



Thornlie

1957 – 2019



In the mid 1950s the area administered by the Gosnells Roads Board included the Gosnells townsite, Beckenham, East Cannington, Kenwick, Maddington (which included the Orange Grove locality), Martin and the land known today as Southern River.

On the other side of the Canning River, the Board also administered largely undeveloped bushland, heavily timbered with red gum, jarrah and banksia, stretching as far as a sand track that later became Ranford Road.

A portion of this area had included the original grant of about 2,000 acres made to Thomas Bannister in 1829, designated Canning Location 17. It stretched from the Canning River to the current site of Ranford Road and between Warton Road and Pembury Road.

Bannister did little to develop the property he called Woolcombs and upon his return to England less than 10 years later administered it as an absentee landowner until his death in 1874. The property was sold on until finally in 1883 it was purchased by Walter Padbury.

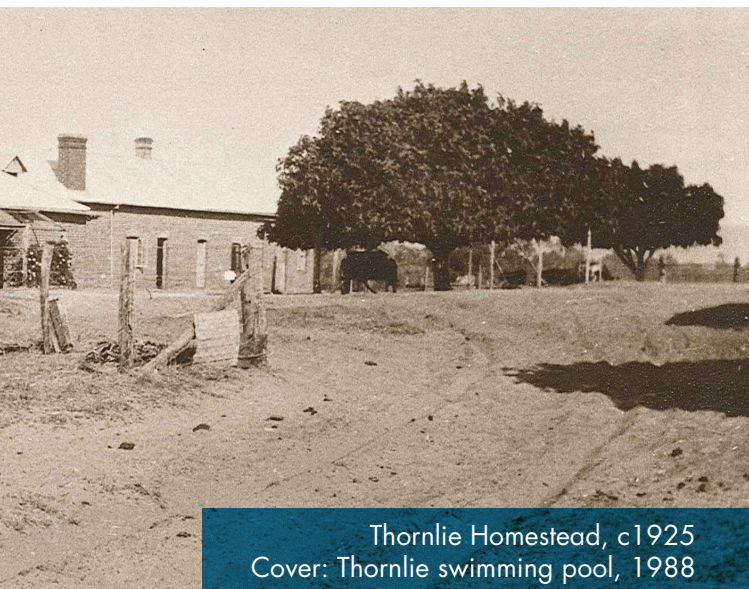


Padbury had arrived in the West Australian colony as a 10 year old in 1830 and had since become a successful businessman. He proceeded to invest in his new property on the Canning by installing his niece Amy with her new husband Frank James as managers of the estate.

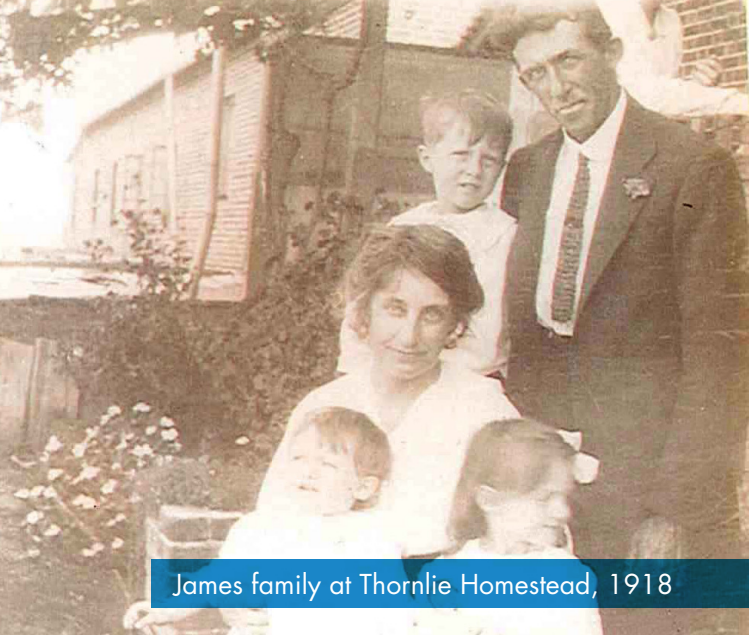
In 1884 a new house was constructed of bricks made on the property, lime mortar and local jarrah. The young couple named it Thornlie after a business house in Madras, India which had been run by Frank James' grandfather.

