

# The Oaks Historical Society Inc

Est. May 1979

The Oaks Historical Society Inc.  
43 Edward St The Oaks 2570  
(PO Box 6016) T: (02) 4657 1796  
E: tohs1988@bigpond.net.au  
www.wollondillymuseum.org.au



## Newsletter

February 2021

## Wollondilly Heritage Centre & Museum

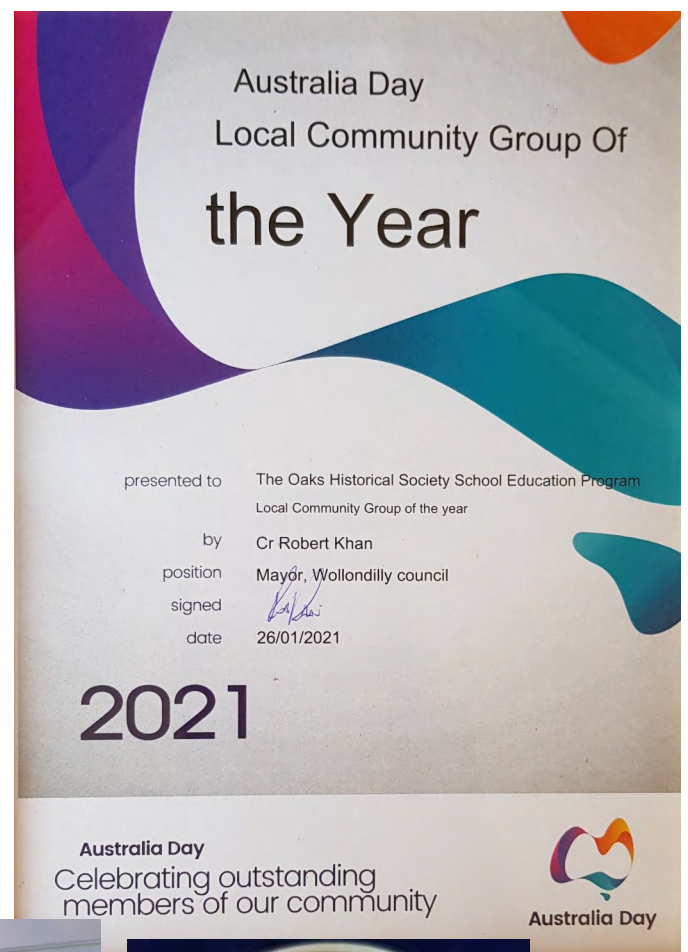
# OUR AUSTRALIA DAY LOCAL COMMUNITY GROUP

The Oaks Historical Society School Education Program Team comprises a group of over 20 volunteers who run the education program for visiting school groups on a weekly basis throughout the school terms.

The Education group is coordinated by retired school teacher Bev Batros. Other team members bring a range of skills to the group including retired miners, nurses, teachers and farm managers.

The community spirit shown by this team is a credit to them all and they have shown a demonstrated willingness to learn and acquire new skills and knowledge themselves to better meet the needs of the students. The Team members are required to arrive at The Centre by 8.45am to begin preparation for each activity. These include lighting the fuel stove, preparing pikelet mixes to be cooked on the fuel stove, filling the butter churn with cream and preparing paints and boomerangs for the activities.

The program is designed to accommodate the school curriculum and the team have a development day in February each year to review the activities and ensure the program meets the requirements of the school curriculum. The team all have their 'Working With Children' accreditation and these are updated as required. Congratulations to all of the members of the Schools Education Team ■



Group photo courtesy of Wollondilly Shire Council



## President's Report

Trish Hill

Happy New Year to all of our members and friends. I hope everyone had a great holiday break and lets hope 2021 is a better year for us all.

Thanks to our volunteers who opened for a few hours on the last couple of weekends and we had a morning tea group in as well during that time. We have several morning tea group bookings on the calendar so things are improving already.

