

The Oaks Historical Society Inc

Est. May 1979

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Newsletter

March 2023

Wollondilly Heritage Centre & Museum

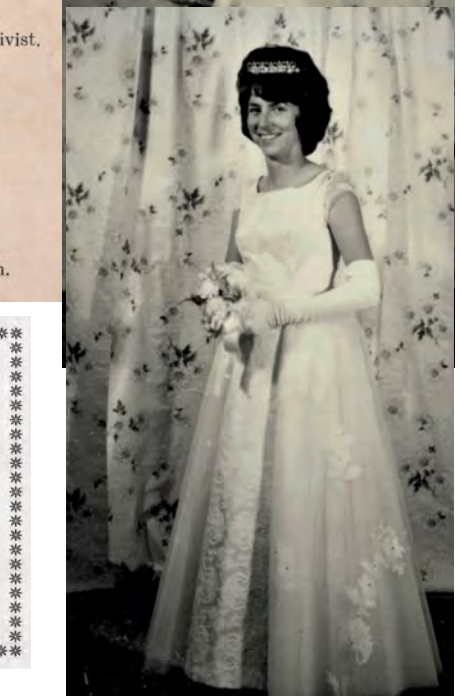
OUR DEBUNTANTE BALLS

Debutantes originated in London at a time when Court Society set the standards and the social calendar revolved around the Royal Family. Gradually the custom became adapted to Australian conditions and because of the isolation of many country towns, balls brought people together from many districts and were associated with race meetings and tennis parties which could extend over several days. Debutantes were often presented at many types of balls held as fundraisers for organisations such as Churches, local sports clubs and agricultural societies.

During a revisit of items in our collection Allen discovered a file of unidentified Debutante Ball proof photographs and a link to a publication entitled *Church of St Aloysius The Oaks Centenary Celebrations 1865-1965* in our reference library. These celebrations were overseen by a committee who arranged a formal event in October of 1965 and included a Centenary Ball with a presentation of → debutantes. The debs all listed on page 2 of the publication were Laura Small, Joyleen Cox, Therese Souter, Patricia Nolan, Susan O'Brien, Maureen McDonald, Therese Gaudry, Rita Arnold, Beverley Jeffrey, Anita Arnold, Angela Haynes, Marie Crouch, Judith Duck, Margaret Duck and Gloria Ditton. This finally simplified identification of the photographs. The Matron of Honour for this event was Mary Ferguson, who had been a debutante in 1939 (see story page 4).

In 2001, The Oaks Deb Ball committee published *We Had A Ball (Twenty Five Debutante Balls in The Oaks 1973-1999)* in conjunction with The Oaks Historical Society and several photograph albums covering this period have since been donated to our collection ■

1965 Debs pictured from top Patricia Nolan, Margaret Duck and Laura Small.



THE OAKS CATHOLIC CENTENARY COMMITTEE

OFFICIAL FUNCTIONS

FRIDAY, 22nd OCTOBER, 1965:
 THE CENTENARY BALL
 Presentation of Debutantes to The Very Rev. Monsignor Francis Deignan (Secretary to Bishop McCabe).
 Distinguished Guest: Mrs. Wal Chandler, President Catholic Women's League.
 Matron of Honour: Mrs. Arthur Ferguson.

SATURDAY, 23rd OCTOBER, 1965:
 ADDRESS to be given by THE VERY REV. MONSIGNOR CORNELIUS DUFFY, D.D., Ph.D. President of Catholic Historical Society, Diocesan Archivist.
 EXHIBITION OF CATHOLIC AUSTRALIANA.

SUNDAY, 24th OCTOBER, 1965:
 MASS, ST. ALOYSIUS' CHURCH, 11.00 a.m.
 Picnic Lunch in Church Grounds.
 Pilgrimage to Catholic Cemetery and Recitation of the Rosary for the souls of Pioneers of the Parish.
 Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament — 3.00 p.m.

We Had A Ball!

