

The Oaks Historical Society Inc

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The Oaks Historical Society Inc.
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Wollondilly Heritage Centre & Museum

Newsletter

February 2020

FIRES OF 1939—VOLUNTEER FIRE FIGHTERS SAVE PICTON

BY Elizabeth Villy

The second week of January in 1939 was horrendous. South Eastern Australia baked with extremely high temperatures and bush fires raging, Picton registered 44° on Wednesday the 11th and there was to be no relief for another five days. It was the most savage heatwave in living memory. On that Wednesday, the first outbreak of fire was on a farm along The Oaks Road, caused by sparks from an earlier fire that lay smouldering. Volunteers and council employees put up a desperate fight, concentrating on saving several homesteads that they managed to do. The Oaks village was at risk as strong winds swept the flames towards Werri-berri Creek where men were able to contain the fire.

In the meantime there was another fire at Matthews Creek at Thirlmere. This too was fanned by the wind that drove the fire to Mill Hill where an unoccupied cottage was burnt. On Thursday morning another fire was in a paddock near Mowbray Park and here the Barnado boys were sent out, and with volunteers managed to quell this fire.

After a sweltering night Picton registered a temperature of 39° at 9am and this rose steadily throughout the day. There was no relief in houses with tin roofs, thin walls and no insulation. Few people had refrigerators and cooling was of a most primitive kind. Wet hessian bags were hung across meat safes in attempts to keep perishable food edible.

Saturday the 14th was disaster day. A fire re-kindled on Westbourne Avenue in Thirlmere and fanned by fierce westerly winds, was quickly out of control despite the desperate efforts of some 40 men. The fire raced across the rail line, and partly checked by a ploughed field, one branch veered towards Queen Victoria Home. Men rushed there and hastily put up two breaks. The fire jumped these with tremendous speed. It licked the grass and outer walls and threatened to destroy the home. Inmates panicked and screamed.

Cars owned by locals brought in volunteers and took out patients. 56 patients and 16 staff were sent to Picton where most were accommodated at the Royal George with the remainder billeted in private homes. At the home 200 volunteers fought the flames with buckets of water, quenching flames as they began to burn outer parts of the building. The Home, not unscathed, had a narrow escape. The fires rampaged across the main rail line, leapt down the hill and menaced a number of houses in Upper Picton. Another desperate battle ensued with emphasis on saving houses rather than outbuildings, orchards or bushland. Everyone who could lend a hand, men, women and even children, all work to prevent the fires charging further into the town.

While Upper Picton burned, a fire that began near Tahmoor was driven by the wind to the Nepean and it was here that Maldon Bridge caught fire. The fight to save the bridge exemplifies how volunteers coped with such a desperate time. Constable Watts took a lift from Alderman James Ashcroft, who had spent his time working at the danger zones. They took some fire extinguishers which were useless in such a fierce fire. Ashcroft realised water was needed, returning to Maldon he met Mr Rutter in his truck. They took some milk cans from a nearby dairy and Rutter drove to the cheese factory in Picton



Maldon Suspension Bridge c1913

where the cans were filled with 350 gallons of water. By this time the bridge was burning with bits of charred timber falling into the river below. By evening, all the wood was gone leaving only the steel frame. The destruction of the bridge was serious as it was the main road to Appin and thence to the South Coast.

The fire itself continued unabated between the deep cliffs of the river, occasionally running up the slopes to threaten farms above. With a wind change it turned back upon itself and flickered out when it again reached the river. Continued on page 4.....



President's Report

Trish Hill

Happy New Year everyone! I hope all of our members survived the fires without loss or too much discomfort and our thoughts are with those who were affected and did suffer loss.

We are looking forward to another exciting year and have commenced the year working on changes to a couple of our exhibitions. The Drill Hall exhibition has undergone a change now including WW2 and eventually Vietnam and reflects 'Objects Through Time'. The Federation building 'Her War' has been dismantled and we are undertaking research to compile a replacement exhibition. We have been offered The 'Queens Album', a touring exhibition from the State Archives and we are investigating the process currently. Doreen and I attend a meeting with Council to promote local history with the consultant for the new Council Cultural

Hub .

There is a museum orientation scheduled for our February working bee on Saturday 29th to give our volunteers a more comprehensive understanding of museum practices and some of the more recent changes. Please come along and join us to familiarise yourself with aspects of the museum you may be unsure of.

