

Armistice Day Centenary

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What was the Armistice?

The word armistice means "suspension of fighting". In November 1918 after four years of fighting during the First World War (the Great War as it was known then), the Germans called for an armistice to allow time to negotiate a peace settlement. They accepted the terms of settlement which "amounted to an unconditional surrender" and at 11 am on the 11th of November 1918 the armistice was signed at Compiègne in France. ¹

What was Armistice Day?

The moment in time when the hostilities ceased became associated with the remembrance of those people who had died during the war. On the first anniversary of the signing of the armistice, two minutes silence was observed as part of a ceremony at the Cenotaph in London. This two minutes silence was adopted as central part of future Armistice Day proceedings. ²

Changing from Armistice Day to Remembrance Day and two minutes to one minutes silence

After the Second World War, the name was changed to Remembrance Day as the date now became one on which Australians and the British would "commemorate all war dead". ³

Information on the War Memorial site further explains..in 1997, Governor-General Sir William Deane issued a proclamation formally declaring 11 November to be Remembrance Day, urging all Australians to observe one minute's silence at 11 am on 11 November each year to remember those who died or suffered for Australia's cause in all wars and armed conflicts. ⁴

Celebrations at the Signing of the Armistice

It isn't hard to imagine the joy that was felt throughout the Riverstone district when advice that the war was over became known. There are no known photos of the celebrations in Riverstone, but descriptions in the words in the *Windsor and Richmond Gazette* help us to imagine. According to the *Gazette*, news of the official cease fire came through to Windsor around 8 p.m. ⁵ Presumably it would have been around the same time at Riverstone.

The celebrations in Riverstone were noisy and sustained. They started on Monday the 11th and continued on the next night, on the green in front of the railway station, a mock trial and execution of an effigy of the German ex Kaiser took place.

CELEBRATING THE VICTORY

Riverstone rose to the occasion on Monday of last week - when news came of the signing of the armistice by the representatives of Germany. A number of business men and other residents put their heads together and celebrated the victory by 'proceshing' the streets and belting tin cans until the early hours of the morning. - When work at the local meatworks ceased, the band got together, and added much to the enjoyment of all concerned.

On Tuesday night further celebrations took place, when the ex-Kaiser was executed. The deposed Kaiser is generally regarded throughout the civilised world! as the man who was chiefly responsible

for the great world war, and on account of the misery brought on the human family thereby, he is the most hated and despised man in the world to-day.

Riverstone showed its utter detestation of the arch fiend on Tuesday evening by holding a mock trial, and afterwards consigned his effigy to the flames. A great crowd gathered to witness the novel proceedings, the trial taking place on the green, in front of the railway station.

The Kaiser's effigy was the work of Mrs Crisp, assisted by others, and the representation was a faithful one. Mr. H. L. Lawson acted as Crown Prosecutor, and recited a list of the evil deeds the prisoner had committed. Mr. J. S. Hunter appeared for the ex Kaiser, and put up a good fight for his client. The judge. Mr. Chas. Davis J.P. on summing up, returned a verdict of guilty, which was greeted with one loud unanimous cheer from the gathering. His Honor said the prisoner was guilty of murder in its worse form, and condemned the convicted Criminal to be taken to the place of execution and "burnt at the stake".

The executioner, Mr. A. Bertie, then got Kaiser Billy in tow. He took care that his captive would not do the disappearing trick. The criminal was tied to a nearby tree, and after a baptism of kerosene, was set alight. The people simply went mad with joy, and stones were hurled from all directions at the burning effigy. The Riverstone band enlivened the proceedings with a programme of patriotic music They played splendidly, and were a great acquisition to the celebrations.⁶

The celebrations continued. Services in the Catholic Churches at Windsor and Richmond on the Sunday were "celebrated in thanksgiving for the glorious victory bestowed on the Allied arms".⁷

After the celebrations

Throughout the war men were returning to the district from the war, while others prepared leave. After the armistice, over a period of many months the servicemen gradually returned home.

The return of a soldier to the town was celebrated each time they arrived on a train. One of the biggest would have been for Herbert Davis who was one of our original ANZACS. He served at both Gallipoli and the Western Front. He arrived home by train on the 24th of November 1918. The railway station was decorated with "an avenue of greenery interspersed with flags and hanging lamps". The train came in with the whistle sounding, along with detonators and explosions. Approximately 400 people were said to have waited outside the station to welcome him home. There were speeches and musical selections by the local band. At his father's home, there was an archway of ANZAC flags from the gate to the door.⁸

It is also understandable that the celebrations would also have been a time of heartache for those whose friends and relatives had died or been injured during the war.

There is no mention of a service on the first anniversary of the signing of the armistice. However Riverstone saw a major event on 8 November 1919, when the district gathered to witness the unveiling of the local War Memorial. The centenary of this event will be celebrated next year.

¹ <https://www.awm.gov.au/commemoration/remembrance-day/traditions>

² <https://www.awm.gov.au/commemoration/remembrance-day/traditions>

³ <https://www.awm.gov.au/commemoration/remembrance-day/traditions>

⁴ <https://www.awm.gov.au/commemoration/remembrance-day/traditions>

⁵ *Windsor and Richmond Gazette* 15 November 1918.

⁶ *Windsor and Richmond Gazette* 22 November 1918.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *Windsor and Richmond Gazette*, 29 November 1918.