

KANGAROO GROUND TOWER

HISTORY

The tower was planned by a group of local identities as a Memorial, and a public committee was organised in 1925 to work for its erection. A Mr. Basil Hall of Panton Hill, an ex-Councillor of the Shire, suggested that the Tower be a replica of the Old English and Scottish watch towers.

An architect, Mr. M. Meldrum adopted this suggestion and designed, free of charge, a tower from a sketch provided by Mr. Harold Herbert, the artist.

Donations were called for and generously given by the public, enabling the Tower to be built. 1500 people attended the dedication ceremony on the 11th of November 1926, performed by the Governor General, Lord Stonehaven.

The public committee then committed the care of the Tower and grounds to the Council of the Shire of Eltham.

On the 16th of November 1951, Sir Dallas Brookes dedicated the cottage and an additional plaque on the Tower as a memorial to those who gave their lives in the 1939-45 War.

Records show that the Tower was used for "fire watching" prior to 1948. An old Minute Book records a Mr. Smith of Warrandyte was appointed Fire Spotter in December 1948.

Mr. Galbraith, the Shire Secretary, was the Proper Officer at the time. He was instructed to approach Council for a portable telephone to be used at the Tower. A Mr. Geveaux, an employee of the Council, was appointed caretaker and spotter in 1950.

In 1951, the Forest Commission and the Country Fire Authority agreed to share the cost of the spotter's salary.

In 1966, the Forest Commission delegate to the Local Advisory Committee suggested an enclosed cabin to be added to the Tower to provide protection for the fire spotter and his equipment, as is done throughout the Victoria on the Commission towers.

When the first proposals for an addition were put forward in February 1968, the Press gave prominence to it, and the branches, namely Eltham, Montmorency, Hurstbridge and Panton Hill, objected to the use of the Tower at all for fire spotting. Letters explaining the proposal and its benefits to the Public were sent to the above branches, with satisfactory results. Eltham Branch replied stating that they "were not opposed to this very necessary community need". Montmorency opposed the plan and Hurstbridge branch had become defunct. Because of the publicity received, the "Shire of Eltham War Memorial Tower and Park Committee of Management was formed in May 1968.

This Committee of Management asked the Local Advisory Committee to provide sketch plans for an addition, and these were submitted on 01-08-1968 by the Proper Officer.

A previous attempt to provide some protection for the fire spotter by erecting a pipe framework and attaching a canvas awning was not a success due to wind damage. After prolonged negotiating, the Council instructed the Committee of Management to meet the Local Advisory Committee for discussion.

On 17-09-1969, the Committee of Management met Mr. Brinkotter, Mr. Mountain and Mr. Murray at Research Fire Station. It was agreed that an addition was desirable, and the advice of a suitable architect should be obtained. The Committee of Management approached Prof. Lewis of the Melbourne University of Architecture for his opinion of the proposal.

On receipt of the original photo and plans, Prof Lewis stated: "I agree with the principle expressed in your letter in the provision of a fire spotting extension, and I also agree with the late Mr. Meldrum that it could be added to, without any undue expense or aesthetic damage". (Note: Mr. Meldrum, the architect who designed the Tower, was approached shortly before his death by a member of the Committee of Management.)

The representatives of the Committee of Management stated that the addition could be dedicated at a ceremony to the fallen in the Korean and Vietnam wars, to which the Local Advisory Committee representatives agreed.

In 1970, the Parks and Council Properties Committee decided that the CFA should be asked to build another tower on another site. A Local Advisory Committee report on 10-08-1970 showed that RO McPhan said the CFA would not build another tower as the cost, \$6000 - \$8000 for a 80t steel tower were prohibitive. This figure was obtained from the Forest Commission in 1970. Today's cost would be considerably more.

The cabin was designed and was built by a company at Faulkner, Wright and Rainey Bros. and transported to the site by trailer. It was raised by a crane.

PS: At this time, May 1996, the Shire of Nillumbik (Eltham) have decided to repair the stairs and the tower itself.

What price progress.

Keith Sharp

Spotter Kangaroo Ground Tower