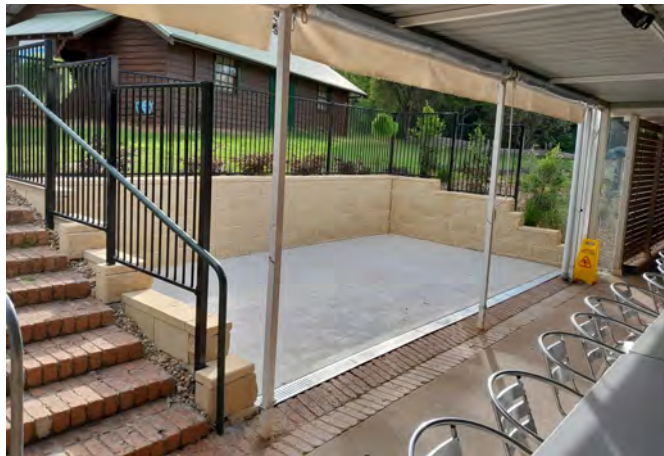
Twenty-five Debutante Balls in The Oaks, 1973-1999



President's Report

Trish Hill

February saw the completion of the outdoor space (pictured) on the right of the back stairs. This space will be invaluable for additional seating and standing and also free up pedestrian access through that area. The garden area has been transformed and a variety of plants including many natives have been replanted and extended behind the slat wall.



The fencing at the front from the carpark has been completed including double gates to enable access to the BBQ area and the next stage of upgrades is well underway as pictured right. This area will be more appealing and useable.

Our Seniors Event on the 20th February was a success despite the immense heat on the day. A large attendance was kept busy with museum activities. Our volunteers did an amazing job and thank you all.

Several months ago we discussed having our volunteers compile a 'volunteer profile'. Through this collection of profiles it should give us a comprehensive history including the roles of volunteers, most aspects of the development of our

museum, things that were done along the way and perhaps how and why they were done. This process isn't restricted to only current volunteers so to those retired volunteers among us please start your story ■



Acquisitions Report

Allen Seymour

This past month we have had some interesting items. From the Angilley family comes some newspapers which include an almost full set of 1901 Camden News and issues of The Picton Advocate and the Picton Penny Post from 1896-97. These are very fragile and will require very careful handling. The Camden News are available in Trove but the Picton papers don't appear to be in Trove and they contain some interesting articles. One article in the Camden News was a proposal to extend the Camden Tramway to The Oaks. This was discussed at public meetings and the local member was pushing to get an official surveyor to look over the route. There is no mention of how they proposed to get over Loomes Hill. Other notable events in 1901 were the death of Queen Victoria and the opening of the new bridge at Camden. Miners were on strike at Yerranderie, and a traction engine had made its way down into Burragorang and

had crossed the Nattai and Wollondilly Rivers, and was expected to be doing work hauling silver ore and produce. There was also an unsuccessful push to get the phone line extended into Burragorang. 1901 finished with the opening of the new Burragorang access via Nattai. The Picton Penny Post has articles in a number of issues on crops in Burragorang Valley, while the Advocate has an article on a trip through Burragorang and a report on the Brimstone Gully sawmill.

Judy Murdoch has given us some items that belonged to Les Murdoch, including nameplate and name badges, how to vote flyers and a certificate from the Local Government Association acknowledging his years of service on Wollondilly Shire Council ■



Family History & Local Archive Research Corner

Sue Davis

We can learn so much about the past by visiting places of historical significance. Recently the Thursday research and cataloguing team were able to have a “transfer of duty” to the National Trust property of Retford Park, Bowral. The most recent private owner was James Fairfax who gifted the property to the National Trust in 2016. Mr Fairfax believed that Retford Park should be preserved for the enjoyment of future generations, particularly those of the local district. The European history of the property can be found in 1821 when Governor Macquarie promised a land grant to Edward Riley senior. The house was built in 1887 by Samuel Hordern (1849-1909) merchant and stockbreeder, and his wife, Jane (nee Booth). It was designed by Albert Bond and is set back on a low rise. It is considered a grand rendered brick Italian style residence. In 1964 James Fairfax purchased the

property and began to turn it into a gentleman’s residence from it’s previous purpose as an agricultural property. The garden is quite spectacular and includes a pool pavilion ■ Retford Park has dedicated opening days that can be found

on their website <https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/places/retford-park/>



