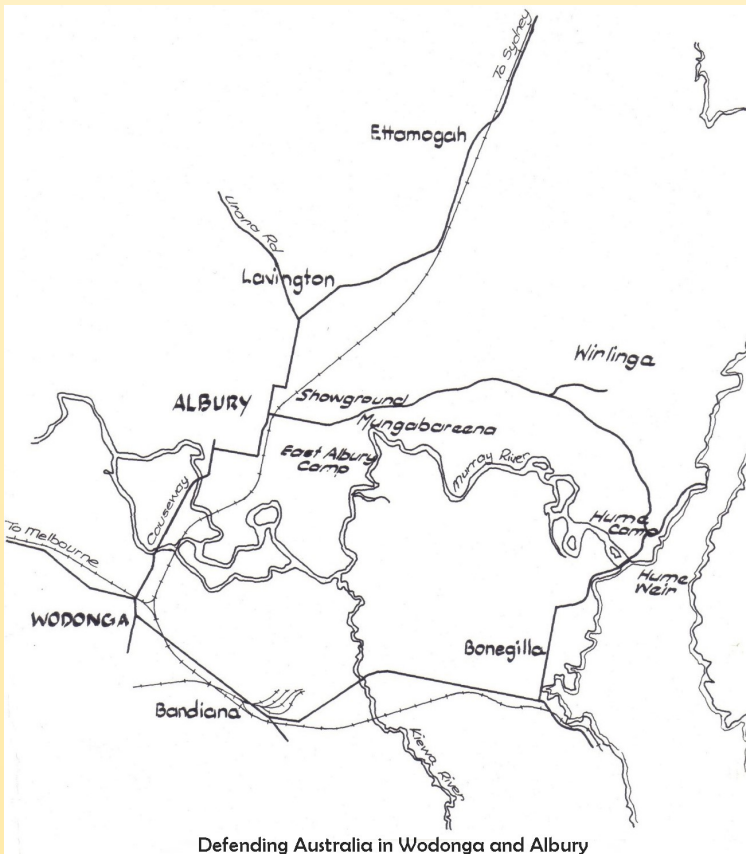
<https://www.vic.gov.au/veterans-support-and-commemoration>

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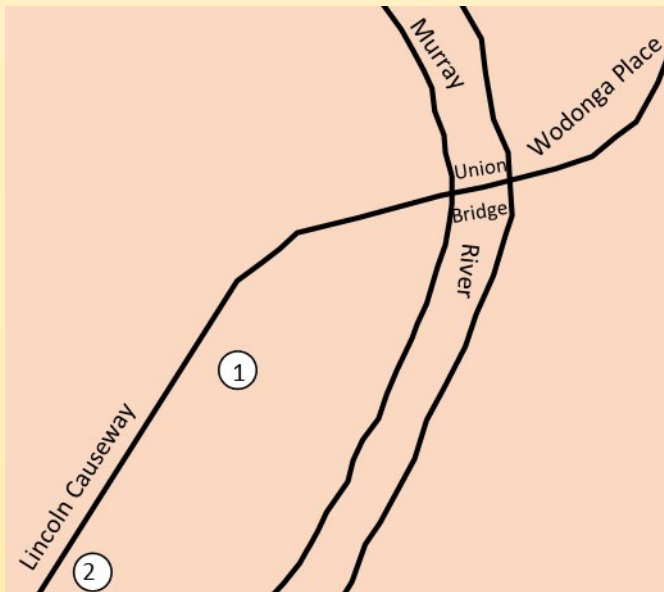
## FIGHTING THE WAR ON THE HOME FRONT



Wodonga and Albury were strategically important during the Second World War as they were situated at the break of railway gauge. This was a base from which army personnel and their equipment could be easily dispatched north or south in case of attack. Altogether about 11,000 servicemen and servicewomen were in the district during the war.