It is possible that this name had in turn been borrowed from the Scottish locality in the Glasgow area.

Padbury continued to invest money in the estate, and with the James' skilful management it became a very successful enterprise. Upon Padbury's death in 1907 ownership was passed to Amy James and she and her husband continued to farm and raise their family there.



Thornlie Homestead, c1925
Cover: Thornlie swimming pool, 1988



James family at Thornlie Homestead, 1918

After Frank died in 1929 and Amy in 1932, their youngest son Selby remained on the property until he decided to sell to Nathaniel Harper in 1937.

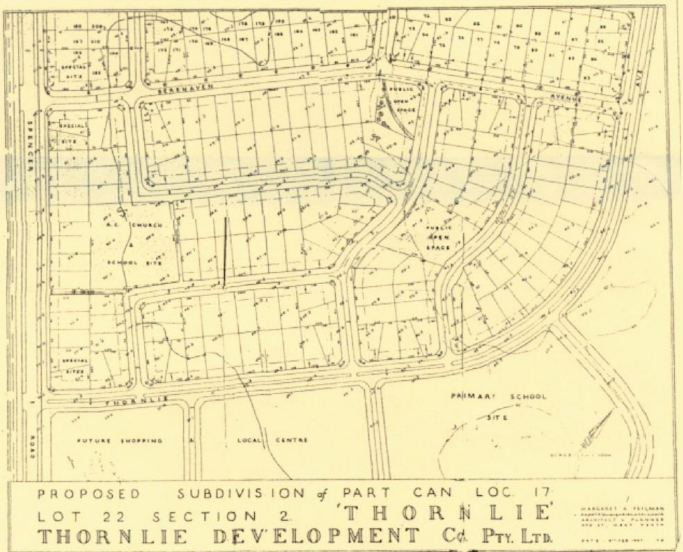
In 1954 the late Nathaniel Harper's 1,175 acre Thornlie estate was put up for auction. It was broken into two lots; the smaller, of 565 acres, was located between Spencer Road and the Canning River. This lot did not sell and so was broken up further into three more sections, designated Lots 3, 4 and 5. Lot 5 consisting of 228 acres and including the remains of the Thornlie homestead, was bought by D and M O'Sullivan.

The decade following the end of the Second World War had brought a growing prosperity to Perth and its environs. Post war migration fuelled an already swelling baby boom enjoyed by young couples and the mood for investment was optimistic. Building material shortages were coming to an end and the Gosnells Roads Board enthusiastically supported the proposal by Daniel O'Sullivan for a specially designed urban development.

Secretary to the Gosnells Road Board, Richard Rushton and his staff undertook a thorough investigation on the standards required for roads, drains and housing, and in 1956 approvals were given to the Thornlie Development Company for a unique housing development to begin.

It was considered unusual because the developer combined selling the land with building the houses. The General Agency Company was the selling agent and arranged finance for the new residents.

Margaret Feilman, a notable and innovative architect, was employed to draw up the plans. Feilman made significant contributions Australia wide in the area of urban planning and medium density housing concepts.



Subdivision of Lot 22, 1957

The building of a brand new community in the bush was an innovative concept. One of the conditions for the development was that it be named after the existing homestead; another was that the roads be bituminised. Ahead of its time for being environmentally-friendly, there was to be no indiscriminate felling of trees.