Pictured left-The plates are a dinner set that was handmade in Italy and includes the image of Retford Park



Schoolies Report

Bev Batros

Our very experienced team did not need to work too hard during our Planning Meeting on February 16th. After dealing with some administration matters, a review of our COVID Policy and the revision of First Aid that might apply to us, we enjoyed a morning tea and celebrated Shirley and Jacquie’s birthdays (pictured). Both are valued long-term volunteers. Jacquie keeps us all in order each week while undertaking the time keeping and assisting capably with other activities when necessary. Shirley, at 87, continues to work in the cottage with enthusiasm and has a lovely manner with the children. She has been with the Schools’ Program over 30 years. We are very fortunate to have such great volunteers. At this point we have a full team of 10 people

who turn up every Thursday, plus a list of 11 reserves. Most of our volunteers worked at the Seniors’ Event last week, showing the seniors what the children experience.



Our bookings are going ahead full steam. After a disappointing cancellation of 4 weeks in Term 1, the phones have run hot keeping our Bookings Officer Sue Davis very busy. Sue is another valued long-term volunteer. Now we have new bookings for Term 1, Term 2 has only 1 week free, Term 3 has 2 weeks left and Term 4 has 2 bookings already. Usually, schools contacting us in February have plenty of choice, but not so this year.

PICTON DISTRICT BAND BALL OUTSTANDING SUCCESS PRESENTATION OF DEBUTANTES

The outstanding success achieved and the presentation of debutantes provided the high-lights of the annual ball of the Picton District Band, held in the Town Hall, on Friday night.

For pleasing decorative effects, impressiveness in the presentation of debutantes, genuine socialability, and large attendance, the event enhanced its reputation as being one of the most popular local functions of the year. Everything was arranged with discriminating taste, and reflected much credit upon the organisers, and other ladies and gentlemen concerned. One thing only was unworthy of the occasion. It was the music of which the least said the better, although it occasioned general disappointment. The ball was officially opened, by Mr Jeff Bate, M.L.A., who was accompanied by Mrs Bate. Pink and green were the colour schemes adopted in decorating the hall, and the execution of the task must have entailed a great amount of tedious work on the part of Mrs Phil Smith, who not only graciously undertook the heavy job, but also trained the debutantes and rendered valuable aid in other directions as well. Mrs J Baxter, Mrs Wheeler, and Mr R. McInnes gave her a helping hand in various ways. Hundreds of streamers festooned in three lines, extending from one end of the hall to the other, the centre line being pink and those on either side green completely hid the ceiling, while the windows and the front of the stage were decorated with pink coloured flowering peach blossoms and greenery, in the midst of which were imitation lyres (symbols of music), which tended to create the correct atmosphere.

PRESENTATION OF DEBUTANTES. The presentation of the debutantes was one of the delightful features of the evening and was witnessed by a crowd of about 300, including Mr Jeff Bate, M.L.A. and Mrs Bate, and representatives from every centre in and around the district. Burragorang contingent alone numbered no less than 50. When the ceremony was about to take place Mrs Bate who wore a gown of black satin and lace with white camellias, took up a position in front of the stage to receive the debutantes, who were presented by Mrs P. R. Payten, matron of honour, wearing a frock of floral lacquered satin. No sooner had these ladies taken up their position than two little pages, beautifully attired in suits of blue velvet slowly



marched to the rear of the hall. They were Violet and Jean Wonson, who each carried a basket of flowers and fruit, which they presented to Mrs Bate and Mrs Payten respectively. Next were the flower girls, two tiny tots (Anne Walton and Leonie Emmett) who made the sweetest of pictures in their long frocks of pink frilled net and miniature hats of blue velvet. The children were received with loud applause, which was renewed when the first of the procession of debutantes, appeared at the end of the hall, and in slow, almost hesitating steps proceeded towards the stage to the steps of Glow Little Glow Worm. Glitter, Glitter. At the conclusion of the impressive and interesting ceremony, the debutantes joined their partners and participated in an old-time waltz. The debutantes were misses Marjorie Burgess (Picton), who led the procession with dignity and charm, Massie Askildsen, Joan Ryan, P. Prior, Isabel McKenzie, Patty Turner (all of Picton), Marjorie Nicolson (Maldon), Kath Wintle (Burragorang), May Quig (Burragorang), Doreen Dennis (Burragorang), Doris Gardner (Yerranderie), Jean Bearsall (Bargo), and N. Payne (Bargo).



