

THALLON HISTORY TRAILS

The Old Town

Unlike many country towns, which developed at river crossings or cross-roads or around station homesteads, the location and layout of Thallon was planned in connection with extension of the railway line from Goondiwindi. Originally known as Bullamon, it was renamed at the request of the local community to reflect the role of Mr JF Thallon, Commissioner for Railways, in determining the railway route. After town lots were auctioned in June 1911, successful bidders moved quickly to clear their blocks of trees and prickly pear cactus and have their premises ready for opening of the railway line in October that year. Until the early 1930s, when the Cactoblastis moth introduced to the district by Mr KB Cameron of Bullamon Plains brought the prickly pear infestation under control, much of the town remained covered with pear.

Thallon quickly became a busy transport hub. Carriers, initially with wagons drawn by horse or bullock teams and later with motor trucks, provided an essential road transport link to the railway and several were based at Thallon. At a time when few people owned motor vehicles, rail transport was the main means of passenger travel: people travelled to and from St George and Mungindi by coach or passenger car to connect with trains at Thallon. The town had its own butcher, baker and blacksmith and a variety of shops as well as a hotel and a boarding house, stock and station agents and forwarding agents (the connection between rail and road transport). The town's early buildings were on a short section of Pine Street each side of the hotel, the corresponding section of Garah Street and the block north of the railway line.

Over the years, Thallon has evolved in response to changing circumstances and few of the old buildings remain. This History Trail is a walking tour designed to help visualise the town as it was. It starts and finishes at the Park in Pine Street.

Site 1: Cobb & Co site (opposite the Park)

The vacant area inside the yard of Thallon Motors, to the right of the building, is the site of the store best remembered as belonging to Cobb & Co and then to Paddy and Bertha Nolan, though it had several other owners. It consisted of two separate buildings – a bulk store, selling items such as horse feed and bags of flour, on the left and a general store on the right, as viewed from the street. They were later linked by building an office in the space between. The Nolans added another building, to the right of the store, which was used as a butcher's shop then a café. The entire complex was destroyed by fire in 1953. While owned by Cobb & Co (1913-1927), the store served as the company's Thallon office and was the arrival and departure point for Cobb & Co's coaches and cars. Cobb & Co had an extensive set of stables for its coach horses along the southern and eastern sides of the hotel yard.

Thallon Motors was started by Paddy Nolan in the late 1930s, in the galvanised iron shed that is part of the existing building, but it did not operate for long. Wardales re-opened Thallon Motors on this site in the 1950s, then sold it in 1960 to John Edmiston and Abe McGrady, who extended the building. John and Chris Edmiston continued the business until 2003, when it closed. Westaways ran a refreshment room and shop from the mid-1930s to early 1940s in a building just left of the shed, which was later a home to several families over the years before being moved.



View from the railway crossing, across Pine Street to Garah Street, early 1930s. Site of the Park at front right, the former Cobb & Co store and stables in centre and the former Deeley's garage on left in distance (NAA J2879, QTH295/16).



Looking down Pine Street from near the Park, 1924 (SLQ).



Cobb & Co coach and cars outside Cobb & Co store, 1917.



Nolans' store and Wilson's café, about 1940.

Walk down Pine Street, away from the highway.

Site 2: Francis Hotel



The original hotel (SLQ Neg. 9119).

Originally called the Thallon Hotel, it was renamed Hotel Francis by the then owner, Harold Francis, in 1927.

The current hotel is the second on this site. The original hotel, a single-storey fibro-cement building surrounded by verandahs, was destroyed by fire in 1940. A temporary bar was opened in the disused hotel

stables, behind the hotel. It can still be seen today, next to Booligar Street. Following closure of most businesses in the town, the hotel now incorporates a small general store and community postal agency.

Behind the old hotel was an extensive garden producing a variety of fruit and vegetables. The garden, watered from a well that also supplied the hotel, was maintained by Jimmy Ah Bue and then by Hamet Khan.

Site 3: The railway yard (view from Pine Street)

The railway station, built in 1911, was an oblong timber building with a galvanised iron roof and comprised an office and a waiting room, both facing the line. In 2013, it was moved to the recreation grounds as a club house and has been modified to suit its new purpose. It originally stood on the southern side of the rail track, opposite the intersection of Pine and Booligar Streets. To the left (west) of it was the goods shed, which is still standing, with the names of former porters still visible on its inner walls. During the Second World War, the goods shed was used for medical examination of army recruits and during the 1950s, boxing lessons were held in it. Between it and the station, on the northern side of the line, was a large tank on stout timber pylons, from which river water was supplied to steam trains. Water from the tank was also piped to government buildings in the town and later to some homes. Several cottages to accommodate railway workers were situated alongside the line, about 300 metres west of the station. Some had prolific gardens.

