

# Showcasing SA Heritage Places



**former Wolseley Inland Aircraft Fuel Depot**  
(including pump house, drum filling platform and six fuel tanks)  
Bordertown – Wolseley Road, Wolseley  
SAHR 20987 – confirmed as a State Heritage Place on 27 September 2007

## **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:**

The remains of the Wolseley Inland Aircraft Fuel Depot (IAFD) are a significant reminder of South Australia's contribution to Australia's national defences during World War Two.

While most of the physical impact of the Second World War was felt in the north of Australia, South Australia was affected principally through its role in the manufacture, storage and transport of war material. Built in two stages, in 1941-42 and 1942-43, the Wolseley IAFD was an important contributor to these activities in South Australia.



*Ruins of the Wolseley IAFD, September 2007*

Of the four generally similar fuel depots built in the State, Wolseley is the oldest, largest, most complex and best preserved. It is the only South Australian IAFD built above ground and is a conspicuous monument, easily viewed from the nearby road.

## **A BRIEF BACKGROUND HISTORY:**

In the first years (1939-41) of the Second World War, Australian forces were engaged in fighting in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, with no direct threat to Australian territory. However, from 1940 there were increasing signs that Australia faced a likelihood of war against the Japanese.

Early in 1941 Australia responded to this threat in a number of strategic ways, including a program to locate military supplies away from capital cities and other likely targets of air and naval attack. Aircraft fuel was a vital defence commodity and so the RAAF began construction of Bulk Petrol Storage Depots at strategic rural locations along railways and highways.

One of the sites chosen was on requisitioned land at Wolseley in South Australia. This depot was still under construction in December 1941, when Japan entered the war with far more vigour and success than had been anticipated. The war moved dangerously closer to Australia and on 19 February 1942 Darwin was bombed, followed by attacks on Broome, Derby and Wyndham in early March.

March 1942 was the lowest point in Australia's defence history, and suddenly all the preparations of the previous year seemed pathetically inadequate. Among the many emergency measures that followed, the dispersal of strategic supplies was given a high priority. Twenty-six new fuel storage facilities (called Inland Aircraft Fuel Depots) were built along major Australian railways.

In South Australia, new depots were built at Gladstone, Crystal Brook and Port Pirie, and a second, larger set of bulk fuel tanks was built alongside the earlier complex at the Wolseley site, which became No. 12 IAFD.



*Concrete filling platform, September 2007*

### **THE WOLSELEY INLAND AIRCRAFT FUEL DEPOT:**

Stage one of this complex, known originally as the Wolseley Bulk Petrol Storage Depot, was first surveyed in May 1941 and was constructed on farmland compulsorily acquired by the Commonwealth Government.

It consisted of three large brick tanks – two aviation spirit tanks of 120,000 gallons (545 kl) and an ethylene tank of 40,000 gallons (181 kl) – as well as a brick pumphouse, corrugated iron guard house, sleeping hut and mess rooms. The tanks were tall, brick, cylindrical structures built to plans supplied by the Royal Air Force. They were spaced about 75 metres apart, lined with welded steel plates and surrounded by earth bunds to retain spillage. The complex was surrounded by a wire fence with an angled barbed top.

Following Japanese attacks on Darwin and other northern coastal towns in 1942, the Wolseley Bulk Petrol Storage Depot became No.12 Inland Aircraft Fuel Depot, under the Commonwealth Government's new defensive program to have 26 fuel depots along railway lines across Australia. Additional farmland was requisitioned and a larger set of bulk fuel tanks was built alongside, and to the west of, the first complex.

The three new tanks were steel-lined concrete structures, built to a design recommended by the US Army Air Corp. Each held 300,000 gallons (1 364 kl) of aviation spirit. A large area further west was used for drum storage, and a shelter was also constructed to house a generator for fire-fighting.

The RAAF designers must have felt confident that Wolseley was relatively safe from attack, as its tanks were left exposed above ground, not buried in the earth like those at Gladstone and Crystal Brook.

The new complex was completed and in use by March 1943, but by that time the Japanese threat had dissipated. Although the Northern Territory was still being bombed, southern Australia was thought to be out of danger and the Wolseley complex was guarded by only five RAAF personnel. Fuel stocks were allowed to run down and by November 1944 the tanks were no longer used. By early 1945 the RAAF guards were replaced by a civilian caretaker and SA Railways crews occupied the RAAF living quarters.

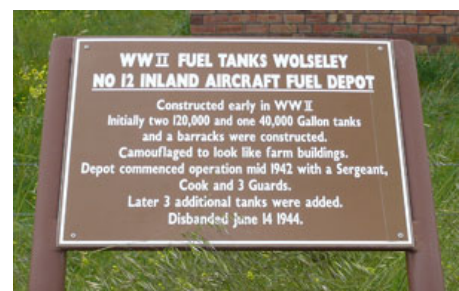
In 1948 the Commonwealth sold the land. Many of the wartime buildings have since been demolished and materials that were scarce after the war (such as steel linings, pipes and pumping equipment) were stripped from the tanks. By 1951 the land was again sold and reverted to farmland. By that time, everything useful had been removed from the site and only the brick and concrete structures remained.



*Panoramic view of the former Wolseley Inland Aircraft Fuel Depot site, September 2007*

### **SITE DESCRIPTION:**

The former fuel depot site lies in a field on the western outskirts of Wolseley township, along the Bordertown-Wolseley Road. It consists of eight masonry structures scattered over an area of more than two hectares, and includes three tall brick fuel tanks, three squat concrete fuel tanks, a brick pumphouse and a concrete filling platform. An interpretive sign has recently been installed by the roadside.



*Interpretive Panel, September 2007*

*The above information is based on the assessment report in the Tatiara Heritage Survey (2004) prepared by Historical Research Pty Ltd and Austral Archaeology Pty Ltd for the District Council of Tatiara.*



**Government of South Australia**  
Department for Environment  
and Heritage