

NAME: 'Bassett Memorial Tree', Lot 2 Main Road, WILLUNGA

CURRENT USE: Memorial tree

FORMER USE: Memorial tree

DATE(S) OF CONSTRUCTION: 1917 planting

LOCATION: Lot 2 Main Road, WILLUNGA

LAND DESCRIPTION: CT 5086/589, Section 240, Hundred of Willunga

OWNER: Private ownership

RECOMMENDATION: Local Heritage Place



Bassett Memorial Tree, Main Road, Willunga (GGA, 2021)

NAME: 'Bassett Memorial Tree', Lot 2 Main Road, WILLUNGA

DESCRIPTION:

Cypressus macrocarpa (Monterey Pine) planted in 1917 in memory of Private Frederick Farmer Bassett, grandson of James Bassett, a prominent local Willunga resident.

It is recommended that the Bassett Memorial Tree, Lot 2 Main Road, Willunga included on the South Australian Heritage Register as a Local Heritage place.

A delineation of significant historic fabric is provided in the Extent of Listing.

STATEMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE:

The Bassett Memorial Tree, Lot 2 Main Road, Willunga is of significance as the township of Willunga's earliest surviving war memorial planting, commemorating the life of Private Frederick Farmer Bassett (1894-1917), grandson of James Bassett. A notable local landmark and significant planting, the Memorial Tree is associated with Private. F. F. Bassett and the Bassett family, early settlers and prominent citizens of the Willunga district from the mid-19th century.

RELEVANT CRITERIA (As defined in Section 67(1) of the PDI Act 2016):

a) it displays historical, economic or social themes that are of importance to the local area; being the township's earliest surviving war memorial planting. The Bassett Memorial Tree was planted in memory of Private Frederick Farmer Bassett, grandson of James Bassett, a prominent early Willunga settler and a notable family for the district.

e) it is associated with a notable local personality or event; being strongly associated with Private Frederick Farmer Bassett (1894-1917) and the Bassett family, early settlers and prominent residents of the Willunga township.

f) it is a notable landmark in the area; being a notable and significant botanical component of the Main Road, Willunga frontage and a prominent example of a memorial tree in the local district.

g) in the case of a tree, it is of special historical or social significance or importance within the local area; being a notable specimen of *cypressus macrocarpa* planted in 1917 as a memorial to the grandson of James Bassett, a prominent mid-19th century Willunga resident. According to the National Trust of SA, the Bassett Memorial Tree is now the earliest surviving war memorial planting in Willunga.

RELEVANT HISTORIC THEMES:

Theme 2: Regional Life in the Southern Vales

2.7 Remembering past generations and the fallen

2.8 Significant local trees and plantings

BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

The Bassett Memorial Tree, Lot 2 Main Road, Willunga does not appear to have been identified or assessed as part of any previous heritage survey.

Substantial information relating to the history and heritage significance of the Bassett Memorial Tree has been historically available. A summary has been provided by the National Trust of South Australia within a 'Significant Tree Report' relating to the Tree. This history reads as follows:

This tree was planted as a memorial tree to Private Frederick (Fred) Farmer Bassett who died on 10 March 1917 while on overseas duty during World War I. He was buried overseas in a War Cemetery in Plymouth UK. Given that he had no local burial place or headstone, it was seen as appropriate to memorialize him by planting a tree in his honour in the Willunga town-ship. It would have presumably been planted in 1917. This tree was planted in a 'reserve' in front of the Alma Hotel which was later known as Mrs. Aldam's Garden. Vera Aldam was the licensee of the Alma Hotel from 1932 to 1951. The land on which the tree stands is still owned by the Alma Hotel.

The memorial tree was mentioned in the 1944 minutes and correspondence of the Willunga Progress Association in 1944 (attached) when they sought information from Maude Aldam, about the whereabouts of Bassett's descendants, prior to tidying the area. A memorial plaque is mentioned – it is no longer evident. The tree is on the northern end of an area which was known as the Town Garden, a significant site in the township in the 1940s and 1950s. Pte. Fred Bassett's grand-father was James Bailey Bassett, the esteemed teacher and musician who started Buckland House School in 1847, then built the Bassett Boys Schoolroom which building celebrated its 150th year in 2012. He was a very popular member of the Willunga community. Pte. Fred Bassett's father was Frederick Farmer Bassett, who was also a well-known figure in the district, being at one time the Clerk of Willunga Council and the Manager of the Willunga Bangor Slate quarries in the 1890s.