- Bonegilla Army Camp was hastily built in 1940 to accommodate recruits from the immediate surrounds while they underwent initial training. At the end of 1940 there were 5,600 troops training in the camp — that was nearly twice the number of people who lived in the town of Wodonga. Through the war, the camp at Bonegilla was used by a variety of units including signals, small arms, and an officers' training school. The 106<sup>th</sup> Australian General Hospital at Bonegilla was a 600 bed military hospital which serviced defence personnel in the immediate area and cared for the wounded and disabled repatriated from the front.
- At Bandiana a huge ordnance complex was established. It included goods and weapon depots, engineering workshops and a massive vehicle park. The complex was made up of large buildings resembling wool-stores, linked to both New South Wales and Victorian railways on 800ha of land. Altogether there were 235 buildings and 6.5 kilometres of railway sidings. At one stage there were 10,000 army vehicles on site. Approximately 4,000 servicemen and servicewomen were stationed in the area to operate the complex.
- Across the river, there were a large munitions and explosives warehouse depot at Wirlinga and a smaller RAAF explosives depot at Ettamogah. Both remained operational after the war. Even smaller army units were at East Albury and Mungabareena. At the end of the war East Albury camp was dismantled. Eight huts at Mungabareena were used by the RSL to house temporarily the families of eighteen returned men who could not find houses.
- Local recruits from both sides of the border were initially mustered in a makeshift camp at Albury Showground before they marched to the newly built Bonegilla Army Camp to complete their training.

## WAR TIME WODONGA



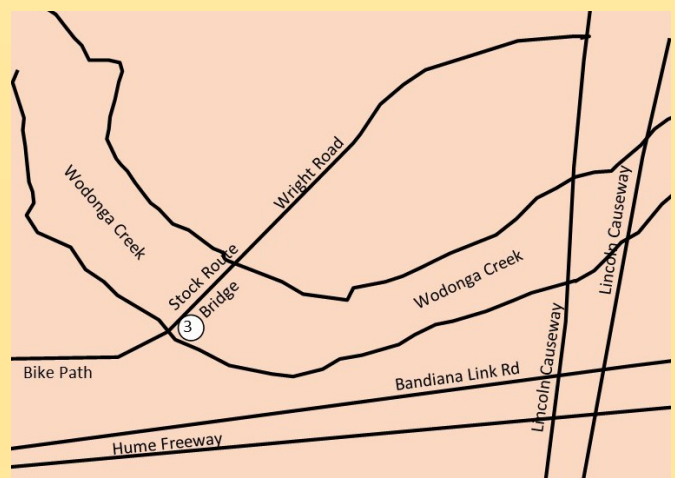
① Holdenson and Nielson Fresh Foods Pty Ltd dairy factory on the causeway pasteurised whole milk and made butter, ice cream and cheese. It also had cool rooms for the rabbit and fruit trade. It supplied ice for domestic use. It delivered 60 gallons (273 litres) of ice cream per week to the camps. It employed 75 people.

