Willowbank’s History and Association with RAAF Amberley

In 22nd Dec 1938, 882 acres of land in the Parish of Jeebropilly were gazetted for Defence purpose at Amberley and RAAF Base Amberley commenced operations on 17th June 1940.

This land was located on the overflow floodplains at the confluence of the Warrill Creek and Bremer River which was known as “Jeebropilly” by our First Australians, an indigenous name translated as ‘Swamp of the Flying Squirrels’ and overlay two main land holdings; the north portion being part of the original pioneer family Collett’s property of “Amberley” named after their county of origin in Sussex England, and the southern portion overlaying the banks of the Warrill Creek rural subdivision of “Willow Bank”, a brief history of which is inscribed on the Willowbank Entrance Statement Historic Data Plaque:

"Willowbank" was the name given to a large Sheep & Cattle Station land holding established in the early 1800’s on the NW side of Warrill Creek. This property was established by pioneer developer, Mr. Darby McGrath. The homestead was located on what is now Amberley Air Force Base near the banks of Warrill Creek which was prolific with willow trees - hence the name .. “Willow Bank”.

In February 1890 his property was surveyed into smaller parcels and auctioned off to the public by Mr. Darby McGrath. This was historically the 'First' subdivision of rural portions in Queensland and continued to be known as the "Willow Bank" Estate.

The name 'Willowbank' was used by the Postmaster Generals Department in 1956 when they sought the approval of the Land Administration Board to name a new telephone office in the district 'Willowbank' similar to the name of the area.

Willowbank as a name was officially named by the Governor in Council on 15 October 1983. The official locality boundaries were gazetted by the Minister for Natural Resources on 8 September 2000. This followed local community consultation led by Willowbank resident George Hatchman.

An original cadastral poster advertising the auction sale of "Willow Bank" Estate is located in the Harrisville Pioneers Museum.

(Of note is that the original Amberley State School was known as the “Warrill Creek” school and was located near where the RAAF base 25 meter Rifle Range now exists).
In essence, Amberley is more parts than one might realize of Willowbank. To construct RAAF Amberley circa WW2 to a solid base strip elevated above the surrounding flood plain, up to two meters of alluvial topsoil soil was excavated from the surrounding area, especially from the paddocks and hills of what is now known as the locality of “Willowbank”, and consolidated into the airfield. The boundaries of RAAF Amberley and Willowbank align along O’Neils Road and Willowbank also rises to an elevation of 85 meters above the airstrip elevation of 26 meters and lays approximately two kilometres south west directly under the approach flight path of the airfield cross runway. The new Amberley Aviation Precinct will also be established on what was the south-east portion of the early “Willow Bank” Estate land holdings.

Now days Willowbank village exists as a close residential community on the south-west perimeter of RAAF Base Amberley and is populated extensively by Defence, ex-Defence, corporate Defence and civilian families. It is an exciting sector of a vibrant Ipswich inclusive of a rural residential community, farming lands, motorsports facilities, coal mining, caravan parks, environmental waste facility, a rifle range, co-habitant aviation & Defence industries and the Queensland Government proposed Ebenezer industrial complex.

On the 11th November 2011, the custodianship of the “Amberley Boy” Honour Stone was transferred to the perpetual care of RAAF Amberley by the Willowbank/Amberley community and to commemorate this event, a plaque was affixed to note the history of the Honour Stone. On this plaque is also inscribed the image of a Flying Squirrel (Sugar glider), to establish the transitional historic links with the original First Australians who knew this land as “Jeebropilly”, the early settlers who pioneered this rural community and its current tenure as RAAF Base Amberley.