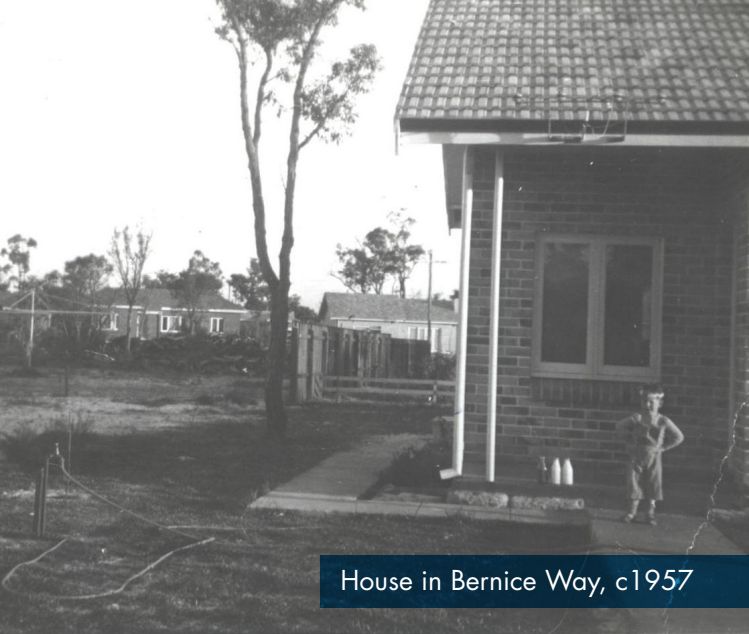
Feilman designed the Thornlie streets to avoid dangerous intersections, and dotted among them were a number of children's playgrounds. The project included initial provision for 100 houses, shops, a school, hotel, a swimming pool, golf course and playing fields.

Several builders were involved, the major one being Sloan Construction Pty. Ltd. All the houses were to be constructed of brick in the modest, affordable, triple fronted bungalow design of the late 1950s. Houses were planned to suit each block. There was a choice of six basic designs with the opportunity to vary the colour of bricks and tiles.

"...they were full quarter acre blocks with a little house on them and there was plenty of room for kids to play."



James family, Thornlie Homestead, 1925



House in Bernice Way, c1957

Small alterations to internal designs were carried out without cost so each house could be personalised. As the development progressed some houses were also built on spec.

Marketing was aimed at young middle income couples who would otherwise not be able to afford a home of their own. Many young couples who had grown up in the Gosnells district seized the opportunity to move into a home of their own in a nearby modern development.

The advertising campaign was also aimed at attracting people from the inner city to enjoy the rural aspect of the subdivision. Wildlife in the area abounded including kangaroos, possums and goannas. The wildflowers and native orchids were prolific, especially next to the old Thornlie homestead.

“We had gorgeous kangaroo paws in Thornlie.”

The first houses were built on the corner of Pegus Street and Thornlie Avenue. Forty houses had been completed by March 1957 and by May the following year there were 100 occupied houses.

The main route in and out of Thornlie was via the Royal Street Bridge over the Canning River, causing links to be forged with Cannington and Victoria Park rather than Maddington and Gosnells. The bridge was much lower than it is today and in those early years the road often became flooded as the water in the Canning rose each winter.

Flooding was also experienced within the subdivision and by 1957 the newly formed Thornlie Estate Progress Association was pushing for improvement in this area as well as for bus services, street lights and rubbish collection. Later on the Progress Association also lobbied for a beautification plan which included planting street trees.

As a contrast to the traditional male dominance in community management, much of the driving force in the Progress Association was female. With so many of the residents being young mothers of similar age, with the interests of their children to pursue, a degree of assertive unity was guaranteed. Lobbying and fundraising secured schooling, public transport and an infant health centre for the area sooner than may have happened otherwise.

"We were sort of in the sticks."

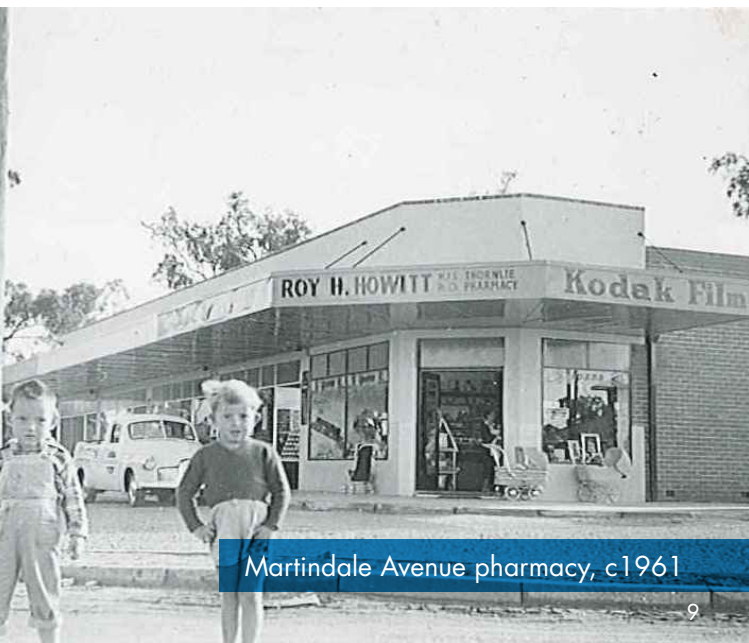
In the early years there were few facilities for the residents. The nearest bank was in Victoria Park and there was no local doctor.

