

KOO-WEE-RUP THEN AND NOW

A walk through local history

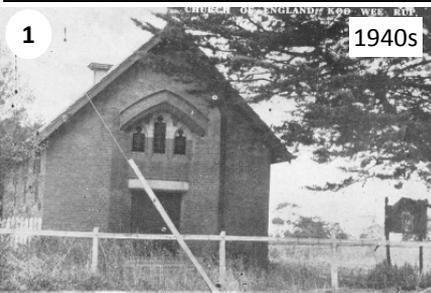
For Koo-Wee-Rup, like many towns, the Railway was the catalyst for its growth and development. The Koo-Wee-Rup Railway station, one of the stations on the Great Southern line that went through to Port Albert, was opened in 1890. It was originally called Yallock and was re-named Koo-Wee-Rup in 1892. Koo-Wee-Rup is an Aboriginal word for “blackfish swimming”. Some growth had taken place in the town before 1890, a school was established in 1884 between Koo-Wee-Rup and Bayles, at Bethunes Road, with 22 pupils, and the first permanent house, *The Grange* was built in 1888. By 1894, the town consisted of the Railway siding, pay office for the Swamp workers and three shops. This small population however developed a cricket team, a Temperance Society and sporting carnivals. By the beginning of 1900, a Presbyterian Church was established, Catholic and Anglican services were held, the Recreation Reserve was established and a doctor even visited weekly from Cranbourne.

In spite of the occasional flood, the town prospered. The first Catholic Church and a Public Hall were built in 1902, a Bush Nursing hospital was built in 1910 and in the same year the school was moved into the township from Bethune’s Road. In 1915, the Royal Hotel was erected and in 1917, the Anglican Church. The town became a railway junction in 1922 when the line to Strzelecki was opened. This line went through Bayles, Catani, Yannathan then up into the hills to Strzelecki on McDonald’s Track. It was this period between the Two World Wars that saw the growth of the town with land subdivision and new commercial and residential buildings. The recreational needs of the locals were met with the construction of the Wattle Picture Theatre in 1927, the same year the Koo-Wee-Rup Electric Light and Power Company supplied electricity to the town.



This walking tour will introduce you to some of these buildings or the sites where they once stood. This walk concentrates on, and starts at the intersection of, the two main commercial streets of Koo-Wee-Rup - Rossiter Road and Station Street.

Rossiter Road, East Side - Rossiter Road was named after Charles Rossiter, an early settler



1. St Georges Anglican Church – 270 Rossiter Rd

The first Anglican service was held on October 7, 1897. The foundation stone of St George’s was laid by the Bishop of Gippsland, Arthur Wellesley, and it was dedicated on December 7 1917. St George’s Church was designed by Louis Williams of North and Williams. Williams designed over 130 churches during his career, including the Finlay McQueen Uniting Church in Lang Lang in 1936 and St John the Evangelist Anglican Church in 1959, also in Lang Lang.



2. Dustings Garage – 272 Rossiter Road (KWR Vet Surgery)

We do not know the exact date of this building but we have a photograph of the building, taken before the Wattle Theatre was built, so 1926 would be close. It appears to have been built by William ‘Ernie’ Mills, but owned by Robert Dusting from around 1930. In September 1932, Dusting announced in the Koo-Wee-Rup Sun that he had secured the Ford Dealership for Koo-Wee-Rup and Districts from the Ford Motor Company. It may have been at this time that he added the Spanish Mission Architectural style elements to his building – the terracotta tiles on the parapets and the rendering of the brickwork. The transformation is clearly seen in the two historic photographs.



3. Wattle Theatre – 284 Rossiter Road

(Something Shabby, Something Chic)

The Wattle Theatre at Koo-Wee-Rup was one of the many cinemas constructed during the Australia wide boom in Cinema building in the 1920s. The Garfield Picture Theatre and King’s Picture Theatre at Pakenham were also constructed at this time and Colvin’s had been showing films at the Memorial Halls since 1922. The Wattle Theatre was opened with a grand ball on July 18, 1927 and the first film shown was *The Big Parade*. The theatre was built for James Mortimer by E. Whiteside. It had a hall of 66 feet by 40 feet with seating for 500 people. The stage of 25 feet by 18 feet and the building was equipped with twin projectors. The Wattle Theatre hosted not only the movies but other activities, such as boxing matches, athletic displays, public meetings, balls and dances. The first talkie was screened in July 1931.