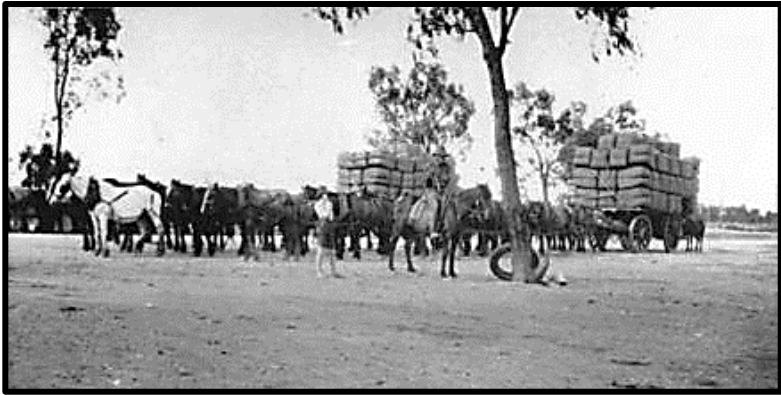


Official opening of the railway line to Thallon, October 1911 (SLQ).



Thallon railway station, about 1930.

For many years the railway was a hive of activity, with trains several times per week bringing goods and freight and taking away wool and livestock, as well as carrying mail and passengers both to and from Thallon. In the early years, wagons drawn by horse or bullock teams would line up in the yard waiting to unload wool or load items for outlying properties and other towns, while a variety of horse-drawn vehicles and motor vehicles dropped off or collected goods, mail and people. The surface of the railway yard was originally deep sand, which was difficult for vehicles and particularly for teams drawing loaded wagons. Cars carrying mail and passengers from St George and Mungindi were often late due to wet roads, the roads at that time being little more than tracks through the bush. Cars became bogged even in the main street.



Wool wagons in Thallon railway yard (SLQ Neg. 9125).

The railway remained busy until the 1970s, after which it declined as road transport took over. The line to Dirranbandi was closed in 2010 and the maintenance depot at Thallon closed the following year. The line east from Thallon remains open but is now used only for transporting grain.

Site 4: Former businesses in Pine Street

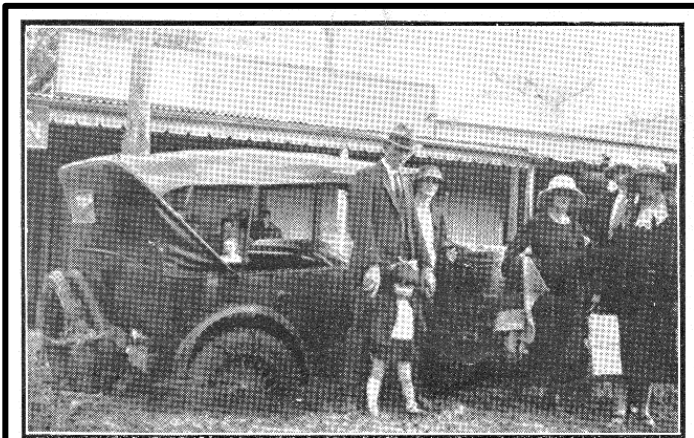
The building on the corner of Pine and Booligar Streets occupies the site of several early businesses. They included, at various times, shops selling fruit and vegetables, groceries, drapery and general merchandise, a refreshment room, a newsagency and a billiard room. The names of some owners show the multicultural nature of the town: Ah Foo, Khan, Deen, Leard, Albeck, Walsh and Pagan. Ross' Café was built on the corner in the early 1950s. Mrs Woodlock bought the café in 1954 and ran it, with Fred Davis, for over 25 years, during which it was rebuilt after a fire in 1959 and expanded from a café and newsagency to a general grocery business. It became a small supermarket, which finally closed in 2010. The building now houses an online store "Buy it from the Bush", specialising in local merchandise.

The next building occupies the site of a boarding house, started by Mrs McNulty and later run for many years by Mrs McGrogan. Next to it was John Lloyd-Jones' general store, which later became a home. Except for Greens' residence, a former shop or office near the end of the block, these were the last buildings in Pine Street until the late 1920s, when building of the police complex began. The police house, cell block and former court house are now among the oldest buildings in Thallon.