Shopkeepers from neighbouring suburbs such as Queens Park, Kenwick and Cannington made home deliveries and it was only in April 1958 that the first shop, a pharmacy, opened in Martindale Avenue.

An infant health clinic was conducted there on Thursday mornings in the back room. The next shops opened were a butcher, a delicatessen and a greengrocery. Later that year a telephone box was installed beside the shops. A hardware store then followed.

"...they had the whole shop full of babies screaming."

The isolation and the self-contained aspect of this development as well as the predominance of young families in a similar situation promoted a strong community spirit and identity.



Martindale Avenue pharmacy, c1961

"...everybody knew everybody else... and we all helped one another."

In 1958 the company proceeded with the second Thornlie subdivision in the area bounded by Spencer Road and Thornlie and Berehaven Avenues. Berehaven is reported to be named after the Irish hometown of the O'Sullivan family who were principals of the General Agency Company with Pegus, Selby and Spencer being named after local pioneers.

At this time Thornlie was an almost exclusively residential suburb, with locals needing to drive their cars to workplaces further afield. As most households at this time had only one car and women generally did not work in paid employment, there was a consequent need for

"In the early days, anyone with a car would pick up anybody who was walking and drop you off."

public transport within the area. A bus service therefore began in June 1958.



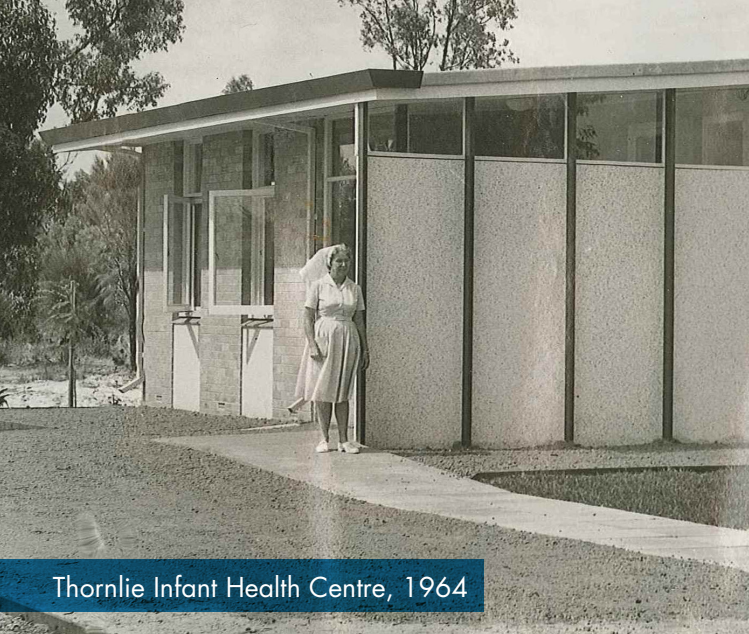
The flooding situation improved with the installation of a deep drainage system. A direct physical link was established with the township of Gosnells when the Fremantle Road Bridge over Southern River was opened in 1959.

The sporting ethos of Thornlie was strong and by 1959 three tennis courts had been built and the Thornlie Cricket Club formed. Three acres of land at the entrance to Thornlie had been vested by the development company to the Gosnells Roads Board as a recreation reserve. The next few years saw the founding of the bowling club, a baseball club, a darts club, a par 3 golf course and a football club.

By June 1960, 235 houses had been built and until that year the closest school was at Kenwick. The Roman Catholic Sacred Heart Primary School opened its doors in 1962. The nearest secondary schools in those early years were at Kent Street in Victoria Park or at Armadale.