Films were screened at the Wattle Theatre until 1960. The previous year the theatre had been purchased by St George’s Anglican Church and was known as St George’s Hall. The building became the venue for the newly formed (in 1968) Westernport Light Opera Society. Their productions included the *The Merry Widow*, *Oklahoma* and *Brigadoon*. The High School used the building for debutant balls, Speech Nights, and its Music Festival in the 1970s.



4. Former State Savings Bank, 288 Rossiter Road

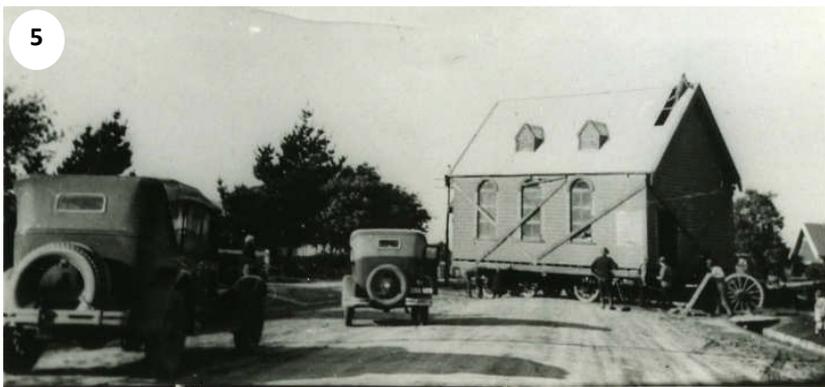
(Westernport Conveyancing & Anne O’Mahony)

The building of this bank and attached residence started in 1952 and the Bank was officially opened on March 10, 1953. The first Bank manager was Mr C. Turnbull. The *Koo-wee-Rup Sun* reported that *the erection of this most modern building shows the confidence the bank has in the potentialities of Koo-Wee-Rup and district.* The paper goes on to say that *the large banking chamber is well ventilated and lighted and equipped with the latest furnishings.* Architecturally, the bank is built in the modernist style, a style which came in after the Second World War and apparently represented honest and functional design.



5. Uniting Church

The original Methodist Church in this site was Yallock Church, built in 1909. Due to declining numbers the Church was transferred from Yallock to Koo-Wee-Rup in August 1932. It was moved again to a Church Camp in Grantville when the existing building was erected.



6. Residential Precinct 360, 362- Dr Hewitt's house, 370-80 Rossiter Road

These are a series of private houses, or what the Cardinia Shire Heritage Study, calls the Rossiter Road Residential precinct. The houses were all built between 1924 and 1937 and are significant because they represent the growth of the town during this time. The population of the town and surrounding area increased from 500 in 1920 to 650 in 1940. Of these buildings No. 362 is significant for being Dr Hewitt's Surgery. It was built in 1929. Dr Alan Hewitt and his son Dr Ian Hewitt delivered many babies born on the Koo-Wee-Rup Swamp, attended to many medical matters in their Surgery and at the hospital and were also involved in Community affairs for seventy years from 1925 to 1995. No.380 is the former Methodist parsonage.



Rossiter Road, West Side

7. KWR State School (KWR Secondary College)



The Granite Gates at the entrance to the Secondary College were erected to the memory of Mr William Eason, Head teacher from 1914 to 1936. The Gates were unveiled in December 1936. The original Koo-Wee-Rup School on Bethunes Road was re-located onto this site in 1910.

A new building was opened in 1915 and was burnt down in May 1950. In September 1952 the building of the replacement school, a Higher Elementary school, was completed. This School included both primary school classes and secondary classes, (Forms 1 to 3 or Years 7 to 9) which began in 1953. The School became a High School in 1957 but the primary school students had to share the accommodation until November 1960 when the primary school opened in Moody Street.