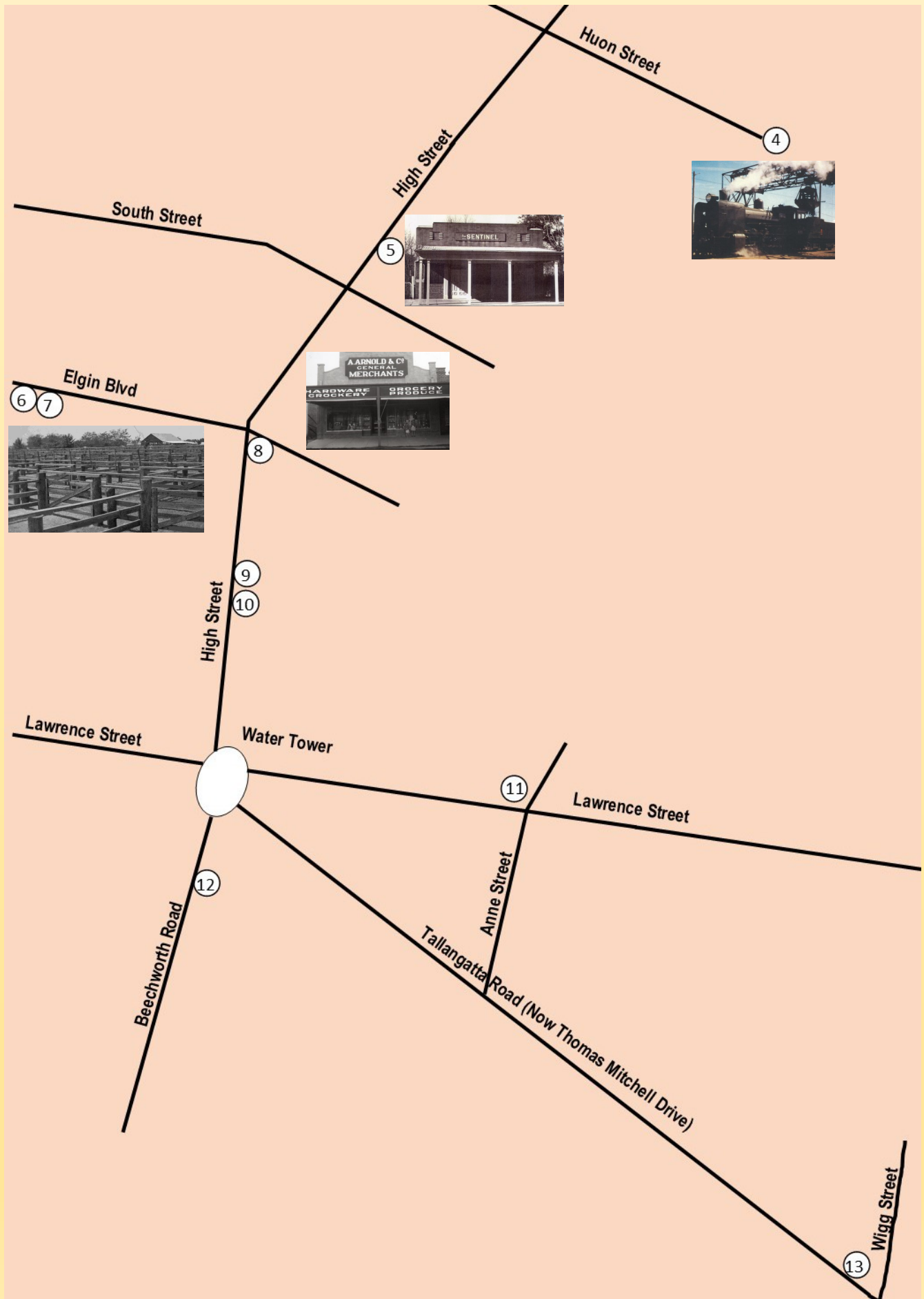


② A new wool scouring and tanning firm, began operations nearby. It employed fifty men.

The construction of the weir altered the flow of the river. Groins were inserted near Ryan's Creek to ensure the river kept to its original bed, rather than continue with a new preference to flow into Wodonga Creek.

③ A bridge over Wodonga Creek had opened a stock route across the causeway to relieve traffic on the highway in January 1939. Piles of stout planking were driven against the steep riverbank to prevent erosion, and enhanced the creation of a swimming spot. The Country Roads Board allocated £1000 to improve the stock route in 1945.