Thanks to our members and friends who support our bottle/can recycling. A sustainable project, last year it funded our entire Volunteers Christmas function with excess funds remaining going towards tools or gear for maintenance.

Our sincere sympathy to the families of Ray Lincoln and Jim Barrett, our thoughts are with you ■



Family History & Local Archive Research Corner

Sue Davis

We have enjoyed being able to use our wonderful new facilities in helping some researchers who visited us in our January open times. It is always interesting helping with research because it is a pleasure to help others but I also learn more about identities who helped form our history in the Wollondilly.

I am delighted to be finally making some more progress with cataloguing of local archives as we now have a printer for our catalogue cards which makes life so much easier! If anyone would like to join us in cataloguing on most Thursday

mornings then please contact me for more information at tohs1988@bigpond.net.au or phone me on 0414703204. Training is free!

Monthly Hint for Family History Enthusiasts: Always cross check your information, including that of family members. Sometimes family names are repeated and you need to make sure you are researching the correct one! Accurate birth and death dates will help.

Happy researching and start getting organised ■



Exhibitions Development

Doreen Lyon

THE DRILL HALL: changes have been made to this display as suggested. The WW1 material has been reduced to take up one third of the space so that additional material from the collection relating to war can be added, this section is now headed **Objects Through Time** to allow for a random selection of objects relating to war time. The first of these relates to WW2 from the collection.



Sydney Allen's hat & jacket feature in the WW2 objects

FEDERATION BUILDING: Her War has now been removed and research started on the history of local bush fire brigades and bush fires up to 2020. We hope to record some current experiences in images and audio-visual memories and work has begun on this project. If you would like to be involved please see Trish or Sue or me.

TRAVELLING EXHIBITION: we have been offered a travelling exhibition,

The Queen's Album, from the NSW State Archives which had been applied for by Picton Library. When they read the specifications, they were disappointed to discover that there was insufficient area to display the exhibition so we were approached to mount it. We are going to install it in the space where HER WAR was. To feature in Heritage Week 2020, we will run it during March and April.

THE QUEEN'S ALBUM: A History Mystery. This album was apparently gifted to Queen Victoria in 1882 to promote NSW but today its whereabouts are unknown. However, in 2018 the State Archives rediscovered most of the original glass slides which have been conserved, digitized and reproduced for the exhibition on a series of panels presented in themes. The exhibition introductory panel features Picton Viaduct. We can also add our own content. It also contains a video describing the project, reproduction glass plates and an E-Catalogue. We will advertise when we know when the Exhibition will be delivered ■



Acquisitions Report

Allen Seymour

There have been a couple of items in already and these are:

- A metal hook with chain, possibly blacksmith made.
- A master farrier shoeing price list, this one was part of Ray Lincoln's collection. Sadly Ray has passed away.
- From my own collection and on loan for our new war display is a guaranteed souvenir piece from one of the Japanese miniature subs that attacked Sydney in 1942.

Some cleaning out of the workshop has uncovered some items we didn't know were there. These include a field surgical chest and a medical equipment chest, both believed to be ex-army and have gone into the new war display. Other items to be uncovered include a number of parish maps,

including an 1892 key map on linen for the County of Argyle (Mittagong) and a couple of parish maps from this county as well also some County of Cumberland maps and one of Cobbitty. There are also some CMA topographic and ortho-photo maps covering Canyonleigh, Camden and Bringelly. There is also a school cloth map of Queensland and a chart showing costs and returns for a dairy farm at Badgery's Creek.

If you are on duty and someone brings in an item for donation, please ensure the correct paperwork is filled out. Donated items should be placed in the workshop so they can be treated appropriately. Donor information should also be recorded in the day book and a note can also be left in my pigeon hole in the office ■



Marketing & Bus Visits

Louisa Singleman

A new year has begun with two bus groups booked in for February so far. As in the past I will be looking for speakers and helpers to assist on the days we have visitors to the museum. If you are interested in becoming a helper please let me know either by email or phone. My email address is lsingleman@bigpond.net.au or 4680 8358 or 0408 66 9287. To be a helper involves putting out the morning tea and putting things away in the kitchen. To make things easy we have a dishwasher. There is always experienced staff to help you so don't be shy.

Marketing

Australia Day. Sunday 26th January - Wollondilly Shire Council organised a very successful Australia Day Ceremony in the

Picton Botanical Gardens. This was a free day for the community to enjoy our heritage and for those people who have served the community well to be awarded for their efforts. Many thanks to Betty Villy who helped on the stall and as usual she was able to inform the public of many historical facts regarding the local area.