8. Mallow House 325 Rossiter Road

This Edwardian house with terracotta roof was built by John Colvin in 1916 and occupied by John Leslie O'Riordan and his wife Margaret (nee Colvin) from their marriage in 1918 until they passed away. John O'Riordan's parents, John and Elizabeth, had built the first general store in Koo-Wee-Rup in 1890. John Leslie O'Riordan, born 1892, has the distinction of being the first white baby born in the town. The O'Riordan's store, on the corner of Station Street and Moody Street had a store room at the rear which was used as the town's first Hall. Margaret's brother A.C Colvin, opened a cycle shop



in the town in 1909. The Koo-Wee-Rup Swamp Historical Society purchased the building after John O'Riordan's death in 1978 and it is now their head quarters and a Museum.

The original Koo-Wee Rup lockup or gaol is on display here. It was built in the early 1920s and is the only structure remaining from the establishment of the Police Force at Koo-Wee-Rup in 1919. The police station has had three locations, Sybella Avenue, 260 Rossiter Road and Icke Road. Koo-Wee-Rup's first policeman was Constable O'Connell, who came in March 1919 and left the same year. He wasn't replaced until February 1921 when Constable Robert Whiteside arrived to take charge of the newly created Koo-Wee-Rup Police district. Constable Whiteside (1891-1969) remained at Koo-Wee-Rup until his retirement in 1945.





meant Government grants could be obtained.

Mechanics' Institutes were generally connected to a Public Hall. Bayles was another local town which had a Mechanics' Institute. This was located in the Bayles Hall which had been re-located from Yallock and officially opened in January 1932.

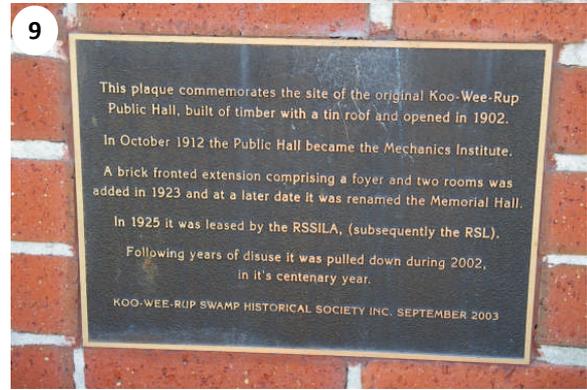
The Koo-Wee-Rup hall was built of weather board and was extended in 1919. The brick front and other rooms were added in 1923-24 and it was



renamed the Memorial Hall to honour of the First World War soldiers. The Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia paid £300 to help fund these additions and had a lease on the Hall at the rental of one peppercorn per annum.

9. Memorial Hall site

The Memorial Hall used to stand between the Presbyterian Church and the Historical Society in Rossiter Road. The hall was demolished in 2002 and a plaque on the fence marks its location. The first hall had been opened on this site in April 1902 and in 1912 the Hall became a Mechanics' Institute, because this



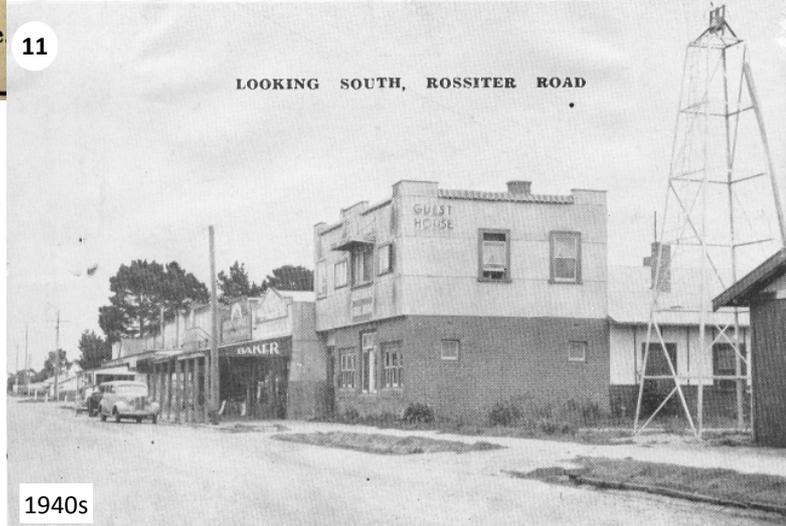
meant Government grants could be obtained. Mechanics' Institutes were generally connected to a Public Hall. Bayles was another local town which had a Mechanics' Institute. This was located in the Bayles Hall which had been re-located from Yallock and officially opened in January 1932. The Koo-Wee-Rup hall was built of weather board and was extended in 1919. The brick front and other rooms were added in 1923-24 and it was renamed the Memorial Hall to honour of the First World War soldiers. The Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia paid £300 to help fund these additions and had a lease on the Hall at the rental of one peppercorn per annum.