Fred's widowed mother received a World War I Memorial Medallion from the British Government, colloquially known as a Dead Man's Penny, which is on display at the Willunga Court House Museum, together with Fred's War medals and other Bassett memorabilia.

This tree is significant firstly because of its status as a World War I Memorial Tree. It is understood to be the only surviving original War Memorial tree in Willunga - the long row of memorial trees planted along St Andrews Tce after WWI was removed in 1952. Secondly it is significant because of its association with the Bassett family who were closely involved in the educational, cultural, religious and industrial life of Willunga Township from the mid-1840s to the 1920s. Thirdly it was associated with Mrs. Aldam's Garden and also with the Willunga Town Garden which was established in the area in the 1940s and 1950s.

(National Trust of South Australia, Significant Tree Report relating to the Bassett Memorial Tree, Lot 2 Main Road, Willunga).

An obituary relating to the life of Private Frederick Farmer Bassett was also published in newspapers at the time of his death. The Observer newspaper's 1917 obituary reads as follows:

LATE PTE. F. F. BASSETT

The late Pte. F. F. Bassett was the youngest son of Mrs. Bassett, of Walkerville road, St. Peters. He was employed in the warehouse of Messrs. Matthew Goode & Co. from the time he left school until he enlisted. He was closely associated for several years with All Souls' Church, St. Peters, and was a member of the choir, as well as a teacher in the Sunday school. The quiet strength of his personality was felt wherever he went, and he was

beloved by a large circle of friends. He enlisted in October last, and left for England in December, 1916. He died of meningitis in Devonport Hospital, England, on March 10. He was 23 years of age.

(Late Pte. F. F. Bassett, Observer, Sat 21 Apr 1917, p.37).

A history of the Bassett Memorial Tree is also provided on the Willunga Now and Then website, though this website was not accessible at the time of writing.

The Australian War Memorial records also provide a brief history of Private Bassett's life and death in the description of Bassett's digitised studio portrait. This history is given as follows:

Description

Studio portrait of 3114 Private (Pte) Fred Farmer Bassett, 50th Battalion. A warehouseman from St Peters, South Australia, prior to enlistment, he embarked with the 8th Reinforcements from Adelaide on 16 December 1916 aboard HMAT Berrima (A35) for Devonport, England. Two days before arriving in Devonport he was admitted to the ship's hospital with acute influenza. On arrival at Devonport he was transferred to the Military Hospital where the diagnosis was confirmed as cerebro-spinal meningitis. Pte Bassett died of this disease on 10 March 1917 and is buried in the Plymouth (Efford) Cemetery. He was aged 22 years.

(Australian War Memorial Accession Number PO9291.317, accessed via <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/PO9291.317>, 8/3/2022).

EXTENT OF LISTING:

The 1917 *Cypressus macrocarpa* (Monterey Pine). All other site plantings and elements not included in the listing.

It is recommended that a commemorative plaque (a plaque was formerly located on the site, now removed) should be reinstated at the site to provide public biographical information relating to the history and significance of Bassett Memorial Tree.

REFERENCES:

National Trust of South Australia, Significant Tree Report relating to the Bassett Memorial Tree, Lot 2 Main Road, Willunga/

Late Pte. F. F. Bassett, Observer, Sat 21 Apr 1917, p.37

[https://willunga.nowandthen.net.au/Bassett Memorial Tree](https://willunga.nowandthen.net.au/Bassett_Memorial_Tree), accessed 8/3/2022.

SITE MAPPING:



Site of Bassett Memorial Tree, Lot 2, Main Road Willunga; site of tree within red circle (Planning SA SAPPA)

HISTORICAL IMAGES:



Studio portrait of Private Frederick Farmer Bassett (1894-1917) taken in December 1916 (Australian War Memorial Accession Number PO9291.317, accessed via <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/PO9291.317>, 8/3/20222).

OTHER IMAGES:



Bassett Memorial Tree, located between two gum trees, looking west from Hill Street (GGA, 2021).



Bassett Memorial Tree, Main Road, Willunga (GGA, 2021)