Thirlmere Steam Festival event which is usually held on the first Sunday in March has been postponed this year due to the aftermath of the recent bushfires that have affected so many residents throughout the shire. Our thoughts are with all those who have experienced great loss during this tragic time ■

THE QUEEN'S ALBUM EXHIBITION



The Queen's Album explores the unique story of an album of photographs gifted to Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle in 1882 on behalf of the people of NSW. The album contained 64 photographic images of sites and scenes in Sydney and regional NSW that were constructed to promote NSW as a progressive and desirable place, and to consolidate its position within the British Empire. At the time, the album was described as a 'graceful tribute of loyalty' to Queen Victoria. Today, its whereabouts is unknown. *The Queen's Album* reimagines a moment in history from nearly 140 years ago in this beautiful exhibition produced to mark 200 years since the birth of Queen Victoria. Presented through nine themes, which include

- The [Glass Plate] Negatives
- Wild and Majestic Landscapes
- Pastoral Vistas
- Civilising Nature
- Private Worlds
- Exotic Landscapes
- Institutions of State
- Industrial Strength
- Mighty Empire.

FIRES OF 1939—VOLUNTEER FIRE FIGHTERS SAVE PICTON CONTINUED.....

The men and women who fought to save their district from destruction had no fire fighting equipment, no vehicles and no protective clothing. They used wet hessian bags, tree branches and buckets of water relayed to the fire by a string of locals. Lack of water was a serious problem with only the towns having reticulated water. With the demand so great over that week water trickled from narrow and often rusted pipes. Some volunteers were injured, fortunately none seriously, and one young woman, after repeatedly climbing a hill with buckets of water, collapsed. There was much destruction of property but only one house was burnt. Much praise was given to the two local police officers Sergeant Newell and Constable Watts. They were everywhere directing operations. Fire fighters were ferried from danger spot to danger spot by a team of drivers using private cars and lorries. Picton was lucky that week. Parts of Mittagong were burnt to the ground, especially in the vicinity of Fitzroy where all that remained were the brick chimneys standing desolate among

blackened trees. Part of Frensham school was destroyed by fire and the town could only take consolation in that no lives were lost. The day before, on Friday the 13th, 'Black Friday' as it became known, the town of Noojee in Victoria was destroyed with 71 people dead and 1000 homes destroyed. Picton knew they were lucky when they heard of the desolation elsewhere. Surrounded by thick bushland, fires have always been prevalent in the district and would be in the future. After the fires died down a number of citizens came together to form the first volunteer bush fire brigades in the district. They saw that the haphazard, though courageous efforts displayed during the fires would not always work to stave off disaster. An organised approach with training and good equipment was essential. All the rural fire brigades in our towns and villages have their genesis in that desperate January when so much was saved by the efforts of volunteers ■

AN EXTRACT 'FROM FARMERS TO FIREFIGHTERS—75 YEARS OF LAKESLAND BRIGADE'

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN—A Meeting to Form The Brigade: The inaugural meeting of what was to become the Lakesland Volunteer Rural Fire Brigade was called by Sergeant McRae of Picton Police Station. The meeting was held on the 8 January 1940 at the Dr Barnardo's Training Farm at Mowbray Park, Lakesland. Those present at the inaugural meeting were; Messrs George and Gordon Findlay, V Alp, Captain RW Rees, Mr Frank Gilmore, Alan and Athol Fergusson, Stuart Fergusson, Don Lindner, Mrs Alice Moss, Richard Kelsall, Bill and Bruce Robertson, AE Moore, Sgt McRae, Constable



Murphy. Apologies were received from FR Crowther and Evold Alp. Alan Fergusson was elected as the first President, a position he held for 48 years. Captain R Rees, who was the Superintendent at Dr Barnardo's Training Farm, Mowbray Park, was elected as the first Captain of the Brigade. Captain Rees was affectionately referred to as Captain Captain Rees due to his title as a naval captain. Athol Fergusson was elected Deputy Captain and in 1943 took over the role of Captain of the Brigade, a position he held until 1969. Bill Robertson was elected Secretary, a position he held until 1956.