Congratulations to our Schools Education Team Volunteers and to Shirley Carlon who received Australia Day Awards for 'Local Community Group of the Year' and Citizen of the Year at the Wollondilly Council Australia Day ceremony. Peter Vale from Tahmoor Colliery has very generously donated copies of *Surviving & Thriving— the History of Tahmoor Colliery* written by Ray Christison (from Lithgow State Mine Mu-

seum) The publication is available in our shop. Thanks Peter for your support.

Kevin, along with the assistance of John Hyland and Bruce Brown have done some roof maintenance over the verandah to stop the water leak (of course morning tea was an added incentive) Thanks fellas. Just to note – this week Council are erecting steel bollards in our carpark adjacent to the disabled parking spaces so you will need to take a little care.

At our business meeting last week we decided to reinstate our monthly meetings commencing March 1st providing present Covid restrictions remain unchanged.

Happy 85th Birthday to Shirley Carlon for the 15th ■



## Family History & Local Archive Research Corner

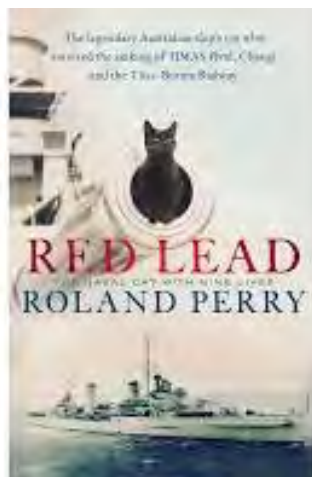
Sue Davis

Welcome to a new year at the Wollondilly Heritage Centre and Museum. I hope you will make this the year to find out more about your ancestors and research your local area.

During the break my husband came across a handful of letters in our garage that were from my grandfather's sister. I had forgotten about them and upon looking through them found so many interesting stories. We discovered that Great Aunt Kath had been on a similar European River Cruise in 1936 that we also went on in 2017! A real 'then and now' journey! Of course, I have now made a file up for Great Aunt Kath who didn't marry because she was devoted to her nursing career. Did you have any "great finds" during the break?

When volunteers are on weekend duty they sometimes take the chance to read through some of our library collection or to look at the magazines that are on the open shelves in the Jim Whyte Room. One of the magazines that has a variety of stories is *TRACES-Uncovering Australia's Past*. Edition 12 contains a spotlight on Victoria's obsession with dried fruit. It also has some articles on the devastating impact of smallpox; the women of Cascades Female Factory; and unravelling the mysteries of Captain Starlight (of course these articles are not connected!)

Edition 13 of *TRACES-Uncovering Australia's Past*, is the most recent and gives advice on deciphering pharmacy registers. It also has a great article on the book, "Red Lead, the



naval cat with nine lives", By Roland Perry. Red Lead was the ship's cat on *HMAS Perth*. A quote from the article tells us ...'in the early morning of 1 March 1942, the HMAS Perth was sunk by the Japanese, and 353 men lost their lives at sea. Hec Waller went down with his ship but made sure that Bob Collins jumped clear with Red Lead. More than 300 sailors survived, along with one brave cat.' ... However... "From Java to Changi and then on the Thai-Burma Railway, Red Lead was to act as a companion, mascot and occasional pro-

jector for a small group who made it their mission to keep her alive in some of the most hellish prison camps on Earth.' What an amazing cat! I might have to track this book down as the cousin of my grandfather and Great Aunt Kath, survived from being Changi prisoner of war and spent many years with us.

You never know where history connections will lead you!