- ④ An extensive set of coal bunkers was built in a siding adjacent to the main line. The bunkers were to cater for the transport of coal from New South Wales to Victoria, given the hazardous nature of coastal shipping. About 70 civilians worked there, as coal lumpers.
- ⑤ *Wodonga and Towong Sentinel* was a small 4-page weekly. It paid particular attention to the meetings of the Wodonga Shire Council and local markets. The cross-river *Border Morning Mail* was a much bigger daily and had a broader sweep of news. Also across river the *Albury Banner and Wodonga Express* was a large weekly which printed reports from correspondents scattered through a very broad district.
- ⑥ Elgin Street Transport Regulation office. Both states had controls over road transport to minimise competition with their state rail systems. They restricted the distance carriers could operate within a state other than that in which the carrier was registered. Interstate truck crossings were monitored by policemen on the road and by administrators in an office building near the railway. Trucks travelling interstate had to remain in Wodonga for ten hours before proceeding to Melbourne. Their drivers registered arrival and departure at a Transport Regulation Board Office, at first near the railway station, then in Smythe Street, opposite the saleyards. Drivers bought petrol, ate meals and sometimes stayed overnight.
- ⑦ The Wodonga saleyards were the busiest in Victoria outside Newmarket in Melbourne. There were about 2.5ha of cattle yards with a capacity of 6 000 head. There were also 200 pig pens. A dining room was close to the yards. About seventy families were dependent on livelihoods related to the saleyards.
- ⑧ Arnolds delivered a truck of fruit and vegetables three times a week to Bonegilla. Flemington Reynolds delivered sometimes more than 7 250 kilograms of meat per day, and local graziers knew that meant 200 sheep or 20 bullocks per day.
- ⑨ ⑩ Meetings for patriotic fund raising activities were held in halls. The Red Cross used the supper room at the Shire Hall. The CWA had its own rooms on a site that is now occupied
- ⑪ O'Neill and Mylon bus companies prospered servicing Bonegilla and Bandiana. Mylons tried to overcome petrol shortages by installing benzene gas bags.
- ⑫ In 1944 a surgical hosiery factory was established in Beechworth Road. It initially employed twenty women making trusses, supports, hosiery and other heavily structured under garments.
- ⑬ The community mourned the loss of young lives in a tragic road accident, when a bus carrying service personnel on leave collided with a train, killing 24.

## ***Moving from war to peace, Wodonga, 1945-1949***

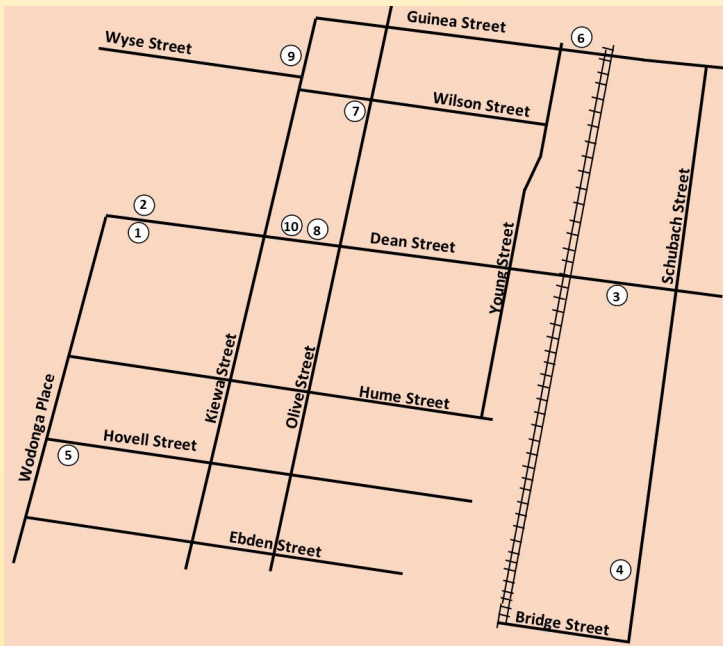
- Business related to the railway, the road and the saleyard increased. 159 men were employed in railway work and 68 in road transport. The coal bunkers remained in operation. Road traffic increased with the greater availability of motor vehicles. During 1949 nearly 1,500 semi-trailer vehicles crossed Union Bridge ① each day. Post-war the two states proposed changes to the cumbersome motor traffic regulations, but they remained in place until a Privy Council appeal on a High Court decision disallowed them.
- Holdenson and Nielson dairy factory ② thrived. More farmers took to dairying, particularly after electricity was extended into the Kiewa and Leneva Valleys and to Baranduda immediately after the war. 'Iceberg' ice cream was sent in canvas shippers packed with dry ice as far afield as Wangaratta and Wagga Wagga.