10. St Andrews Presbyterian Church 319 Rossiter Road

Presbyterian services first took place at the home of Mrs Hudson, who owned the Grange. Locals donated money to purchase a Church building and the Wesleyan building from Cranbourne was obtained at a cost of 70 pounds. This church, designed by Architect Alfred Dunn, had been erected in 1888 and it was transported to Koo-Wee-Rup on a large trolley drawn by 13 horses and placed on land donated by Christopher Moody. The first service in this building was on March 20, 1896. This is the oldest public building in the town.

11. Scotts Guest House – 293 Rossiter Road

This was built by John Colvin and sons for J. Scott and opened in August 1934. Scott was the owner of the Alcove Cafe next door, which had opened a year earlier. The Koo-Wee-Rup Sun reported that the Guest House had electric light, hot and cold water, compact bedrooms and a spacious dining room. Other rooms were furnished for visiting commercial and professional men. The Alcove Cafe catered for weddings, socials, banquets, had a soda fountain and menus to suit all requirements according to a 1934 advertisement in the Koo-Wee-Rup Sun.





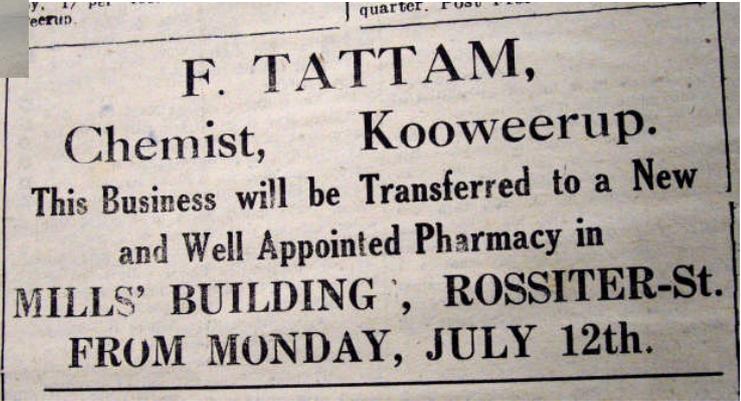
12

12. Mills Buildings -279-285 Rossiter Road
(Barber's to Wendore Milkbar)

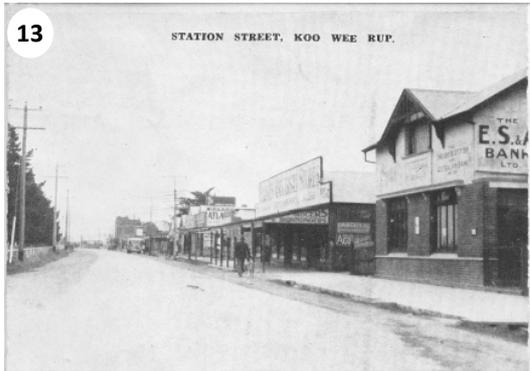
These shops were built by Ernie Mills around 1925, the same time as Dustings Garage. According to the Cranbourne Shire Rate books in 1926 they were occupied by Felix Tattam, the Chemist; Alistair Campbell the draper and Gordon Potter, the green grocer. Felix Tattam sold the business in 1934 to Mr Brewer.



12



Station Street



13

13. ANZ Bank - 10 Station Street

The London Bank (later the English, Scottish & Australian Bank) acquired the site of today's ANZ Bank in 1912 and the existing building was erected in 1919. It is a two storey bank building with a manager's house behind. It is built in the style known as 'towards modernism'. This is the earliest of the three former E.S & A Banks on the Cardinia Shire Heritage Study. The other ones are the Garfield Bank, built in 1925 and the Lang Lang Bank built in 1929.



13



13

OTHER SITES OF INTEREST

A. The Railway Station: The Railway Station no longer exists, but you can still see the remains of the embankments behind the Community Centre. The Station opened in 1890 and received a boost when the Strezlecki line opened in 1922. At the peak of the rail traffic in 1926 Koo-Wee-Rup Station had a staff of eleven and



1890

had 48 passenger and mixed trains and 72 goods trains per week.