The first brigade meeting to be called after the inaugural meeting to form the brigade was held at Lakesland Post Office on 1 February 1940. This was Bill Robertson's house in Lakesland Road. The next meeting, on 9 August 1940, was held at Fergusson Brothers' Packing Shed and this was to become the regular meeting place for the brigade until the new station was built in Ruddocks Road. In the early days, brigade ranking was based on the army system of ranking—Captain, Deputy Captain

and Lieutenants. Vehicles- Initially, the Brigade had no vehicles. Private vehicles were used such as Stan Thompson's war time Chev Blitz truck and also a Chev Maple Leaf Tabletop truck. There was a borrowed tank from Laurie Woollams and the Brigade owned a pump which had a Villiers motor.



Pictured; Top —Alice Moss with her mother Mrs Ruddock.

Images of early fire vehicles from 75 years of Lakesland Brigade and a fire fighting knapsack.

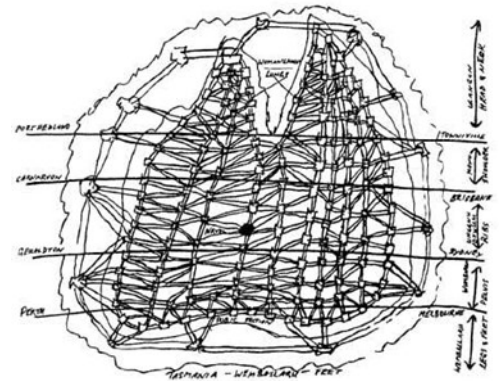
MUSEUM OF APPLIED ARTS AND SCIENCES REGIONAL STAKEHOLDER FORUM

Powerhouse Museum- 29 November, 2019 Report by Sue Davis

Doreen and I represented The Oaks Historical Society at this well organised and impressive day. The day is held annually as a partnership between Museums and Galleries of NSW and Regional Arts NSW. It is an opportunity for the NSW regional sector to meet and discuss issues relating to our sector. The one-day forum was aimed at supporting smaller volunteer-run regional museums and galleries by programming relevant speakers. Representatives from the NSW cultural institutions working in the regional sector attended as did regional advisors. All provided great networking opportunities. Below is a summary of some of the interesting sessions we experienced.

Re-play, Re-interpret, Re-tell:

- 'Stories in archives' (Delia Falconer, Senior lecturer, Creative Writing UTS)- In writing her book, "The Service of Clouds, The Lost Thoughts of Soldiers", Delia researched the private collections at the Mitchell Library and was grateful for the access that Australia has to archives. Archives in the form of various objects are also found in family collections. Objects create themes such as some belly wool from Samuel Marsden's sheep of 1804 not only created history of the wool industry but also helped examine the history of insects and grasses of the time. Many and varied stories come from archives.
- 'New directions with old knowledges' (Marcus Hughes, Head of Indigenous Engagement and Strategy, MAAS)-Spoke about the research behind the exhibition, called "Linear", at the Powerhouse Museum. It includes the journal and designs of David Unaipon who is featured on our \$50 note. He was an indigenous preacher, inventor and author. It also includes a map of Australia (right) by Elder David Mowaljarlai. It depicts interlocking lines that show we are a shared nation which is like a body. The gulf country in the north is the lungs. Uluru the belly button. The rib cage extends from the west to east. Marcus Hughes explained how to identify indigenous artefacts and gaining permission to use them in exhibitions.
- 'Project update: developing a model for state-wide collection documentation in NSW' (Dr Kate Gahan, Freelance Historian and Michael Rolfe, CEO, M&GNSW) – this was a demonstration of how museums can develop a digital culture through a new program called, 'Crystal Clear'. It will allow a state-wide collection documentation with support on standards and guidance of procedures to digitise collections. Will be launched during 2020.
- 'Tourists Paradise: not just another digitisation and storytelling project' (Debbie Sommers, Volunteer Curator, Port Macquarie Museum)- The museum's new exhibition came from a significance assessment in 2007 when they decided to locate objects to promote tourism, the cultural identity. They used social media to gain more interest and suggested to always use a professional photographer to enhance exhibitions. Another exhibition was developed online to save floor space and also reach more users. It is called, 'Our River, our History'.
- 'Two councils, one RADO, and seven community museums: unpacking complex regional partnership projects.' (Alyce Fisher, Executive Director, Murray Arts, and Emma Williams, Museum Coordinator, Albury Library Museum) – a collaboration of partner museums in the Riverina to develop aspects of the First World War at each site while sharing information and expertise.