(Above) Looking west along Pine Street from Booligar Street.

(Below) Car bogged outside the shops in 1924 (SLQ).



BOGGED IN THE MAIN STREET.

A scene in the township of Thallon, but not uncommon in other Western towns where the roads have been formed by nature.

—N. E. Barber photo.

Walk along Booligar Street to the intersection with Garah Street.

Site 5 – Corner of Booligar and Garah Streets

Several of the older buildings in Thallon, and the sites of some others, can be seen from this point.



The Catholic Church

The house across Garah Street from the Church is on the site of a single-story Queenslander-style house with a large garden, built about 1913 as the residence for Frank McLoughlin, the first manager of the Cobb & Co store. To the right of it was the Catholic Church, in use from 1916 until the early 1980s, when it became structurally unsound and had to be demolished. Next to the now-vacant Catholic Church site is one of the oldest



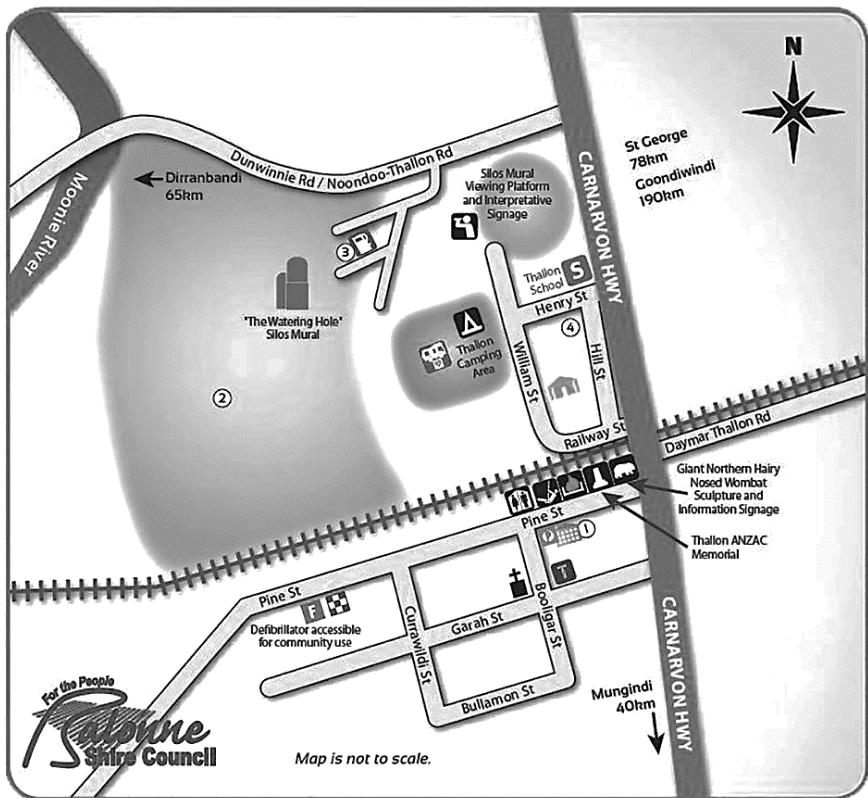
Henry Russell's house and garage

remaining buildings in Thallon, though it has evolved greatly from the original flat-roofed two-roomed shack that existed in the early 1920s. The next house along was built in 1936 for Henry Russell, who had a garage beside it; there is now a house on the garage site. The remaining houses in

this section of Garah Street were built since World War 2, most of those on the northern side by the Housing Commission in the early 1950s.

The section of Garah Street between Booligar Street and the highway contains some surviving early buildings. Opposite the tennis courts is a house built in the 1920s for Jim Lewis, a local carrier. Though quite small by present standards, it was a fairly typical family home of the time. The galvanised iron shed farther down the street, with “Garage” still visible on the gable, was a garage owned in the 1920s by Horace Deeley, who also drove a passenger car for Cobb & Co. The house next to it (which has also been extensively modified) was the Deeley family’s home.

Return to the Park (Site 18) and take the path across the railway line.