Happy researching ■



# Acquisitions Report

Allen Seymour

Well another year under way, and already we have some items coming in. These include some Kalamazoo system folders that were used in an office. Talk about built to last, these things would survive a nuclear blast. They date from the 1950's. We also received an army peaked cap and we are hopeful that we may get the medals and some info on the owner. Another amazing item is an 8 record set of the morning prayer service for the Church of England. These were done by the St Andrews church choir in Wells Street, London, for the Gramophone Recording Company. The originals were done in 1908 and was the first full church service to be recorded. These are slightly later and we believe they fall into the 1908-1930 period. The records are very heavy and single sided only. Number 5 is missing. As an aside, the St Andrews church in Wells Street was later dismantled and re-erected in another location.

On the mining side there are some badges, cloth badges and stickers for Tahmoor and Oakdale mines and the Southern Mines Rescue.

From my own collection comes a set of portable salt & pepper shakers. These are made from hard plastic and date

from the 1950's. They push together when not in use and were used on picnics by us for many years. Also from my collection is a 1970 souvenir calendar for the 200th anniversary of Captain Cook's landing with a time line of the Endeavour's voyage.

I'm still working on the journals from Butler's funeral parlor and am now getting close to 5000 entries. A particularly tragic one involved the Skerry family from Crookwell. They were returning home when their tourer car veered to the wrong side of the road near the bridge at Tahmoor and crashed head on with a semi. Killed were the father, Edward Joseph Skerry and two sons, Raymond 7 and John 3. His mother-in-law Christina Allsop also died. His wife, daughter and a 2 year old son survived the crash. The Camden ambulance was the only one available and had to make two trips from Tahmoor to Camden. The father and his two sons were buried in the Catholic cemetery in Camden, while Mrs Allsop was returned to Crookwell. From the newspaper reports the scene was horrific, and it makes you realise what the rescuers and first responders went through. I guess counseling wasn't available in those days ■

## 60<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary Celebration

Bob and Vivian Allen were married on 30<sup>th</sup> December, 1960 at St John's Anglican Church, Parramatta.

They both grew up in Padstow where their families were early residents of the area. The Allen's were market gardeners and Viv's father started poultry farming when she was about four years old.

They both attended Padstow Public School and Bob attended Tempe Boys Intermediate High School. He commenced a pre apprenticeship in carpentry but decided that he would rather work with his father in the market garden, an occupation that he continued for nearly 60 years.

Following her secondary education at Marrickville Girls and Fort Street Girls High Schools, Vivian gained a Scholarship to Sydney Teachers' College.

With the growth of suburban Sydney Bob moved with his parents to Campbelltown where they continued growing vegetables and Viv's family moved their poultry farm to Schofields.

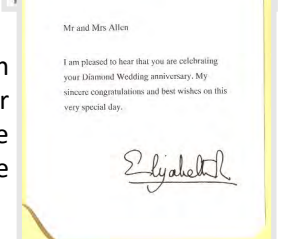
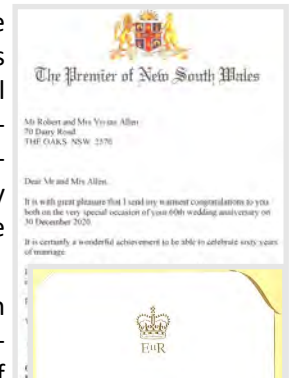
Four children were born during the 1960's. Around this time development was taking place in Campbelltown and once again a move was necessary and this was to a proper-



ty at The Oaks where Bob has worked for the last 40 years. He retired from growing vegetables and keeps himself busy running beef cattle at the Oaks and Bathurst. There are now nine grandchildren ranging in age from ten to twenty- nine.

Bob and Viv were foundation members of The Oaks Historical Society and enjoy volunteering at the Museum with the many friends they have made.

A family celebration was planned but unfortunately because of Covid restrictions only one of their daughters and three grandchildren were able to help them celebrate their 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary so they hope to have an ongoing celebration for the whole year. Congratulations Vivian & Bob.





# Schoolies Report

Bev Batros

Happy New Year! The Schoolies year gets underway soon. Our organisational meeting, lead by Sue Davis, will be held on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> February from 10am until 11.30 at the centre.