They wore charming frocks of white lace, chiffon, net satin, georgette, and sheer made in different styles and had posies and halos of white flowers in their hair. The dainty bouquets they carried were of white stocks, sweet peas, and pink carnations set on a foundation of white tulle and tied with silver ribbon. The supper was in keeping with the standard set by similar functions in the past, conducted under the auspices of the local band, and the excellence of the light menu and the service evoked favourable comment ■

Pictured top May (Mary Ferguson) Quig bridesmaid in 1938

Bottom Doris (Dot) Gardner on left with her sister Eileen at Yerranderie.

From TROVE the Picton Post Wednesday 23 August 1939 .

THE STORY OF THE SILM FAMILY & THE KUNGLA CONNECTION

Hugo Silm was born in Estonia came to Australia looking for work in 1925 during the depression period and ended up digging out rabbits in Willow Tree. He was a Master in Continental Cooking and eventually found work with Gartrell White (Cakes) in Sydney so was able to save enough money to send for his wife Maria and daughter Elfrida in 1927. When the Repins coffee shops opened in Sydney Hugo opened a factory and made the special continental pastries which made Repins so popular. He purchased duck eggs from Thirlmere for the cakes and began to be interested in moving to the country, encouraged by Voldemar and Evald Alp who were also from Estonia and brought in provisions from the orchards and farms in Thirlmere in their truck. Hugo



Beurre Bosc Pears. He installed underground irrigation and bought a travelling spray unit to spray chemicals onto the trees. Ron also built an apple crushing machine to make apple juice from windfall and smaller fruit, which was a popular innovation. The Alp brothers also made apple juice and carried the juice to Sydney to sell and took orders from the women for special craft materials to bring back. To combat the frequent droughts Ron constructed several large dams and pumping systems over several years, added more land and built the very successful Cedar Creek Orchards which is now producing stone fruit and persimmons and run by his sons and grandsons. The legacy of Hugo and Maria live on through the families they inspired ■

Photos from the Silm family collection at The Oaks Historical Society

bought their present property on Cedar Creek Road but kept the cake factory until 1939 when he brought his family and started a duck farm followed by chickens. Many of his neighbours were also Estonian and had started poultry farming and they all helped each other to build up their farms – and enjoy social gatherings and sauna! Together with other farmers Hugo began a Co-operative Society to purchase poultry and bulk poultry feed which they named the Kungla Farmers Co-operative.

Information from the book of the exhibition **From Estonia to Thirlmere** at The Wollondilly Heritage Centre and Museum and available in our shop.



Pictured Top-Hugo and Maria Silm in Sydney with their daughter Elfrida and baby Ron c1928

Centre—Ron & Laurel (nee Bale) Silm with children Mark, Catherine, Jennifer and Michael.

Bottom—The newly restored Kungla sign on the store in Thirlmere.

Hugo planted an orchard in 1938 and when his son Ron left school and joined his father he decided that poultry farming was not for him and wanted to expand the orchard. The farm was still under timber so he and his cousin Bruno cleared 30 acres by hand – which was very labour-intensive work – and planted his first orchard in 1955 with Granny Smith and Delicious apples and Packham and



Wonderful Wedding Reports from Local Newspapers



We are continuing the coverage of weddings from our local newspapers. This wedding event was reported in The Camden News (NSW: 1895-1954) Thursday 21st September 1933, page 7.

guests. Later Mr and Mrs Tickner left for a tour of the south coast, the latter travelling in a toilette of blue and grey.

Pictured Left is Vera on the arm of her father John (Jack) and on the right bride and groom Vera & Wilfred (Bill) Tickner ■



Newspaper information sourced from Trove/Camden News.

TICKNER— HANGER.

