

The Oaks Historical Society Inc

Est. May 1979

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Wollondilly Heritage Centre & Museum

Newsletter

December 2020

HOPE OUT OF THE ASHES EXHIBITION AND BOOK LAUNCH

Hope Out Of The Ashes, our new exhibition was officially opened on Friday 20th November by Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons. The exhibition and accompanying book *Hope Out Of The Ashes*, documents the journey from farmers to fire-fighters and the formation of the Fire Brigades in Wollondilly.

The vision of the exhibition was to look at the timeline of how fire fighting developed in the Wollondilly Area beginning with the indigenous use of fire to modern methods used today and the HOPE that comes from regeneration after a fire.

The Commissioner talked of when he left school and became a motor mechanic and would spend each weekend as well as week nights working on the old fire trucks trying to get them at least operational. He reflected on how far we've come in a relatively short time because volunteers, men and women, have relentlessly given so much of their time on a regular basis to serve their community.

He noted this month is a milestone for the advent of the serious fires that began in our midst in 2019 and the professionalism, training, skill standards, technology and support for our volunteers was second to none.

Commissioner Fitzsimmons spoke of the commitment of our RFS Volunteers providing a lifetime of service and how they are recognised around the world for their professionalism. He spoke of the request for a Remote Area Fire team to travel overseas to train fire-fighters in Canada where their fire-

fighters are paid personnel and explained how they overcame sending 'volunteers' by briefly adding them to the payroll.

The Commissioner mentioned the extraordinary difference in the weather conditions of the fire season this year to the 2019-20 fire season and paid tribute to those fire-fighters who lost their lives in the fires in a season like we've never experienced before in NSW.

Despite adversity, the outpouring of community spirit and generosity through care, donations and funds to help with the recovery and healing has been extraordinary and remarkable and culture, community and goodwill ultimately triumphs.

Talking about resilience, hope and a way forward, the Commissioner paid tribute to the Wollondilly Heritage Centre for exhibitions and publications like 'Hope Out Of The Ashes' because they matter, they capture memories and provide reflection.

He reminded everyone there is hope and in his new role as Commissioner of Resilience it is more important than ever to help people in recovery, rebuilding and repair ■

Pictured—centre Commissioner Fitzsimmons with John Ferguson.

Left Commissioner Fitzsimmons, Sue Davis and Trish Hill.





President's Report

Trish Hill

Who would have thought in March that we would have reached December so quickly.

In the past month we've updated our Covid plan again and extended our opening hours, now 10am-3pm.

We felt very privileged to have Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons come and open our Hope Out Of The Ashes exhibition and book launch on the 20th November. Thanks to Doreen, Ben and all of the team who worked hard to develop the exhibition and to Sue for her expertise compiling the book. Thanks also to the kitchen crew, pictured with the Commissioner.



During a visit last week David Campbell noted the sign on the Machinery Shed was faded and in poor condition and has now renewed the artwork so it looks like new again.



Thank you David and thanks again to all of our volunteers for their support throughout this difficult year and may 2021 be a better one. We do plan to be open weekends in January so if you're thinking of visiting please give me a ring to ensure we are open.

Have a wonderful Christmas everyone ■



Acquisitions Report

Allen Seymour

There are still a few items coming in. One of the most important of these is a copy of the official report into the Appin Mine disaster. A warning if you want to read it though, it's about 2 inches thick! We have received some aboriginal items, a large and small Coolamon and head gear from the Northern Territory. From closer to home is a broad axe, made and used by Timberman, Ned Peachey in Burragarang. Something I found at home whilst cleaning up is an invitation from Liz Kernohan MP to a luncheon at The Oaks hall with

then Premier John Fahey and his wife Colleen in 1993. I have no memory of this, pretty sure I didn't attend, does anyone else remember it? On loan to us from John Fergusson is a painting of bush regeneration at Sandy Flat (pictured) after the 2019 fires, presented to John by friend and neighbour Tom Sovoulis ■





Family History & Local Archive Research Corner

Sue Davis



Adding to your Family Tree Knowledge at Christmas Time

Each year at this time I like to remind you of some perfect times to build on your family history research over the festive season. This is often a time when we travel and catch up with family or they visit us. We share conversation about family gone before us. This is the time to ask questions and get new leads on family stories. Here are some points that might help your thinking at this time:

Where to find clues, in addition to talking with extended family members:

- Begin with yourself and work back one generation at a time.
- Look for certificates of birth, death or marriage; family bible; old photographs; medals; birthday books, address books; letters. Online searches. Remember to check TROVE.
- Don't throw out unopened boxes. You never know what treasures may be inside.
- Visit the local studies section of your local library.
- Visit your local museum.

Things to be aware of:

- Online family trees may not be accurate so confirm with official records. Good researchers always list their source.
- If you are not convinced of family information given then thank the relative politely and check later with births, deaths and marriages records of your state. We don't need to upset people!

