

HIGHBURY – Western Australia

ABBREVIATED HISTORY OF HIGHBURY

Extracted from Wolwolling Reflections – Early Days of Highbury by Gwentyth Warren

SETTLEMENT

An important development in the State had been the passing of the Homestead Act in 1893, providing for free homestead farms up to 160 acres to the head of the family or any male over 18 years of age; and for conditional purchase homestead leases of second and third class land at six shilling and three pence (62c) and three shillings and nine pence (38c) per acre respectively, (and half the cost of survey) spread over thirty years without interest.

Like many towns, Wolwolling came into existence with the construction of the Great Southern Railway, the section from Beverley to Albany being completed in 1889. Wolwolling was the gazetted name in 1905 and renamed as Highbury in 1906.

Highbury is a small town in the Wheatbelt region of Western Australia within the southern boundary of the Shire of Narrogin, located along the Great Southern Highway between Narrogin and Wagin. It was noted in the 2006 Census that Highbury had a population of 493.

The Highbury district, 16 kilometres from Narrogin, 208 kilometres from Perth lies in an ancient granitised zone with outcrops of lateritic ironstone. Most of the water sheds to the Authur River. First class land occurs where the granite outcrops, and the rest varies from sandy gravel to sandy loam to some clay in the east.

Immediately before the World War II, 1937/1938, the Main Road between Narrogin and Wagin was built up as a main road. This supplied work for a large number of men at a time when jobs were scarce. It was around the 1950s before it was sealed.

It was recorded in February of 1955 that eleven inches (275 mls) of rain fell over a few days, resulting in a lot of damage to the countryside. Roads and bridges were washed away, fences torn apart and pastures ruined. In April 1978 "Cyclone Alby" hit the area causing great havoc.

THE Highbury Store

In 1902 or 1903 Mr J. Scott opened a general store. It was made from hand-made bricks with a galvanised iron house attached. Wolwolling opened as an Allowance Office. On 1/9/1904 it became a Receiving of Mail Office. In 1906 Wolwolling was renamed Highbury. The name Highbury was chosen by the residents, as the suburb of London of that name held happy memories for Mr Jon Burley, one of the earliest settlers.

It is not known in which year the streets were named, but on the night that a meeting was called for that purpose, a violent thunder-storm developed, so very few people were able to attend. The ones who did decided to name the streets after each other.

As the only store in the town, it soon became the agency for every kind of produce imaginable. It even incorporated a blacksmith-shop. The store had many owners and during 1945/1946 the new cement brick store and house were built. A manager's house of asbestos was erected about 1950/1951.

HIGHBURY STORE 2013



RAILWAY

When the first settlers arrived there was no siding. Trains did not stop unless waved down. The settlers worked hard to improve their lot, and pressure was brought to bear on the Government on the day to give them a siding. This was achieved and the people at least had a ramp. Subsequently, shelter sheds were provided, and later on trucking yards were built.

In 1933 a grain handling organisation, Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd came into being. To begin with Highbury was given a pig-pen type of bin which served the district well for some years. Then in 1963 the existing construction was opened.

THE HOTEL

The hub of many small communities is often the local Pub. So it was at Wolwolling. The Pub was built in the very early years of the new century as a Wayside House. The ownership changed many times and in the early 1980s the Hotel underwent a change when the roof was tiled over the existing roof of iron. The main entrance used to be on the east, facing the Main Road, before it was put on the corner and the name changed to The Highbury Tavern.



HIGHBURY TAVERN 2013

SCHOOL

It was not long before the early settlers formed a Progress Association and one of the first projects was to get a school in the area. The Progress Association were told they could have a school if they provided a building and a teacher. In 1902 there was virtually no town at all, except for a mud hut "Cathedral" with a thatched roof, so a teacher was obtained and school took place daily in "The Cathedral".

The new School, a weatherboard building with iron roof was built on Block 28 of the Townsite in the year 1905.

It was noted in correspondence in 1924 that The Department was informed that the Quarters were very unsatisfactory, only consisting of "two very narrow, small rooms, and a kitchen made from a very small back verandah closed in. In March 1929 the School Board was still pressing the Government for a better school house. In June 1933 it was noted that the new quarters were nearing completion.

During 1940 the possible closure of the School was discussed, owing to low enrolment. It was recorded in 1946 that the Board decided to pass their funds to the Christmas Tree Committee, as the School was about to close. They made a donation to the Narrogin P & C for a Public Address system and sent a letter of thanks to the Narrogin Road Board for the manner in which they ran the school bus, which took the Highbury students to the Narrogin School. The School was removed, the quarters remained and were purchased for a private dwelling in 1958.

THE AGRICULTURAL HALL

Once there was a Hotel, a Store and a School, settlers began to pour into the district. They needed a meeting place, so a bough shed was made somewhere in the Station yard, which sufficed for a time.

In 1906 the fine brick District Hall was built and a large crowd gathered for the opening on 1st January 1907. In 1914 additions to the Hall were carried out. The Highbury Hall Committee was formed in 1926. About 1957 the floor was renewed, as the boards were rotting away and the kitchen was upgraded.



HIGHBURY DISTRICT HALL 2013

After the main body of the Hall was built, dances were held to add the supper room.

Throughout both World Wars, dances were held regularly to assist the war effort, and to supply comforts for the troops, through Red Cross.

A significant event held in the Highbury Hall on November 9th 1952 was the unveiling of the Highbury District Honour Roll of the Second World War 1939-1945.

(The Honour Roll of the World 1, 1914-18 had been erected many years before).



In 2006 the Highbury District Community Council successfully proposed the construction of a war memorial next to the Hall, to honour those from the district who had fought and died overseas.

HIGHBURY SUNDIAL & ENTRANCE STATEMENT