St. Paul's Church, Mt. Hunter was nicely decorated with arum lilies and pale pink stocks on Saturday, September 2nd, when the marriage was celebrated of Vera, only daughter of Mr and Mrs John Hanger of Spring Creek to Wilfred, twin son of the late Mr and Mrs Peter Tickner of The Oaks and late of Cootamundra. The Rev. T. G. Paul officiated. The bridal frock of ivory satin was finished with long tight-fitting sleeves of chantilly lace, the veil was mounted on pink tulle and finished with a coronet of orange blossoms. Miss Kathleen Dunn, wearing a frock of Lily of the valley green georgette, attended the bride. The two sheaves of choice flowers were designed by Miss Nina Smart. Mr Cec Hanger supported the bridegroom. The reception was held at the Mount Hunter School of Arts where Mrs Hanger and Mrs Alchin (sister of the bridegroom received the



Wedding Photo Correction

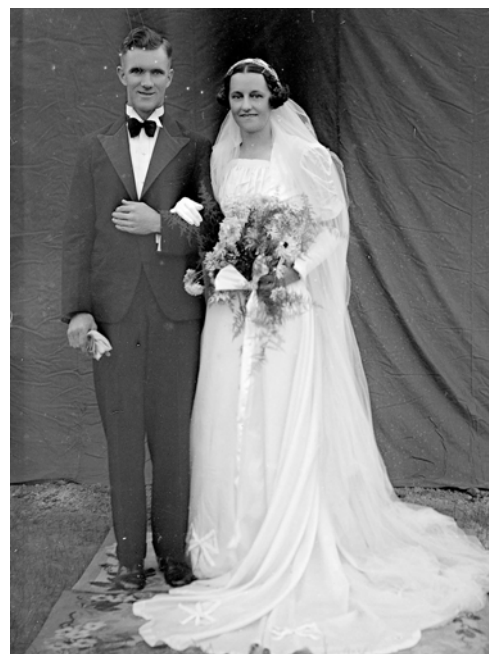
The wedding photo we featured in the last edition had been identified incorrectly. This is the photo of the wedding of **Iley Smart and Aubrey Ryder** and is the correct one for the wedding description in last

months edition. Left to right are Gerald Williams, Nina Smart, Groom Aubrey Ryder & Bride Iley Smart, Harold Smart (brother of the Bride), Jean Doust and flower girl Enid Clifton ■



Unidentified Wedding photo

This wedding is one from the Roy Dowle Collection and not identified. Are you able to help us find out who the happy couple are?



Reminders, News & Info

WEEKEND ROSTER	
MARCH	
Pam & Margaret	Saturday, 4
Bev & David	Sunday, 5
Sue & Helen	Saturday, 11
Trish & Kevin	Sunday, 12
Colleen & Kathy	Saturday, 18
Marlane & Cheryl/Kate	Sunday, 19
Bob & Vivian (working Bee)	Saturday, 25
Maria & Betty	Sunday, 26
MONTHLY SUPPER ROSTER	
March	Volunteers required

THIRLMERE FESTIVAL OF STEAM
18 & 19 MARCH 2023

The 2023 Festival of Steam is delivered in partnership by Wollondilly Shire Council and Transport Heritage NSW, operators of the NSW Rail Museum.