STREET MAP OF THALLON (NOT TO SCALE)

Pine Street (originally called Railway Street) once contained many large cypress pine trees, relics of the original vegetation on the sandhill where Thallon was built. **Garah Street** (originally Gerar Street) is named after Gerar, the 1850s run on which the town stands. The first lessee of Gerar was Richard Bligh of Warialda, a grandson of William Bligh who was the Captain of HMS *Bounty* and a Governor of New South Wales. It later became part of Bullamon Station, after which **Bullamon Street** is named. **Currawildi** and **Booligar** Streets are named after historic stations near Dirranbandi. **Hill Street** commemorates the Hill family. James and Edward Hill owned Bullamon Station in partnership with Hurtle Fisher during the 1870s and 1880s. Edward later managed it for the Australian Pastoral Company. Many of his descendants still live in the district. **William** and **Henry** Streets are believed to be named after Thallon's first Post Master, William Henry McGeever.

Sites 6 - 10: Historic sites in William Street

On the corner of William and Railway Streets was a galvanised iron building known as **Gillespie's Offices**, where Allan Gillespie ran a stock, station and forwarding agency. The unlined, unceiled building, comprising three rooms and a verandah, was later leased by the Queensland Police and served as the **police office** and **residence** for several years until purpose-built facilities were erected in Pine Street. There being no cell, any prisoners were chained to a stout post or tree.

On the other side of William Street, inside the railway yard, was the **Station Master's residence**. It was one of only four high-set houses in the town and had a garden full of fruit trees. Following closure of the railway station, the house was sold and removed.

The Hall, opened in 1925, is one of the few early buildings remaining in this part of town. Originally called the Church of England Hall, it was built by Constable William Laird and the publican, Arthur Bennett, with funds raised by the local community. As well as being used for dances, other social functions and community events, it served as a church, with doors at the back of the stage opening to reveal an altar. During the 1950s and 1960s it was the venue for Saturday night picture shows, films being projected from a box over the porch. Its use has evolved with changing needs. The supper room became a library. An annex erected north of the hall a few years ago currently operates as a Community Hub.

On the other side of William Street, within the former railway reserve and approximately opposite the (now closed) BP Fuel Depot, is the **site of the town's first school**. Initially called the Bullamon Provisional School, it opened in July 1911 with 29 pupils. Classes were held under a large tarpaulin which was replaced later in the year by a wooden-framed tent, with a similar tent being provided for use by the teacher. The school had a floor of red sand and was surrounded by prickly pear so thick that the children had to follow a special track to reach the school and had nowhere to play. On 8 August 1912, Bullamon Provisional School became Thallon State School, reflecting the new name of the town and the improved status of the school.

The **Cemetery** in William Street, in use since 1998, replaced the old Thallon cemetery on the sandhill south of the town. The William Street Cemetery incorporates some graves from the early days of Thallon. As with the graves in the old Thallon cemetery, they are no longer

identifiable but are acknowledged by a plaque in the Remembrance Garden within the present cemetery.

Some information about early burials in Thallon and the surrounding district is contained in the booklet titled “Old Thallon Cemetery”, which also includes directions to the old cemetery.

Proceed to the corner of William and Henry Streets.

For many years, a dirt track west from the end of Henry Street was the beginning of the road to Dirranbandi. It was also part of the original road to St George, which turned off to the right before reaching the river.

Site 11: Thallon State School, Henry Street



Thallon State School, 1930

Henry Street was chosen as an appropriate location for a permanent school building, which was officially opened on 6 September 1913. Miss Gertrude Baker was the first head teacher at the new school. The teacher’s residence beside the school was built in 1932. Until then, most teachers had either stayed at the boarding house in Pine Street or

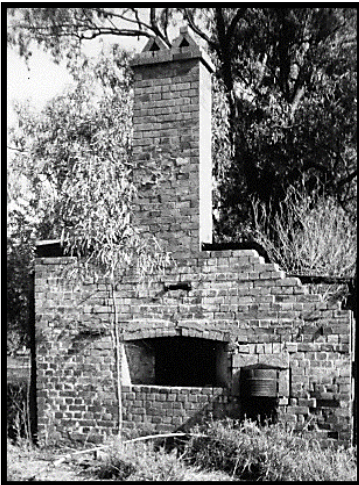
boarded with local families. Over the years, Thallon State School has expanded to accommodate growing enrolments, but the original school building is still identifiable at the far left of the present complex. The school was the venue for Thallon’s centenary celebrations in 2011, which also included a parade down Pine Street, a historic display in the railway station and dinner at the hall.