Happy researching!

Sue Davis, Local Archives and Family History.

DESERVING AWARD

I was delighted to attend the annual *Pride of Workmanship* awards conducted by the Rotary Club of Wollondilly North, on 24 November, at The Oaks Hotel. The awards recognise people who live or work in the Wollondilly Shire and are committed both ethically and responsibly to their vocation and /or their field of expertise. They are recognised as being a contributor to community well-being in terms of communication skills, expertise and consideration of community needs. This year our president, Trish Hill has received one of the awards. She is pictured on the right with current president of the Rotary Club of Wollondilly North, Brian Benson. Trish was recognised for her commitment as President of The Oaks Historical Society and the Burraborang Heritage Society.

Thank you, Trish for your leadership and support!

Sue Davis



FROM FARMERS TO FIREFIGHTERS

an extract from our publication *Hope Out Of The Ashes*

On Friday 13th 1939, during a period of drought and intense heat, bush fires raged through south eastern Australia, claimed 71 lives and destroyed over 1000 homes as well as stock and property. Fires stretched from Lakesland to Mittagong with control organised by the local police.

Following these events, the Bush Fires Act encouraged formation of volunteer fire brigades. The separate communities and farmers in Wollondilly organised their own brigades. Buxton was the first bush fire brigade, formed in 1939.

Initially there was no official controlling body and no funding from the local Council or State Government departments. Neighbours shared equipment such as tractors and water trucks. They set off to fight the fire in the clothes they were wearing at the time the fire was called. The men used rakes, leather beaters, a wet hessian bag or a green bush to attack the flames. Water was carried in knapsack sprays supplied by Council. These were used to put

fires out. To light fires for hazard reduction burning, diesel was also carried on the back. The person carrying it had to have a hessian bag on his back under the tank in case the diesel leaked on to the hessian and caught fire. He was accompanied by another person carrying a tank of water—just in case.

Communication was a problem before the telephone was installed. Various farmers used bells and hooters to alert the community and many young boys started their volunteer careers as messenger boys to spread the news between farms ■

Hope Out Of The Ashes publication is available in our shop.

Pictured below—Lakesland—from Army Truck to Fire Brigade



Buxton Bush Fire Brigade 1946



Wally Alp and his A Model Ford used as a Firetruck in Lakesland 1945



CAMDEN WAR CEMETERY by Allen Seymour



There are twenty three graves in Camden's war cemetery, located in Camden General Cemetery. All of these funerals were handled by P. E. Butler Funeral Directors (in Camden) and are mentioned in the journals

(WHC Archives) that I've been working on. According to the official records, Charles Kinsella was the official undertaker but it appears the funerals were sub-contracted to Butler. Sixteen of these are RAAF personnel who died in air crashes, and at least two of these crashes happened near The Oaks.

Camden aerodrome was owned by the Macarthur-Onslow's, and during WW2 Edward Macarthur-Onslow offered it to the government for the duration. Originally the Central Flying School was located there, and while there were plenty of incidents, no fatal accidents occurred. In late 1942, 32 squadron RAAF arrived. This squadron was formed in Port Moresby in February 1942 and fought there as an armed reconnaissance/bomber unit until returning to Sydney. They flew Lockheed Hudson twin-engine bombers and performed anti-submarine patrols as well as training and rebuilding to make up the losses suffered in New Guinea. On January 26th 1943, at 1.15pm, Hudson A16-152 took off on a training flight, heading for Wagga returning via Forbes and Lithgow. At 1.25pm it crashed onto a wooded slope near Victoria Park and all five crew members were killed. The crew were as follows:

Pilot – Flight Sergeant Stuart Kennedy Scott, 25 years old, single, he had trained in Canada as part of the Empire Air Training Scheme, and then spent twelve months in England flying Hudson's on air sea rescue duties with 279 squadron RAF. He had done almost 230 hours on Hudson's. He joined 32 squadron on January 18th, 1943. He had been a clerk with the AMP Society prior to enlisting.

Observer/Navigator – Flight Sergeant Henry Bennett Langman Johns, 28 years old, single.

Wireless Operator/Air Gunner – Sergeant Bertie Clifford James Pearson, 25 years old.

Wireless Operator/Air Gunner – Sergeant George Douglas Voyzey, 24 years old, engaged to a Canadian girl. He also trained in Canada and became engaged whilst there. He had told his parents he believed he was going to be offered a commission, and they were upset when he was still classed as a Sergeant. They also cast doubts over the pilot's ability,

as he hadn't flown for three months, and the Hudson's flown by 32 squadron were a different model to those he flown in England. He had been given a few hours testing the day before the crash and was classed as being qualified. The RAAF denied all knowledge of the offer of a commission and dismissed the claims about the pilot's competency.