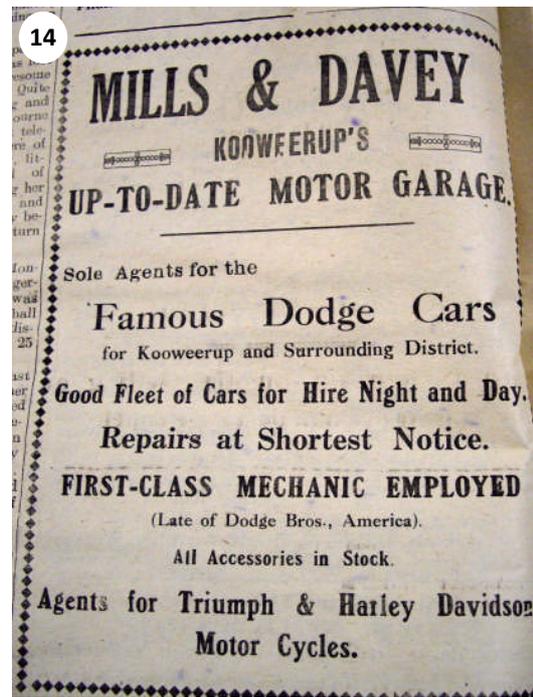


1916

14. Garage – 56-58 Station Street

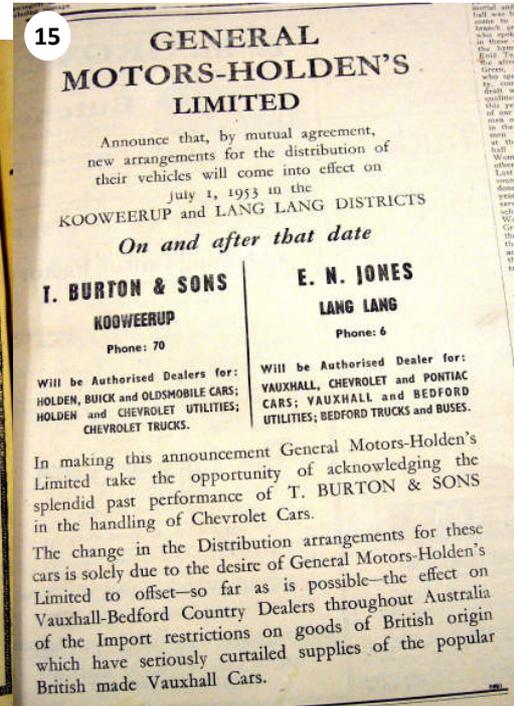


This garage was originally built for Mills and Davey, who were agents for Dodge Cars. We do not know the exact year this building was erected however, Mills and Davey began advertising their *up-to-date* motor garage in the Koo-Wee-Rup Sun from January 1924, therefore late 1923 is a likely build date. As well as having the Dodge Agency, Mills and Davey were also Agents for Triumph and Harley Davidson Motor Cycles; had a car hire business and employed a *First Class Mechanic*, late of Dodge Bros., America.



15. Light's Garage – 68-70 Station Street

This building, built for Thomas Burton, was opened in February 1939. The Koo-Wee-Rup Sun described it as a *new modern, commodious motor garage with up-to-date machinery and electric light*. They congratulated Mr Burton on his enterprise. Burton's later became a Chevrolet dealer and in April 1953 they became Agents for Holden, Buick and Oldsmobile Cars.



OTHER SITES OF INTEREST

B. The Grange, off Sybella Avenue in Grange Court. Private Property. The oldest house in Koo-Wee-Rup. It was built in 1887-1888 for Agnes and Andrew Hudson, who had been living at Warook (not in the existing homestead) however Andrew died before the move. Agnes then moved into the house and remained there until her death in 1913. The Grange was the venue for Presbyterian Church services until the existing Church was erected in 1896. Agnes Hudson was firstly married to Alexander Mickle the brother of John Mickle, who with his business partners William Lyall and John Bakewell owned thousands of acres of land from Cranbourne to Lang Lang. Agnes was eight months pregnant with son John, and had two year old David, one year old Isabella when Alexander died suddenly in 1861. David was the grandfather of Dave Mickle, the local historian. She then married Andrew in 1866 and had two more children, James and Agnes. It was James Hudson who sold the farm for development in 1921 and Sybella Avenue was part of this subdivision.