Opposite the school, the low-set building next to the street is Thallon’s **third Post Office**. It operated from 1965 until 2013, when the Post Office was relocated to the Hotel. The **attached residence**, originally high-set, was built as the home of Thallon’s first Post Master, Mr McGeever, and his family. The McGeevers’ house was surrounded by an extensive garden and had its own tennis court, on the corner of William and Henry Streets. Among the family’s many contributions to the town and district, Mr McGeever donated the block of land behind the school as a recreation ground. In over 100 years, it has been used for many purposes, from cricket and football to rodeos, gymkhanas and circuses.

Continue along Henry Street and around the corner into Hill Street.

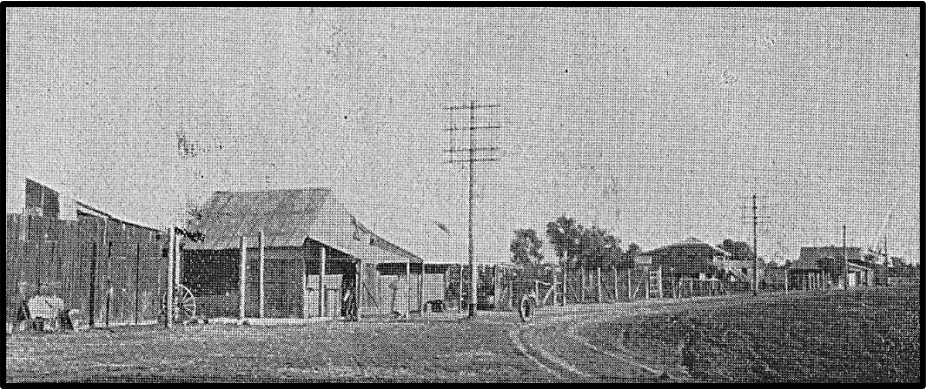
Sites 12 - 16: Homes and Businesses in Hill Street

Thallon's **second Post Office** stood on the corner, facing Hill Street, from about the early 1920s until it was destroyed by fire in the late 1960s. The first post office was attached to McGeevers' store, on the next allotment along Hill Street. Postal and telegraphic services lagged behind opening of the railway line. For some time after Thallon was established, mail continued to be delivered by Cobb & Co coach to Bullamon Homestead, about 1.5km from the town. A receiving officer was appointed at Thallon as a temporary measure until the post office opened in 1912, with Mr McGeever appointed as Post Master. He and his daughters served as Post Master and Post Mistress for over 50 years, until Miss Dot McGeever retired in 1963. She was succeeded by Clarrie Mitchell, who was the first Post Master to occupy the new building in Henry Street and served in that role for over 30 years. The Post Offices also housed the telegraph office (using Morse code to transmit and receive messages) and the manual telephone exchange, which operated until automatic dialling was introduced in 1987.



The crumbling remains of an old brick **baker's oven** show the location of the bakery behind **McGeevers' store** (later owned by Joneses and Rodneys). Mr McGeever started his store and bakery very early in the life of Thallon and installed a new oven, believed to be this one, in 1927. The store, built of wood and galvanised iron, burnt down in 1932 and was replaced by another, of similar construction, which was also destroyed by fire in the late 1960s.

Being close to ground level, the store, bakery and original post office were subject to flooding. When the town experienced its first flood in 1917, water was a foot (30cm) deep in the post office. Later residents remembered the baker, Les Jones, continuing to make bread while standing in flood water during a high flood in the early 1950s and a boat from one of the stations, that had come down the flooded St George road, being tied to a verandah post of the store while its occupants collected bread from the bakery.



Hill Street, then called the St George Road, looking north from the railway end in 1924. Blacksmith's shop at front left, then Berrys' shop and residence; Thompsons' house in middle distance and McGeever's store and Post Office at the far end (SLQ).



Looking south to the railway crossing along the future Carnarvon Highway in 1925. Post Office and store in foreground; roof of Thompsons' house just visible over the store; a cottage and Berrys' house and shop in the distance; blacksmith's shop obscured (QSA Item 1821424).

Note: The photograph at the top of this page, and the photographs attributed to SLQ on pages 3, 5 and 7, were copied by the State Library of Queensland from The Queenslander newspapers dated 12 July 1924, 11 November 1911 and 25 October 1924.

The **high-set house** about half-way along Hill Street, originally the home of Bert Thompson and his family, is the only early building left in this part of the town. The Thompsons, who later owned Box Plain property near Thallon, had a long connection with the district: Bert Thompson's father, James, came to Dareel Station in the 1860s and later became Head Stockman on Bullamon. This house was later the home of Willis Rodney and his family. He and his brother Fred were early carriers in the Thallon district, beginning with horse and bullock teams respectively then switching to trucks.