Wireless Operator/air gunner – Sergeant Gordon Thomas Lawson, 30 years old, married.

The crash was reported to the control officer at Camden aerodrome by the Public Works Department at The Oaks airfield. It is believed that the crash was caused by engine failure, and the pilot was trying to make it back to The Oaks for an emergency landing. Official reports say that it crashed in



an inverted position and caught fire. Witnesses who saw the crashed aircraft (Leo Rideout was one of them) didn't believe there had been a fire. Apparently the Hudson was difficult to fly on one engine and tended to roll over.

The funeral was held at the Camden Methodist church on January 28th. The coffins were carried on a large flat trailer towed by an RAAF Bedford truck (pictured above).

32 Squadron had suffered an earlier loss on November 4th, 1942 when a Hudson crashed into Bong Bong mountain. The crew of this crash were not buried at Camden but appear to have been returned to the families for burial.

The next crash at The Oaks occurred on September 30th, 1943, at 9.15am when a Kittyhawk P40N fighter A29-455 from 78 Squadron failed to pull out of a dive and crashed into The Oaks airfield. The 54th Australian Anti-Aircraft Regiment had gun emplacements adjacent to the airfield, and the aircraft was practicing strafing these positions. The pilot was 20 year old Sergeant Stanley William Smethurst. I understand that souvenirs of the aircraft may have been acquired by residents from The Oaks before the site was secured and do these still exist? 78 Squadron was a fighter squadron, formed at Camden on July 20th, 1943, and later transferred to New Guinea.

32 Squadron converted from Hudson's to Bristol Beauforts while they were at Camden and on November 18th 1943, suffered another loss when Beaufort A9-350 left Camden on a night cross country flight and failed to return. It was found a day or two later 4 miles west of Kiama. Cause of the crash was unknown. The crew, an all-Victorian one consisted of:

Pilot – Flight Sergeant Ronald Cecil Christie, 23 years old, single. Christie was a cadet engineer with Williamstown City Council prior to enlisting, and had also been in the Militia 2nd Survey Regiment. He joined 32 Squadron on October 21st, 1943.

Navigator – Sergeant Douglas Reginald James, 20 years old, single. James was a student prior to enlisting and his father was the member for Bulla Dalhousie in the Victorian Legislature. He joined 32 Squadron on October 21st, 1943.

Wireless Operator/Air Gunner – Sergeant Francis Nelson Fanning, 20 years old, single. Fanning was a postal assistant before enlisting, and joined 32 Squadron on October 21st, 1943.

Wireless Operator/Air Gunner – Sergeant Reginald Alfred Sharples, 23 years old, single. Sharples was a plastic moulder before enlisting.

Passenger – Flight Sergeant Harry Sydney James Terrill, 20 years old, single. Terrill's father was a member of the Australian Flying Corps in WW1. Terrill was a member of 73 Squadron and was part of a detached flight that was based at Camden. It is not clear why he was on the plane. Officially he was not on duty but was not breaking regulations by being on the plane. He was a Navigator and a close personal friend of Christie & James and it is thought that he wanted to have some extra training on the Beaufort. Being classed as a passenger may not seem much, but it did make a big difference. A lot of RAAF personnel had life insurance policies and if they died whilst on duty, the insurance company did not have to pay, but being classed as a passenger meant the insurance company was responsible. The funeral was held at St Johns church in Camden.

15 Squadron RAAF was formed at Camden on January 27th, 1944, and operated Beauforts. It moved to an airfield at Menangle Park in February. On March 29th, 1944, Beaufort A9-550 was taking off just after 4am when the port engine failed, and it crashed some 2 miles south-east of Menangle killing all on board. The crew were:



Pilot – Flight Sergeant Harry Byron Johnston, 26 years old, single.

← Navigator – Flying Officer Ronald William Durrant, 24 years old. He was married with two sons and came from Hornsby.



Wireless Operator/Air Gunner – Flight Sergeant Allen Charles Hoscher, 23 years old, married.

Wireless Operator/Air Gunner

Flying Officer Howard Douglas Wheller, 21 years old, single.

Passenger – Aircraftsman Class 1 William Henry Bray, 22 years old. Bray was from Adelaide and was engaged to a woman in Badgally Road, Campbelltown. There is no mention in the records of why Bray was on the aircraft, but a search reveals that the crash happened on his birthday, but it may have been that he checking some of the equipment on the plane.

From Butler's journals it appears that the funerals may have been split between the Methodist & Catholic churches in Camden.

15 Squadron moved back to Camden in May and later transferred to Northern Australia.

Buried on the same day as the above, from the AIF was Warrant Officer 2nd class John Gow Alcorn, 44 years old. He was born in Scotland and was a Dancing Master before enlisting in the Australian 41st Infantry Battalion in 1934. He was a Drum Major and Bandmaster there before transferring in February 1943, and became part of an Anti-Aircraft unit. He had died of pneumonia.