- The war showed Victoria's dependence on coal from New South Wales made it vulnerable. The state took steps to meet its energy supplies from brown coal and hydro-electricity. Wodonga was a worker recruitment and transit depot for expansion of the Kiewa Hydro-electric project which had begun before the war. At Bandiana a Rocla bulk cement transit depot ③ was established to handle each week 2,000 tonnes of pipes and other material which was taken by a fleet of trucks over a vastly improved road connection.
- A substantial military presence remained at Bandiana ④. In 1944 it had been expanded so that it could become the principal site for the recall, storage or dispersal of huge quantities of military equipment. It stored a variety of weapons and equipment, from pistols to artillery pieces, from tanks, jeeps and motor bikes to portable kitchens. Armed patrols in jeeps secured the barbed wire perimeter. Civilian storemen, clerks and watchmen were hired to help maintain storage activity. Altogether about 1 000 people were employed in 1949. Townspeople and district farmers showed keen interest in the disposal of military assets no longer required. There were big disposal auction sales at Bandiana.

- Italians who had been prisoners-of-war remained at the POW Control Centre Hume at the Bonegilla Army Camp ⑤, until at least 1947, when there were sufficient ships to release them to their home country. An attempt was made in 1944 to convert the 106<sup>th</sup> Australian General Hospital into a specialist TB unit, but in 1946 it had only 216 patients. Redundant army huts were made available as school classrooms state-wide. Community organisations such as sporting groups and youth clubs purchased them at nominal cost.
- Bonegilla Reception and Training Centre ⑤ opened in 1947 catering for 838 displaced persons. It expanded rapidly as more ships became available to transport the displaced from Europe. By 1949 it had processed 40,000 new arrivals and was to process another 36,000 in 1950. By then it could accommodate up to 7,500 at any one time.
- Woodland Grove ⑥ served as Wodonga's community centre. It was used for commemorative services.
- By the end of the 1940s a site had been selected for a Wodonga Hospital ⑦ and fund raising began.
- By 1949 the Housing Commission had built its first 30 homes in William Street ⑧ near Lawrence Street.
- Newly arrived migrants moved from Bonegilla to erect temporary buildings at Killara ⑨, on the Wodonga Flats, and near the showground. Some of these neighbourhood settlements were referred to colloquially as 'Little Russia' or 'Little Moscow'.
- Work did not start on expanding Hume Dam ⑩ and the reservoir until 1950, but plans were well afoot in the 1940s. Many of the workers were to come from Wodonga and from Bonegilla.

## Cross-river places linked to war-time and post-war Wodonga



- Radio station 2CO had offices in Albury ①. It broadcast from a powerful transmitter in Corowa which had a wide coverage in north-east Victoria and southern New South Wales. 2CO was a relay station for Melbourne, but was one of the first country radio stations to develop its own news services. Charles Moses, the Director of the ABC, decided that the audience it served, south of Henty, preferred news from Melbourne rather than Sydney. They had more commercial links with Melbourne and played Victorian football. They also drank Victorian beer.
- *Border Morning Mail* was the most influential of the local newspapers ②. In 1948, it acquired a new press which printed up to 96 tabloid pages per issue. It had a circulation of 11075, reaching readers within 75km. It produced a regular 'Wodonga Supplement' to ward off any daily competitor.
- Many men and women from Wodonga crossed the border to go to work. Some men worked at the railway ③. Some men and women worked at the Amalgamated Textiles Mill which had to expand production to produce service uniforms and began operating on around-the-clock shifts in 1941 ④. Many women from Wodonga worked in Albury shops and offices. Some had jobs at the Alamac clothing factory producing war clothing which was renamed, relocated and repurposed to become the Adelyn factory producing women's clothing in 1945 ⑤. Some Wodonga men and women may have had jobs at a specially built, but short-lived, munitions annexe, which was subsequently converted by the Gadsen company into a factory manufacturing cans and other utensils from tin-plate ⑥.
- Servicemen and servicewomen on leave were provided with comforts and entertainment at a newly erected recreation hall behind St David's Church ⑦. Servicewomen had a recreation centre at the Mechanics Institute ⑧ and a leave house called 'Bonegilla House' ⑨ where they could stay overnight.
- Post-war Wodonga residents participated in some of the cultural activities introduced in the 'community centre' being developed adjacent to Albury Town Hall ⑩, when Albury was proclaimed a city in 1947. So, for example, they attended a performance by the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra in 1945.