The **allotment behind the Hall** belonged to William Rummell, another early carrier. The houses on this allotment and on the next one along were small and low-set, with frames of round timber. This house had timber walls and the one next door had walls of flat iron. The latter, visible in the 1925 photograph on page 13, was a home until about 1960. It comprised two bedrooms, a dining room and a kitchen, with a verandah across the front. The Rummell block was vacant by the 1940s and was used by a neighbour to milk her goats, which ran on the town common.

The last building before the corner is best remembered as **Berrys' residence and shop**. The shop was built for a butcher in the very early days of Thallon and had changed little. The back portion was in the form of a huge gauze safe and in one corner of the front part was a large meat block which was covered with a cloth and used as a table. The shop had adjoining living quarters, the kitchen of which retained the original slab walls and floor. Mrs Berry sold fruit, soft drinks and home-made ice cream. She was also a nurse and served as the local midwife, bringing many of the early Thallon babies into the world. Mr Berry ran a passenger car service between Thallon and Mungindi and was also the Thallon-Mungindi mailman. He took over the mail route from Cobb & Co in 1924 and with his step-son Bruce Quinlan, ran the service for many years.

Site 17: Corner of Hill and Railway Streets

On this corner was **Alf Rolph's blacksmith shop**, made of flattened kerosene tins and small round cypress pine logs standing vertically. Behind it (facing Railway Street) was the Rolph family's house. In the early years, Thallon residents relied heavily on wells for their water supply. Rolphs' well was the best in town, producing clear, fresh water from a depth of about 30 feet (9 metres).

The house on the other side of the highway was built as the home of the Mitchells, early residents and now one of Thallon's oldest families.

Behind Mitchells' house and the former saleyard site was a race track where race meetings were held until the 1940s. Locally-owned horses included Steve Mitchell's Nanomi and Mick Albeck's Rose Yet and Beaucre, all of which raced successfully at country meetings in southern Qld and northern NSW.

A short distance from town, on the other side of the Daymar Road, was one of several slaughter houses that, at different times until the 1940s, provided meat for the various butchers' shops that served the town.

The railway line near the crossing was a popular location for viewing Thallon's "Min Min" light, which appeared regularly on or near the line between Thallon and Daymar for several years until the 1940s. The bright light would appear suddenly, seem to move towards the viewer, then disappear. One night, some railway fettlers were returning to Daymar on a "pumper" after a few drinks at the Hotel Francis when they saw a light and hastily lifted the vehicle from the track, thinking a train was coming, only to see the light vanish a few seconds later. Sitting on the railway line in the evening, waiting for the Min Min to appear, provided entertainment for local children and probably a few adults. The origin of the light was never explained. One theory was that it was the ghost of a man who had hanged himself while working on a property near the line. Others were that it was due to phosphorus, or was a swarm of fireflies.

Return to the Park via the footpath over the railway line.

Site 18: The Park.

The Park was not a feature of early Thallon. At one time, this area was vacant land that provided access to the railway yard, but for many years it has had an important role in the recreational and social life of the town.

It is the venue for community events, including Thallon's annual Anzac Day services. The War Memorial, erected in 2015 and dedicated on Anzac Day that year, commemorates the people from Thallon and district who have served Australia in conflict and peace-keeping. Names of those who served in the two World Wars are listed on the Memorial and on commemorative pavers laid nearby.

The Park is also home to William the Northern Hairy-Nosed Wombat, a sculpture erected in 2017. A sign nearby tells the story of Thallon's connection with the discovery of this critically endangered species.



Pine Street from the railway crossing, about 1959.

Acknowledgments

This booklet (updated in 2021) was written for and published by the Thallon Progress Association Inc.

The map of Thallon was provided by the Balonne Shire Council. Images are from the National Archives of Australia (NAA), Queensland State Archives (QSA), State Library of Queensland (SLQ) and individuals.

We hope you have enjoyed this stroll through part of our history.

Other aspects of Thallon's history are contained in the following booklets, also published by the Thallon Progress Association Inc.:

“Roads of Yesterday” (another History Trail)

“Old Bullamon”

“Old Thallon Cemetery”

“Remembering Thallon's World War 1 Soldiers”

“Remembering Thallon's World War 2 Servicemen”.