At this time we review the program and its aims, revisit our risk management and brush up on our first aid. This year, as it was at the end of last year, we will again be looking at our COVID Safe Practices to ensure we do our very best to keep everyone safe. And of course we have a cuppa.

If you are interested in being part of our program please come along and join us. Our program operates on Thursdays during school terms and you will need a Working with Children number but these are easy to obtain and we can help you. We are always looking for reserves as well as perma-

nent members. After the organisational meeting you will be invited to attend our first school day (currently Picton High on Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> March) to see how the program operates and decide if there is a section that interests you. When you start you are always with another person and do not have to take a speaking role until you feel confident.

In addition there are information sheets with 'what to say' on them, although personal stories are always welcome. Volunteers stay at the same activity station for each of the 6 groups of children so you very quickly learn the ropes. Give Bev a ring on 0409913679 if you are interested. There is also a video on our website that shows the program in operation. It will give you an idea of the activities we undertake. Hope to see you this year ■

## Scrabble at the Centre

Currently the Tahmoor Scrabble Club is operating at the Heritage Centre on Monday afternoons from 12.45 until about 3.30. Why not come along and try playing while it is so close? We are always looking for new members and have a range of abilities.



The group is small, about 10 people, and we play 2 games in the time, with different people, with an afternoon tea break in the middle. The cost is \$3 a week.

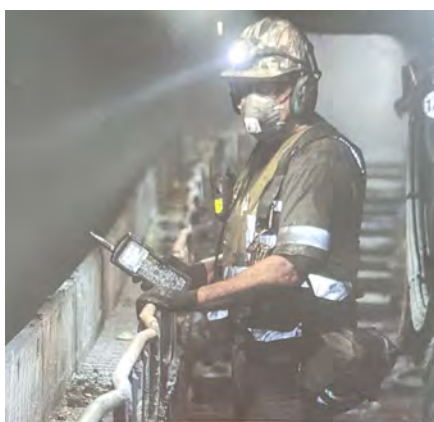
We intend to play on the veranda unless the weather is too hot, in which case we move inside. Bev and Betty are 2 of the players so you will be sure to see a friendly face. Give Bev a ring on 0409913679 if you are interested or have any questions ■

## SURVIVING & THRIVING –The History of Tahmoor Colliery from Origin to 2019 by Ray Christison

This book records the story of Tahmoor Coking Coal Operations.

The story of this mine is a wonderful example of the resilience, teamwork and innovation that characterise the Australian coal mining industry. Tahmoor has survived four decades of economic highs and lows and is poised to continue into decades of high productivity. Like most Australian

underground mines, Tahmoor has overcome technical challenges. These include the lifesaving innovation of an armoured cab to protect miner drivers from outbursts, environmental innovations and world leading applications of technology to facilitate longwall mining under operational railway lines. With pride in its successes and a large coal reserve the mine is set to thrive into the future.



**SURVIVING & THRIVING**  
THE HISTORY OF  
TAHMOOR COLLIERY  
FROM ORIGIN TO 2019



The Book includes a background history of the coal mines of the Burragorang Valley, an area that was one of the most productive coalfields in Australia. Tahmoor was developed in parallel with the Burragorang mines and much of its original workforce was drawn from those enterprises. The history of Tahmoor would not be complete without the Burragorang story ■

Photo above: Opening of Oakdale State Mine 1955(State Library NSW)

# A GLIMPSE AT SOME HISTORY OF THE OAKS AERODROME FROM OUR

## ARCHIVES compiled by Trish Hill

File WHC 019 in our archives entitled The Oaks RAAF Landing Ground holds some interesting information, little of which is known by the broader community, so this is just a glimpse.

For me, The Oaks Airstrip has always existed and my father who served in WW2 spoke about its development during the war as an emergency landing ground explaining the airstrip crossed Burragorang Road (MR 259) to the north encompassing land below Quarry Road.