Children playing baseball, Thornlie 1963



Thornlie Infant Health Centre, 1964

In February 1963 the new Thornlie Infant Health Centre on Thornlie Avenue was officially opened and in 1964 the Thornlie Hotel began trading.

In 1966, 10 years after the green light for this extraordinary development had been given, the first stage of Thornlie's metamorphosis from bush to suburb was largely complete, with more than 500 houses and a population of 2109.

Thornlie continued to expand with the opening of the new Thornlie swimming pool in 1967, which served the entire Gosnells municipality, as its successor Leisure World continues to do today. The first section of the Thornlie Square Shopping Centre opened for business in 1970 and also in that year Thornlie High School accepted its first students.

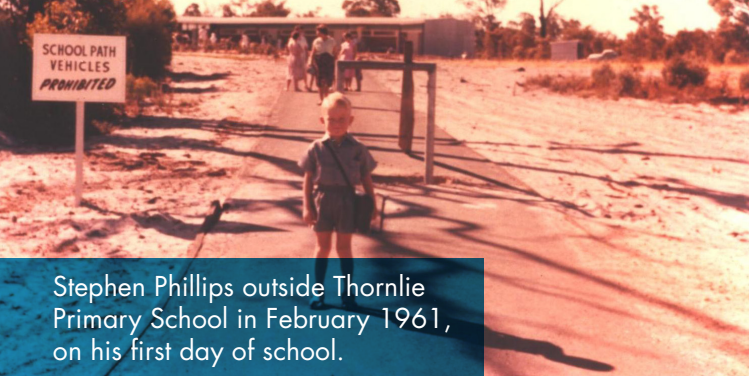
"We had a wonderful time living here."



At this time Thornlie was still some distance from the main Perth-Armadale rail line. The nearest train station was Kenwick and even from the first houses along Pegus Street it was a milelong journey. Many of the residents nonetheless walked.

In the late 1960s a socially innovative new housing subdivision named Crestwood was established, with features including pedestrian underpasses and a body corporate to maintain shared recreational facilities.

The decades that followed saw more housing developments including Castle Glen and Forest Lakes. The foundation for the dynamic suburb of Thornlie had been laid and continues to be realised half a century after its inception.



Stephen Phillips outside Thornlie Primary School in February 1961, on his first day of school.

The establishment of Castle Glen and Forest Lakes in the 1980s resulted in a greater need for facilities to service the growing suburb. A new shopping centre in Forest Lakes opened in the early 1990s, providing residents with shops closer to home. Lakers Tavern opened next to the shopping centre in 1991 and Don Russell Performing Arts Centre opened in 1993.

The performing arts centre was named after the developer of the area who donated the site for use as a community building.

Thornlie Library, which was opened in 1971, had a major extension in 1999, reflecting the increase in size of the local population using the City's library services. Leisure World opened in 1994 to replace the Thornlie Swimming pool, and celebrated 25 years of operation in 2019.

During this time of growth, schools were opened and enlarged. Forest Crescent Primary School opened in 1987. Sacred Heart Primary School moved to a new location in Ovens Road in the early 1980s, as it had outgrown its former site. A new school and church was built on the Ovens Road site. The original school property on Tonbridge Way was reopened as Muslim Community School in 1990, later known as Australian Islamic College.

During the 2000s, existing sporting facilities such as Tom Bateman Reserve were upgraded. The playing reserve was upgraded and a baseball field was established. A skate park was created between Thornlie Library and Leisure World in 2003, to provide a dedicated place to skate.

The Thornlie train station, on a spur line to the Armadale line, was opened in 2005. This provided the suburb with better transport options and a direct connection to the Perth CBD. Work will commence soon on extending the Thornlie line to Cockburn, providing Perth's first east-west connection.

Thornlie has continued to grow as a community, albeit at a slower pace than in previous decades. Much of this growth has come from overseas arrivals and, as a result, the suburb has become increasingly multicultural. The largest increases are seen in the population of expatriate communities from China, the Philippines and India. To meet increased housing demand, there has been an increase in infill development, where larger single home lots are being subdivided to accommodate a number of smaller dwellings.



Thornlie Senior Baseball Team, premiers of the South Suburban Baseball League Inc., for the winter 1963 competition.

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