

Charters Towers Regional Council,
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**RE: Community Use – Tunnellers Tribute. MCU2026/007 - Lot 1, SP326358, 9
Goldtower Street, Queentown,**

Whom It May Concern,
I am

I write to support the establishment of the Tunnellers Tribute. I would like to provide the perspective of a descendant and an insight into the knowledge and profound respect I and my family have gained from being involved in the development of this project and hope that other descendants and their families, may also share this experience.

The points of the project, that I believe will assisted the development of knowledge and respect, that I so hope this Tribute will provide are as follows.

Cultural and historically significant

The Tunnellers' Tribute (Spirit of the Tunnellers) is I feel, a significant cultural and historical initiative for not only Charters Towers, the broader Australia community, but provides also wider international connection, that honours the sacrifice of Australian servicemen, with a particularly focus on local Men and Women of the Greater Charters Towers Region.

Two (2) Tunneller's born in Charters Towers paid the ultimate sacrifice my Grand Uncle Sapper Francis Hugh Armstrong SERN 5278 and Sapper Samuel Henry Montgomery SERN 193.

Sapper Francis (Frank) Hugh Armstrong grew up in Luke Street, son of Thomas Armstrong and Eliza Jane McGibney, one of 7 brothers and two sisters.

Sapper Samuel Henry Montgomery spent his early years in Brick Street, son of William James and Eliza Jane Montgomery, youngest of two brothers and two sisters

A Further twenty (20) other Charters Towers born men fought as Tunneller, and four from Ravenswood also served under the Tunnellers banner. Further afield men from across Australia, who worked in Charters Towers and/or bore and raised families here. Totalling Sixth-Eight (68) Servicemen, identified to date. These men came both for the work, and for education from the Charters Towers School of Mines. Many of those educated by the School of Mines became the leaders of the Australian Tunnellers Corp. Including Captain Oliver Woodward, Lieutenants Bowry, Plant and Redmond. Lance Corporals included Cooper, Laughton, Mestrez, Girard, and Bradshaw.

In addition, over 4600 Tunnellers, from across Australia are listed on the nominal roll from the Great War. Whom this Tribute will also honour.

This tribute, although with a local focus, will assist in ensuring that the stories of all Tunnellers are acknowledge and preserved.

Educational and Reflective

Australia has no singular place of reflection, education, and remembrance for the Tunnellers. My families own experience, from being involved with this project, have gained valuable education, knowledge and insight, into the role, these unsung heroes of WW1, played in securing the safety and security of our homes and country.

Although aware of Uncle Franks, ultimate sacrifice, (both my father and brother were named after him), none of us had any idea of the extent, not only the role, but the secrecy and the significant involvement, that the Australian Tunnellers contributed to turning the war effort in the Allies favour.

To have a centre here in Australia, for families, to learn, reflect on and pay respects to the Tunnellers is of great value, I feel, and I have been in communication with several descendant, who also agree. Currently the Gate of Mein in Belgium, is the most prominent remembrance site in the World for the Tunnellers lost in Europe. And The Museum of Passchendaele is the most comprehensive educational centre recognising the Tunnellers contribution.

Charters Towers community I think would be a perfect site for such a Tribute, given its rich historical mining history, and its pivotal role in mining education of the time. The opportunity to provide a place for generations to come, to learn and reflect on the amazing efforts of these unsung heroes.

International Connection.

I mentioned earlier that I felt the Tribute will have an international connection, in fact that connection is to Belgium, where the Tunnellers primarily served and those who failed to come home, still rest.

A soil sample from Belgium is to be included in the Tribute. Not only to add an authentic element from the battlefield but also as a deep level of respect between Belgium and Australia. The soil has been gathered, with the very gracious permission of the owners, from an original WW1 bunker at a private residence at Nonnebossen Wood, Belgium on 10/11/2024. This place was chosen because this was the area, in which Sapper Francis Armstrong was killed in action on 1/10/1917. Just nine months after being deployed to Belgium. Frank was sheltering in a bunker with a comrade Sapper William Spencer from an enemy bombardment. The bunker received a direct hit. Frank and William were in a party of five Tunnellers on a ration trip between the headquarters and their group camp. Also lost during this encounter were W Lenard, A O'Neil and James Skillen. James Skillen was the only member of the group to survive the initial attack but later succumb to his injuries.

I have connected the tribute to Belgium, because this Belgium Communities response to the Tribute, can only be described as over-whelming. The gathering process was commemorated by ceremony, attended by Colonel Carney Aust, Defence Attache, the Colonel of the Southern Military Command of Belgium, the Mayor and Deputy Mayors of Zonnebeke, Rev Richard Clement, Chaplain, St George's Memorial Church, the Director and Research Officer of the Museum of Passchendele and two Ceremonial Buglers from the Gate of Mein, as well as the Family of the owners and a number of other interested locals.



Wreaths laid at the bunker in Belgium, during the soil gathering process

The level of deep respect shown by the Belgium people for the Allied soldiers is humbling, and epitomised by the Deputy Mayor of Zonnebeke, Jochen Janchheere, who said, "he grew up in peace and safety, as did his children and now his grandchildren, and that is thanks to the sacrifice of the allied soldiers, who fought with them to defend their country, especially those who travelled hundreds of miles from the other side of the world." I feel, that including soil from Belgium is acknowledging the joining of our countries on a profound level of joint respect and community.

Other aspects of the total project that offer unique components, that will connect future generations to the Tunnellers, and their bravery is the "Wall that Whispers" that is intended to display photographs of each of 68 Tunnellers, which will provide a direct family connection for future generations. Along with the audio of their story being read by local students.

In addition, these photos are currently not a complete collection contained in one place. Nor are the other photos to be displayed, showing their Leaders and daily life in the tunnels.

Along with that every endeavour is being made to incorporate meaningful symbolic features ensuring the tribute resonates emotionally and culturally with visitors. And the project aligns with recognised commemorative principles and has the potential to meet Australian Department of Veterans' Affairs memorial guidelines, strengthening its credibility. Making the tribute a valuable community resource to be available for use on commemorative occasions, I think is also commendable.

On behalf of Tunneller descendant I would encourage the Charters Towers City Council, to review this Tribute Project favourably. It is intended to provide a central memorial site for future generations to learn about and to honour and respect the many sacrifices made by Tunnellers, their families and communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this matter.