The information contained in the file was largely sourced from the Air Force Historical Department of Defence and details the development of the landing ground.

An extract of a document dated June 1942 states: The flight strip as shown on the plan to be prepared for aircraft use as follows:  
Landing Area: Remove all trees, stumps and bushes, running all roots to 9" below ground level, take up and remove any existing fences on the area. Any suitable material in good condition to be salvaged for fencing new boundaries. All stump holes, post holes, depressions or soft spots to be filled with selected filling and consolidated. Straight clearing lines are to be avoided and a 'natural edge of clearing' produced in all cases.

The surface of the flight strip to be lightly graded to remove irregularities. Where necessary grade surface of the flight strip to finish flush with runway edges and so as to provide easy side slopes to the outer edges of the flight strip consistent with a minimum of earthwork.

Any portion at present smooth enough for aircraft operations to remain undisturbed as it is essential that as much of the existing natural herbage as possible be preserved.

Bare ground and areas where the natural surface has been disturbed are to be fertilised and sown at a propitious time with suitable grasses as recommended by the State Agricultural Department. In general the surface finish of the flight strip is to be such that a 30cwt. Car may be driven over it at 35 miles per hour in any direction without discomfort.

New fences were to be constructed of similar type to existing. Salvaged material from demolition of internal fences may be used if in good condition and gates were to be erected where required.

The creation of the runway is detailed extensively and includes— Grade the runway site with a long wheelbase power grader and roll with 5-6 ton pneumatic tyred or sheepsfoot roller. Grading and rolling to proceed until the whole of the subgrade is thoroughly compacted, smooth and even. Approved gravel to be laid to give the thickness required to support wheel loadings. Thickness to be determined by soil tests and to be able to carry 87lbs. Per square inch.

Runway to be given surface treatment as indicated for Stage 1 of Medium Bomber type aerodrome.

The drainage construction was detailed in accordance with the drawing.

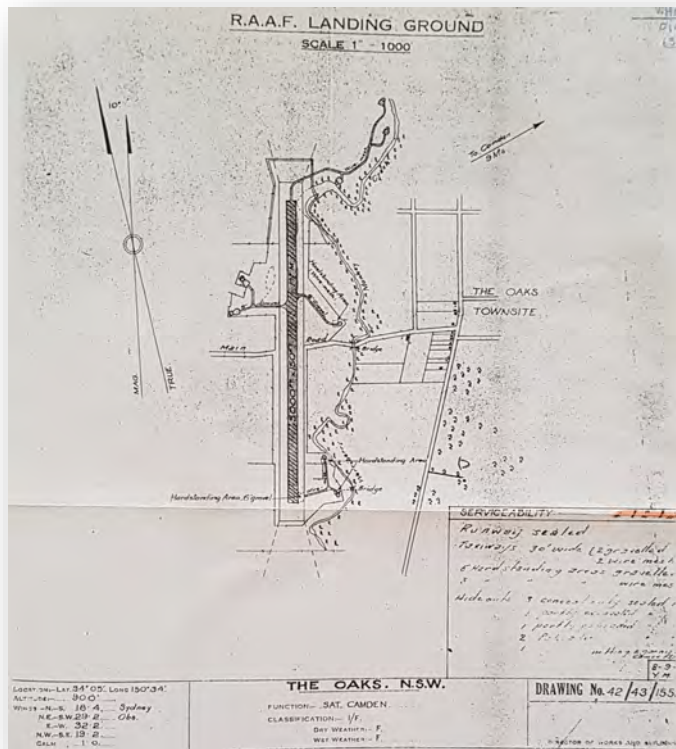
In October of 1942 the Director of Works and Buildings detailed the following: The Hideout Taxiways as shown on the plan to be prepared for use by aircraft as follows:- Trees, stumps and roots under taxiways for a width of 30 feet to be grubbed to a depth of 9 inches below surface and holes filled with selected material and consolidated. Flanks cleared for a further 35 feet on either side of the taxiways. Straight clearing to be avoided with again a 'natural edge of clearing' effect produced.