C. Masonic Lodge. Rossiter Road. This was built in 1923.

D. Shepton Mallet 165 Rossiter Road. Private Property. Built in 1902 for Christopher Moody, who had first purchased land in the area in 1875. Moody originally owned all the land between Rossiter Road and the Main Drain and subdivided it in 1890. He also donated the land for the Presbyterian Church and was a Cranbourne shire Councillor. Moody Street is named after him.

16. Old Post Office – 72 Station Street

Now Station Street Vet Clinic. Former Bank of Victoria, built in 1924. The Post Office transferred from O’Riordan’s newsagency to this building in 1946.

17. Former Newsagency – 86 Station Street.

This building is shown in this 1924 flood photograph. It was the Newsagents and Post office, operated by Margaret O’Riordan (later Mrs Hamilton) for over 30 years from 1908. The building next to it is O’Riordan’s Store, which was built and operated by Margaret’s mother, Elizabeth. It was built in 1902.



18. Royal Hotel – 96 Station Street

The Cardinia Shire Heritage Study rates the Royal Hotel as one of the finest examples of Edwardian Hotel design in the Gippsland Region. The Study says that the hotel is notable for its high degree of internal intactness and fine detailing. This fine detailing includes the large upper level arched porch, the cement lettering wrapped around the architrave, domed caps to the main parapet piers and a Norman tower angled across the corner of the building.

The hotel was opened on September 9, 1915 when the publican, Denis McNamara, turned on free drinks for the whole day. It was built by A.Oliver for a price of £3,305.



19. 140-146 Station Street

Double fronted Edwardian weatherboard house built c.1920. Once again this house represents the growth that took place in Koo-wee-Rup between the Wars.



19

20. St John the Baptist Catholic Church and Shrine to St Sofia – 172 Station Street.

Before the erection of the first St John the Baptist Church which was opened on



20

1940s

August 24, 1902, Mass was said on weekdays at O'Riordan's house and at the Five Mile School from May 1896. The present Church, built in a modernist design, was opened by the Bishop of Sale in December 1962. The original school was opened in 1936 with 67 children enrolled. The Shrine to St Sofia was erected in 1973. St Sofia is the patron saint of Sortino in Sicily where many of Koo-Wee-Rup's Italian migrants originally came from. Italian migrants have played a significant role in the development of the Swamp from the 1920s onwards.

20



20

OTHER SITES OF INTEREST

E. The Hospital. The first Hospital in Koo-Wee-Rup was the Bush Nursing Centre established in July 1918. The Bush Nursing movement had begun in 1910 with the aim of supplying skilled nurses to country areas. Local committees had to pay the nurse's salary and the Central Council of the Victorian Bush Nursing Association then supplied a nurse.

On the May 24, 1923 the Fallen Soldiers Memorial Hospital was opened in Station Street. The Hospital could accommodate medical, surgical and midwifery patients, this was replaced by the Western Port Memorial Hospital in 1955.

F. Railway House 255 Rossiter Road. This house was built for railway employees in 1915 and was the first of eleven railway house built on the Strezlecki railway line. It was a Class 4 Employees residence, and there were originally two Class 3 houses on adjoining sites. This house is due to be relocated to the grounds of the Kooweerup Regional Health Service in 2011.

G. Site of the Radio receiving Station - Rossiter Road and Denhams Road/Sims Lane side.

In June 1921, Amalgamated Wireless (Australia) Ltd. (A.W.A), established a Wireless Experimentation Station at Koo-Wee-Rup. Radio communications, at this time, were sent and received by a series of relays, however communications received at Koo-Wee-Rup were consistent enough to prove that direct wireless communication was both practical and reliable between Australia and Britain. This was a major breakthrough in international communication. We do not know the exact location of the receiving station, which basically consisted of two huts and antennas etc, as it is believed that all remaining remnants of the Station were swept away in the 1934 flood.



1923

This historical supplement is proudly supported by Regional Development Victoria as part of Victoria's 175th Anniversary celebrations