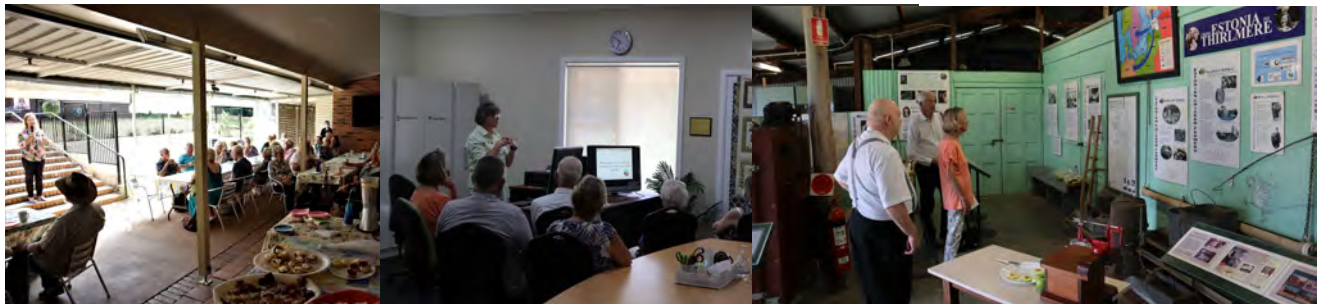
Tahmoor Scrabble Club

An all ability group and this may be for you! Meets Mondays 1-3.30pm and all abilities welcome. At Wollondilly Health Centre 15 Harper Close Tahmoor Contact Bev on 0409 913679 for details.

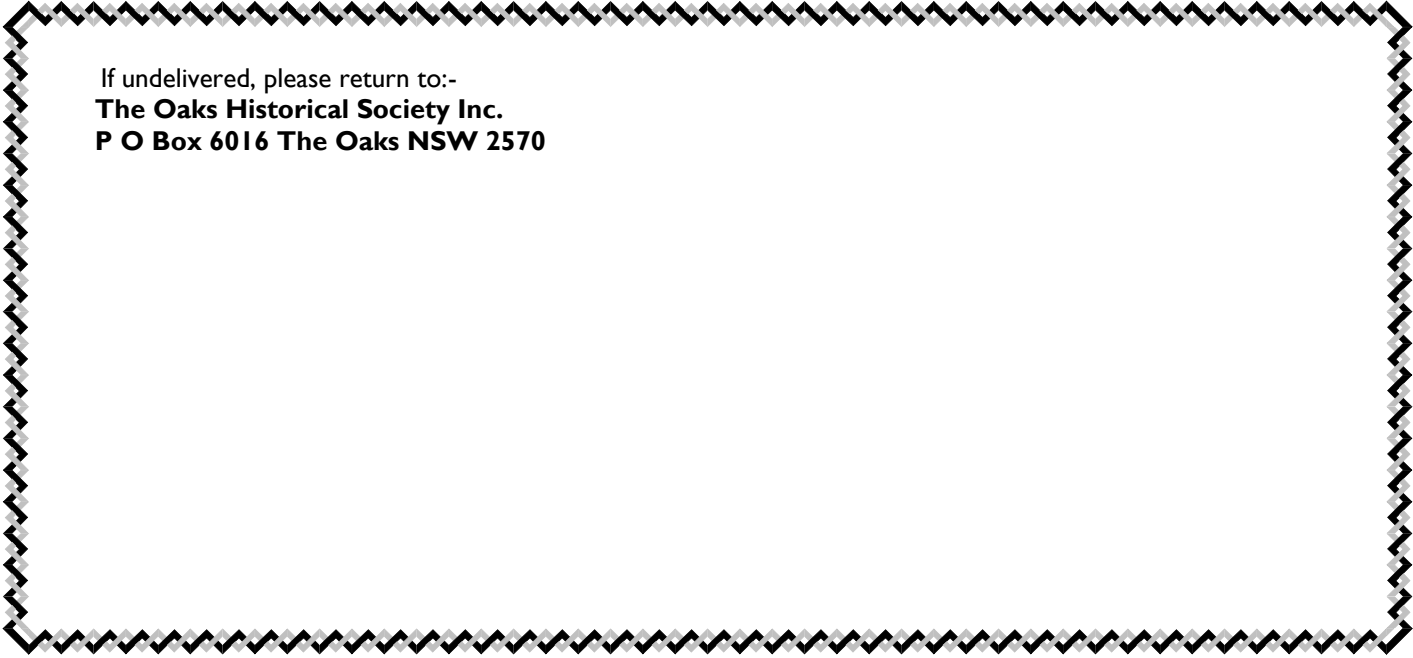
NSW'S PREMIER STEAM EVENT

In 2023, Thirlmere village will once again awaken to the enchanting sound of the steam whistle for the annual Thirlmere Festival of Steam.

Photos from Our Seniors Event on Monday 20th February →



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. The next meeting is Monday March 6th followed by the next general meeting on April 3rd 2023. Our patron is 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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