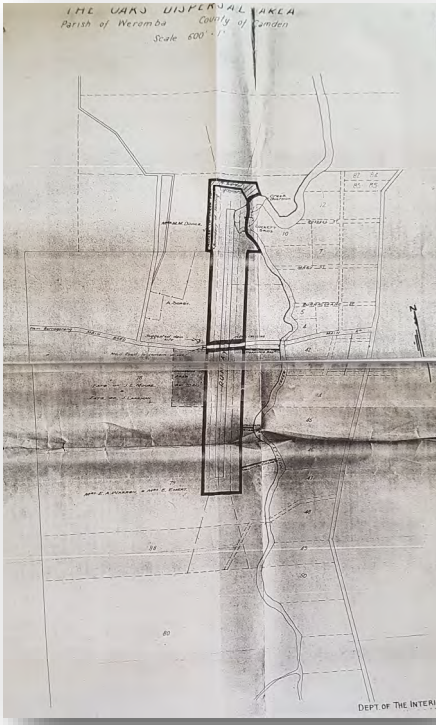
Wire mesh taxiways to be lightly graded where necessary and covered with No. 5 B.W.G. electrically welded steel wire mesh securely fastened with natural herbage protected where possible. Gravelled Taxiways are to be gravelled in accordance with requirements to support wheel loadings. Fences and drains as per drawings.

The Hideouts, also detailed were to – Provide eight (fighter) aircraft hideouts indicated on the layout plan to accommodate medium bomber aircraft. The Hideout construction numbered 1 to 8 described whether they were conceal only or include splinter proofing and all were tail first. Hideout construction provided an overall clearance of 75 feet width 65 feet length and 20 feet height with the whole of the floor area given a primer coat of tar and seal coat of bitumen or tar. The clearing or lopping of timber was to be carried out in collaboration with the Camoufleur.

The total estimate for the schedules of work was £27,295. Continued next page.....

Photo of The Oaks RAAF Landing Ground drawing.





Other documents in the file indicate the variety of support network that was part of the aerodrome. Provision was included for water supply including 2 x 5000 gallon overhead tanks to be serviced by 1925 sq. foot of roof catchment. Water was to be carried (from Camden) to the site to supplement roof catchments as required and a pan system sewerage was proposed. Latrine, ablutions and general

purpose hut and kitchen are included in a schedule of buildings with remarks including 'all ranks' and '200 capacity' for the general purpose area.

| ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE<br>DIRECTORATE OF WORKS AND BUILDINGS  |                               |                    |               |              |
|---|-------------------------------|--------------------|---------------|--------------|
| SCHEDULE OF BUILDINGS   |                               |                    |               |              |
| No. of Sheets   |                               | 1                  |               |              |
| Sheet No.   |                               | 1                  |               |              |
| INSTALLATION THE OAKS N.S.W.  |                               |                    |               |              |
| LAYOUT PLANS NUMBERS 41/42/3471   |                               |                    |               |              |
| Building No.  | Designed Purpose              | Design Drawing No. | Designed Size | Remarks      |
| 1B  | latrines all ranks            | 41/42/2106         | 14 x 12       | 96 all ranks |
| 2B  | ablutions " "                 | " "                | 19 x 12'6"    | 120 " "      |
| 3B  | General purpose hut & kitchen | 41/42/2847         | 80 x 19       | 200 capacity |
| 2 x 5000 gall Elevated Water Storage tanks.   |                               |                    |               |              |
| <b>Note:</b> Above buildings are unoccupied and no fittings are present provided. It is presumed final fittings will be placed in position when required. |                               |                    |               |              |

Post WW2 there is less detail however in 1946 Cec Moore made representations to Jeff Bate MP to have the airstrip retained. The RAAF responded saying the airstrip was not a post war requirement and suggested referring the matter to Wollondilly Shire Council and the landowners.