Re-generate, Re-pair, Re-locate:

- 'Telling the New Italy story: a collaboration'. (Leonie Lane, New Italy Museums group volunteer and graphic designer, Woodburn) – a collection of pioneering history of local farmers who settled in Australia from France and Italy. It includes memorials of the anniversary of their arrival. Aspects of their homeland were rebuilt inside the museum. The November bushfires on the North Coast caused a complete evacuation of all objects. They hope to reopen within 6 months for their annual celebration.
- 'When, not if: why all museums should have a disaster preparedness plan' (Kay Soderlund, Director, *Preservation Australia*) – an outline was given on how we should PREVENT/PREPARE/RESPOND/RECOVER. A very relevant workshop for us in the Wollondilly.
- 'Turning up heat on pests' (Rebecca Pinchin, Collection Manager, National Trust of Australia, NSW)- discussion of a project at Woodford Academy where heat was used to eradicate pests.
- 'Making the move: relocating a regional museum to a new facility' (Tamara Hynd, Museum Curator, Shellharbour City Council) – the lessons learned were outlined and included: planning early; photograph the old exhibition for what needed re-establishing; evaluate what will be in a permanent exhibition space; carefully pack each box and add a photo to show where it should be placed; and colour code the new plan to better organise movement.

The main ideas that relate to the Wollondilly Heritage Centre are: the need for a Disaster Recovery Plan and bin; think about an online exhibition using a professional photographer; and check out the digitisation program, "Crystal Clear" when it is launched ■

2019 AT THE MUSEUM IN PICTURES



Above— Our building extensions
Below- Truckies Reunion in May



Guest Speakers:
Left-(July) Noel Lowry talking about newspaper production
Right -(June) Jenni Wiles on Backyard Birds
Below— Fireside chat with Kevin Wintle growing up in the Valley



Our Fireside Chats
April—Sue interviewing Richard Booth (left) & Gwyneth Noakes (below) about The Oaks .



Right— 2019 Christmas party



Members bus trips -right Australiana Village and below Moore's Dairy



Right Schoolies in period dress.



Reminders, News & Info

WEEKEND ROSTER

FEBRUARY

Sue & Helen	Saturday, 1
Marlane & Cheryl	Sunday, 2
Laurette & Phil	Saturday, 8
Maria & Betty	Sunday, 9
Debbie & Allen	Saturday, 15
Doreen & Ben	Sunday, 16
Colleen & Kathy	Saturday 22
Vivian & Bob	Sunday, 23
Pacita & John (Working Bee)	Saturday, 29
Kaye & Jim	Sunday, 1 March

MONTHLY SUPPER ROSTER

February	Please bring a plate
March	Volunteers required
April	Jan & Sue
May AGM	Louisa & Marie
June	Doreen & Ben
July	Colleen & Bev
August	Debbie & Pam
September	Shirley & Trish
October	Vivian & Pam McV
November	Pacita & Volunteer
December	Please bring a plate

UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPH

Can you help us identify this photograph on the right?

This wedding photo has Gaudry written on the back, possibly by the photographer.

The photographers name on the photograph is Howard Harris who appears in Google as *Wedding photographs by Howard Harris ca. 1915-1955.*

MUSEUM ORIENTATION FOR VOLUNTEERS

DATE: Saturday 29th February (Working Bee)

TIME: 10.30am and morning tea is included.

Come along and familiarise yourself with museum practice and changes that have occurred in the last twelve months.

FEBRUARY MEETING OVERVIEW OF 'THE QUEEN'S ALBUM'

MARCH MEETING

GUEST SPEAKER- LEE ABRAHAMS
TOPIC- TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF A NEWSPAPER EDITOR

Membership

We are updating our membership records which hasn't been done for some time. You may need to check that you are a financial member to continue receiving the newsletter.

We do really value your membership and appreciate your contributions to our society and the Museum. Our AGM is in May and Membership is due in May each year however we accept membership at any time.

Wollondilly Seniors Festival 2020

Seniors weekend at the Wollondilly Heritage Centre & Museum

Saturday 8th & Sunday 9th February 10am-4pm

Free entry to the museum for seniors to explore exhibitions of local history in Wollondilly including tea and coffee.

Enquiries phone Trish 0432 689034



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. Next meeting is Monday 3rd February 2020 followed by Monday 2nd March 2020. 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.

If undelivered, please return to:-
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