

As war memorials go, the one in the small town of Yuleba, 400 kilometres west of Brisbane, is something special.

Key points:

- Violet Baker, who knew artist Fred Doyle when he lived on her family's property, remembers a man rarely without a pen in his hand
- The mural has held pride of place inside the Yuleba War Memorial Hall since 1964
- Maranoa Regional Council engaged professional art conservators to carry out restoration and preservation work

Back in the early 1960s, a local artist and jackaroo named Robert "Fred" Doyle, painted a mural showing the many theatres of war in which Australian troops had fought.

But earlier this year, the Maranoa Regional Council realised Doyle's masterpiece was in danger of succumbing to the ravages of time.

If it were to survive, professional restoration work was needed.

The mural is by an artist whose talent was largely unnoticed by Yuleba locals when he created it.

Violet Baker, who knew the artist and his wife when they lived on her family's property, remembers a man who was rarely without a pen in his hand.

"He was a person who would just sit down and do a sketch, but we thought nothing of it," she said.

"They'd come down and bring the dogs and he'd sit there and, just through force of habit, he'd pick up a pen and start scratching.

"It was only later, when he started to do things like this, that we discovered he was an artist and we hadn't realised it."

The join of two sections of Robert "Fred" Doyle's mural on a wall of the Yuleba War Memorial Hall, showed damage that had to be repaired by professional art conservators. (*Blair Painting Conservation*)

Maranoa Regional Council and South West Queensland Regional Arts received a grant to engage Brisbane art conservators Blair Paintings Conservation & Studio 204 to carry out restoration and preservation work on the mural.

The painstaking work involved gluing down areas where the paint had flaked and using a small, specially designed iron to keep it in place.

Maité Le Mens from Brisbane firm Studio 204 said other damage, caused by birds that occasionally found their way into the hall, was simply a matter of delicate cleaning.

Conservator Tessa Blair said an unexpected part of the week working on the mural was the meeting with Yuleba locals who remembered the artist and saw the mural being installed in the hall.

"I think the mural is a big part of the community and they love it, and they are proud of it," she said.

"So it's really important to have those stories, memories and back stories recorded and preserved, as well as the physical artwork."

Fred Doyle painted the mural over two years while living and working at Bendemeer, the property north of Yuleba.

Among the combat scenes it depicts are the Battle of Britain and the landing at Gallipoli, along with jungle and desert warfare scenes, air, sea and tank battles, and the bridge on the River Kwai in Myanmar.

Tony McLennan, who lived on the property, remembered Fred doing the work on the verandah of the cottage on the property where he lived.

"He did it in four sections," he said.

"He'd do one, move it out, move another sheet in and then do that one. This was an open verandah and he did the four sections there. We didn't realise the extent of the work that was going on."

While many current residents have strong links to the work, Tessa Blair's family have also played key roles in its life.

Her great grandmother was a member of the hall committee and was involved in commissioning the mural.

"Then my grandmother took over as secretary for many more decades so she was involved in caring for the work," she said.

"So it was really nice and special to be able to come back to the community to preserve this work for future generations."

With the conservation work complete, Violet Baker is thrilled to know the work will survive for future generations to enjoy.

"I think it's the most wonderful thing to have in a country town," she said.

"You're never going to see another one like it. I'd just like to think that Fred will always be remembered by this."

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