In February of 1948, the subject of a Department of Air Minute Paper is the disposal of assets. Noted here is a Coalminer and his family (squatters) are living in building number 3 and also utilising number 2 ablution building and number 1 latrine and have been for some time. They then offer to purchase the building to remove to another location.

In addition to the above, the 5000 gallon water tanks are missing and upon investigation were discovered re-erected at the rear of The Oaks Hotel owned by a Mr Moore (Publican).

Upon interviewing Mr Moore he indicated an application by telegram to the Minister for Air previously and received a reply granting permission to use same. He could not produce the telegram saying it was in the Hotel "somewhere".

With correspondence in between, by April of 1948 the Solway family (squatters) have been informed the building had now been declared to the Commonwealth Disposals Commission and it was suggested to them they contact the Regional Manager in Sydney regarding their desire to purchase the buildings.

Further correspondence notes the water tanks had been installed as part of a larger water supply at The Hotel including a windmill in the gully, a pump and erecting. This in fact is supplying 14 other residences and providing a service to the community in general, particularly in drought conditions. An inspection revealed that Mr Moore had cemented the bottoms of the tanks and repaired leaks etc. Mr Moore made an offer of £50 for the two tanks which appears to have been accepted.

All was not resolved immediately however as there was a missing tank stand and piping which had also made its way the Hotel. This was offered as available for collection.

The Disposals Commission Sales Advice notes Mr R.C Morgan of Mosman as having purchased the buildings and contents and it appears he was left with trying to find alternate accommodation for the Solway family before he could remove the buildings from the site.

A final minute paper in the file dated February 1950, indicates that particular assets have proved unsaleable and accordingly authority was given for their deletion from the schedule ■



Top photo-The Aerodrome location including The Oaks Village Centre – Schedule of buildings description & comments

Bottom– Photograph of the Aerodrome site and Village c1942

# Reminders, News & Info

| WEEKEND ROSTER                   |              |
|----------------------------------|--------------|
| FEBRUARY                         |              |
| Sue & Helen                      | Saturday, 6  |
| Bev & David                      | Sunday, 7    |
| Pam &                            | Saturday, 13 |
| Marlane & Kate                   | Sunday, 14   |
| Doreen & Ben                     | Saturday, 20 |
| Maria & Betty                    | Sunday, 21   |
| Laurette & Phil<br>(Working Bee) | Saturday, 27 |
| Trish & Kevin                    | Sunday, 28   |



Sandra Pires and Yesterday's Stories team recorded some local stories at The Centre last year. The App, pictured left is now available to download on your phone and you can view these stories along with many other local history stories. Some of the stories on the list include The George Hotel, Burragorang Valley, Barnados and Gurangatch & Mirragan .

## Volunteer Profile



Congratulations Shirley for your Australia Day award. Shirley Carlon is one of the foundation members of the Wollondilly Heritage Centre and has volunteered with the Schools Education Program since it started in 1988.

Most Thursday's Shirley can be found in the slab cottage showing children how things were done at home, before electricity and running tap water. She cooks pikelets on the fuel stove and talks to the children about methods of ironing, bathing and cooking. She enjoys listening to the children's comments about the 'olden days'. When the centre opened Shirley and husband Joe volunteered on the weekend roster when the museum is open to the public. Shirley volunteered also for Meals on Wheels and St Vincent de Paul at The Oaks. Another passion was knitting trauma teddies. Happy 85th for the 15th.



The Photographs are a collage of our Australia Day event, anticipation and subsequent awards. The bottom photo is with our Patron Judy Hannan, photo supplied by Judy. Congratulations All.

**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 reinstating them commencing next month with our March meeting. 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:-  
**The Oaks Historical Society Inc.**  
**P O Box 6016 The Oaks NSW 2570**

