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How Toodyay has changed over the past 100 years

Over the years there have been many changes as our community has developed. Some of these changes are indicated by the evolving use of a place. Other changes are reflected by the absence of what was once here.

One hundred years ago the population of the Toodyay district was about a third of what it is today (2018) and a high proportion of people were primary producers. Today most workers are either employed in the construction industry or in health care / social assistance. Primary producers now number about a quarter of these two groups combined.

The wider Toodyay district had over 300 residents or associates involved in World War One, many of whom were farmers or farm workers. Since the end of that war, commemorations for Toodyay's returned service men and women have taken several forms. The Toodyay War Memorial (1921) and the Toodyay Memorial Hall (the 1910 town hall, renamed in 1956) are built structures acknowledging war service. Both venues are cared for by the Shire and the community and are regularly used for public events. The Toodyay RSL has served its members since 1919 and its members have also cared for the community. The Sub Branch deservedly celebrates its centenary in 2019.

One hundred years ago the Toodyay State School was at the forefront of innovative educational practices and programs. In 1920 it became the first Consolidated School in the state where children were bussed in from outlying districts. The 1887 school building was closed in 1954 when a larger school was built across the river. The old main brick school building later became a church and community meeting place and is now a private residence.

The Toodyay Library building began as the Mechanics' Institute in 1874 with a lending library for subscribers. By the early 1910s this endeavour had fallen on hard times and a decade later the building was adapted as the Toodyay Road Board offices. After the Road Board moved to new premises in 1959 (the old Courthouse, now the Council Chambers), the Toodyay Library took over the entire Mechanics' building again. The sympathetically extended library is currently open 6 days a week for locals and visitors.

During the last century the narrow-gauge railway was upgraded to standard gauge and Toodyay was connected directly to Perth instead of via a spur line from Clackline on the main line to Northam. The Toodyay Railway Station was moved and the track through town was realigned. Several historic buildings such as the Methodist Church and the Residency were demolished to make way for progress in

the 1960s. Regular freight and passenger (both Perth and interstate) services continue to pass through Toodyay today. The current Avonlink passenger service (1995) is greatly valued by the community.

The 1870s Connor's Mill (built by an expirree convict) ceased milling wheat in the early 20th century and was subsequently converted into the local power station, later becoming a tourist information bureau and then a museum. The Newcastle Gaol (built by convict labour in the 1860s) had also ceased operating as a gaol by 1907 and later became a residence. It was saved from neglect to become (in 1962) one of the first regional museums in Western Australia. Both museums are today managed by the Shire of Toodyay and are open 7 days a week. QR codes around town link to Toodyaypedia articles about historic places and people on Wikipedia.

The Avon River runs through the middle of Toodyay and has changed considerably over the last century. The Avon River Training Scheme initiative launched in 1956 to alleviate town flooding by dredging and clearing the riverbed, has been blamed for much of the current environmental damage of the river ecosystems. The Bilya Walk Track, created and maintained by the Toodyay Friends of the River, today guides visitors along the Toodyay town site section of the river.

Industry has evolved in Toodyay throughout the last century. An important employer in town was the Industrial Extracts factory which extracted tannin from local timber. The business supplied work for about 70 locals. Its impact upon housing, schools and community life from when it opened in the early 1950s until its closure two decades later was significant. An Industrial Park for small industry operates on and around the factory site today.

The Toodyay Showgrounds have expanded over the last 100 years and its encroachment onto an adjacent traditional Aboriginal burial ground has not always been clear. The Toodyay Agricultural Show has been held at the grounds annually since 1890. This site continues to evolve as community expectations change.

The Shire of Toodyay is the home of a close-knit inclusive community that has bounced back from the usual challenges to a country town and district, evolving into a vibrant place which continues to grow in its beautiful 'hidden valleys'. The community response to the Toodyay 2009 Bushfire was notable. The community's 'specialness' was lacknowledged in 2015 when Toodyay was awarded the Australian Tidy Town and Sustainable Community Award.

Suggested excursion

1. Memorial Hall, Stirling Terrace, Toodyay. (open by prior arrangement)
2. War Memorial and Park, Anzac Avenue, Toodyay. (always accessible)
3. Toodyay Public Library, Stirling Terrace, Toodyay. (open 6 days a week, M-F: 9am-5pm, Sat: 9am-1pm)

4. Newcastle Gaol Museum, Clinton Street, Toodyay. (open 7 days a week, 10am-3pm)
5. Connor's Mill Museum, Stirling Terrace, Toodyay. (open 7 days a week, 9am-4.30pm)

Suggested links

1. Toodyay Public Library: <http://www.toodyay.wa.gov.au/Community-Visitors/Libraries/Toodyay-Public-Library>; Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ToodyayPublicLibrary/>
2. Shire museum and heritage webpages:
<http://www.toodyay.wa.gov.au/Community-Visitors/Museums>
3. Toodyay Historical Society website: <http://toodyayhistoricalsociety.org.au/>
4. Toodyaypedia:
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiTown/Toodyaypedia>