Also at the Camden War Cemetery is RAAF Corporal John Kerrigan, 29 years of age, from Marrickville, who was a member of 13 Operational Base Unit, and was killed in a motor vehicle accident at Mt Hunter on December 11th 1943.

Other Australian Army burials are Warrant Officer 2nd class Harry George Grinsted 34 years of age from the 9th Field Regiment, who died at Campbelltown on August 15th 1944.

Driver Elwyn Sidney Hoole, 35 years of age, from Unit 308, Corps of Electrical & Mechanical Engineers at Narellan camp died on June 6th 1944.

Private Leonard Charles Walker 22 years of age from the 32nd Australian Infantry Battalion died on July 18th 1945.

There are two RAF personnel buried at Camden, and these are:

Leading Aircraftsman Arthur Mullen, 23 years of age from 273 Squadron was involved in a fatal accident on the Camden Airfield Tarmac on October 12th 1945.

Warrant Officer Frederick Seymore Biggs, 36 years of age, from the Servicing Wing RAF Station, Camden, was killed in a car accident in Sydney on 25 November 1945, both occurred after the war had ended. 273 Squadron came to Australia in February 1945 and was a transport squadron, flying Douglas DC3's ■

Information Sources: National Archives of Australia, Camden History files, Ozatwar web site, WHC file- The Oaks airfield, Camden History Notes -Ian Willis.

Reminders, News & Info

WEEKEND ROSTER	
DECEMBER	
Laurette & Phil	Saturday, 5
Sue & Paul	Sunday, 6
Doreen & Ben	Saturday, 12
Kaye & Jim	Sunday, 13
Colleen & Kathy	Saturday, 19
Trish & Kevin	Sunday, 20



Yesterday's Stories team at the presentation viewing of the draft local history stories completed by the students to be available on the Yesterdays Stories App.

Wollondilly Heritage Centre & Museum

Holiday Opening Hours

The museum will be open for selected and shortened hours during January

If you are planning a visit please ring Trish on 0432 689034 or Sue on 0414 703204 to ensure volunteers are available.

Volunteer Profile

Lachlan Brooks



Lachlan is a local lad from Oakdale and has been doing his Duke of Edinburgh service with us at the Heritage Centre. Sixteen years of age, Lachlan is in year 10 at Wollondilly Anglican College. He has been a great help to the volunteer team outside is very dedicated to his role, always eager to take on another job.

Lachlan is very artistic and in particular loves to sketch and enjoys Maths. His passion is mountain bike riding, gardening, landscaping and anything hands on and also enjoys his soccer on weekends. He enjoys hanging out with his mates as well.

Lachlan is an asset to our team each Saturday and our gardens are certainly reflecting his input.

Have you been affected by last summers bushfires?

Were you affected by COVID-19?

SHARE YOUR STORY!

Do you live in the Camden/Wollondilly or Wingecarribee Local Government Areas?

We understand that COVID-19 has impeded recovery from the bushfires. We value story-telling and other creative response as ways of expressing and processing grief. We desire to aid recovery and build resilience in our community.

You are invited to participate in our project. We invite you to share your story.

It could be in any creative medium – short story, journal or diary, poetry, song - which can be captured digitally. It could also take the form of a recorded video interview or monologue. With your permission we would upload appropriate contributions to a public website which will become the repository for our collective story.

The desired outcomes of this project are that we will give people an opportunity to express their grief through hearing or sharing stories with others, assist in the processing of individual and community grief in a way that build our community, develop 'our' story of our communities, link people to available help as needed and advocate for additional help if required.

It would be an honour for us to be able to hear your story, in whatever form you are able to record it.

Whoever gives you this invitation is willing to help you share your story, which may be an encouragement to others as we recover from a tough season.

We are a network of community organisations who care about the level of community grief which we are aware still exists after last summer's bushfires.

Questions?
 Contact Bryan Tran, Assistant Organiser, Sydney Alliance.
<https://www.sydneyalliance.org.au/>
 E: bryantran19954@gmail.com P: 0416 661 917

Sydney Alliance Camden/Wollondilly Network
The Listening Post Project

MONTHLY MEETINGS: The Oaks Historical Society Inc. holds its meetings on the first Monday of each month (except January) at the Wollondilly Heritage Centre & Museum, 43 Edward St. The Oaks starting at 7.00pm. Due to Covid our meetings have been suspended but we are looking forward to be able to reinstate again in 2021. Our patrons are Richard Booth and Judith Hannan. The Oaks Historical Society Inc. takes no responsibility for the accuracy of the articles, papers or reviews that appear in this newsletter. The statements made or opinions expressed are not necessarily those of The Oaks Historical Society Inc. Copies of the minutes are available.



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