DEAD HEART OF THE M.I.A.

"The dead walk the streets of Whitton," said old Bill Clyne at Christmas lunch.

My partner's grandfather had dementia but remembered me the few times we met.

Anyway, it's the sort of introduction that makes a town memorable.

Whitton is the oldest settlement in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area.

It grew between large sheep stations including Yanco, Tubbo and Kooba.

When the railway arrived in the late 19th Century it changed names from Hulong to avoid confusion with Howlong.

It had a number of pubs and businesses until a fire in the early 20th Century.

Only a fraction of the main street remains.

These days there are only a few places to shop and the museum never seems to be open.

There is a Common, a bush block on the edge of town that's thick with remnant gum trees.

It's the Common where it feels like the dead wander about.

If you're willing to walk around the watering hole and the cattle that are often stocked within the barbed-wire borders.

Particularly among the trees behind the old courthouse building.

Some of the old grey boxes show cultural scars.

They're marks made by Wiradjuri people to create tools including coolamon, a kind of platter for carrying items between campsites.

A couple of scars look like shields and I think they're a poignant reminder of the Frontier War fought here in the 1830s.

The Common offers a glimpse at a more timeless Riverina landscape.

A shady billabong among the circular shapes cut into the rough trunks of the old eucalyptus trees.

It feels like ghosts might be found here and I have heard they've been caught.

When I worked for Landcare I heard the story from Murrumbidgee Irrigation's environmental officer.

She told me the Common was available for locals to store their animals, such as the cows I saw.

However, the booking system had been reviewed after it was found that names from tombstones in the town cemetery had been listed.

While the dead haven't been seen walking the streets, they have been recorded in Whitton Common.