

The Oaks Historical Society Inc

Est. May 1979

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Wollondilly Heritage Centre & Museum

Newsletter

November 2022

New South Wales Beauty Spots

Quite incredible things happen from time to time in the museum and one of our latest acquisitions of a photo album was one of those moments. During a recent group visit a couple came forward and asked if we could use an album that they had brought with them. Jennifer and Morton explained it had belonged to his uncle and when the business closed this album was found abandoned on the premises. The album is entitled 'New South Wales Beauty Spots' and upon reviewing the contents, the album proved to contain mostly scenes taken in Burratorang Valley and has been added to our collection. Stirling Stevenson was the photographer and he was the General Manager of Fisher & Co. Sydney New South Wales and it seems an amateur photographer. The photographs are varied and include many river scenes, camping by the river, wagon teams, farms and several buildings. It was the fashion in those days to go for a 'Sunday Drive' and possibly these photos are a result of such occasions and were

probably taken in the late 1920s according to the donors. The car featured in the photographs has a registration plate that was indicative of those used in early NSW registrations

until around 1924, all numerical in black on a white background. In October of 1876, Henry Fisher opened a pharmacy at 337 George Street Sydney and he started packing and marketing homeopathic remedies such as Fishaphos Nerve Tonic, Phospherine Drops, Beaty Liver Pills and Teething Powders. Some twenty years later the business was purchased by Wil-

liam Morton Stevenson, a master jeweller from an Adelaide family. Stevenson, not being a pharmacist registered the name Fisher & Co with its signature trademark. Stevenson's son Stirling then joined the company to learn all about the business and when his father died in January 1915 he was able to competently take over the management of large enterprise for those times. In 1942 the next generation of Stevensons, twin sons Stirling Morton and Douglas William (born 1919) joined the company after graduation from the School of Pharmacy, Sydney University. Mr S.M. Stevenson was responsible for the firms entry into tablet production and ably

assisted in the management of the business until his untimely death in November 1962, leaving his brother to continue as the pharmacy manager. The closure of the pharmacy in January 1965 was brought about by the purchase of the premises by the Sydney County Council Electricity Supply. The manufacturing division was then transferred to 17 May Street St Peters with Mr Stirling

Stevenson continuing as General Manager until his death in February 1966 after devoting 63 years to the business. His son Douglas continued to manage

the business until retirement in 1974 and the brand name and some formulas were bought by Drug Houses of Australia. By that time the business had been owned by five Stevenson families ■

Authors photo captions— Left 'Camp Ideal Burratorang' and Right 'Road Scene Burratorang' and above is the album cover page.





President's Report

Trish Hill

Earlier this month we ran our second and very successful 'Back Then Live' coach tour. With not great weather and more rainfall predicted, all on board had a great day. We visited Cataract Dam, lunched at the picnic area there on the grounds and returning with a drive through Mount Annan Botanical Gardens to see the watercourse winding its way on to Prospect. Thanks to all who attended for your support and again to Lee Abrahams and the District Reporter for the idea and advertising the event. Recently we have been fortunate to receive funding from Simec/Tahmoor Coal and TRN Civil Construction. These funds will be utilised in providing enhancements to the BBQ and garden area of our



facility. Thanks to Keith Polsen from CPE for the tree removal which will enable work to proceed freely with ease of access.

Last Friday we hosted Tamara Lavrencic and Joanna Nicholas from Museums and Galleries for our Standards Program Field Visit. It was a highly productive morning working through the Standards process and evaluation and look forward to the next stage.

Sending our best wishes to Ian Welsh who is unwell.

I would like to welcome new volunteer Linda Bolton to our team. Linda has attended both of our coach tours and this week helped us with a group visit. Welcome Linda! ■



Family History & Local Archive Research Corner

Sue Davis

We are always grateful for the trust families have in looking after treasured possessions of their ancestors. Recently we were given some of the effects of the late Private John Lewis Kerswell who was killed on the Western Front on the 7th June 1917. He was buried in Belgium in the 451 Strand Military Cemetery, Ploegsteert. Private Kerswell had lived in the Burragorang Valley prior to enlisting. He was 19 when he was killed. His parents were Henry and Sabina Kerswell of "Warragamba" Cox's River.

When WWI had ended and soldiers were coming home, Sabina and youngest son, Owen, had gone to welcome home first born son, Arthur, who had survived the war. Sadly, Sabina and Arthur caught the pneumonic influenza and both died soon after Arthur arrived home safely. They are both now buried at St Matthews, Old Oaks. Father, Henry, (Harry) lived to a grand age of 95 and died in 1964. He is buried with Sabina at St Matthews. There is a plaque inside St Matthew's church that commemorates the life of



Private John (Jack) Kerswell.

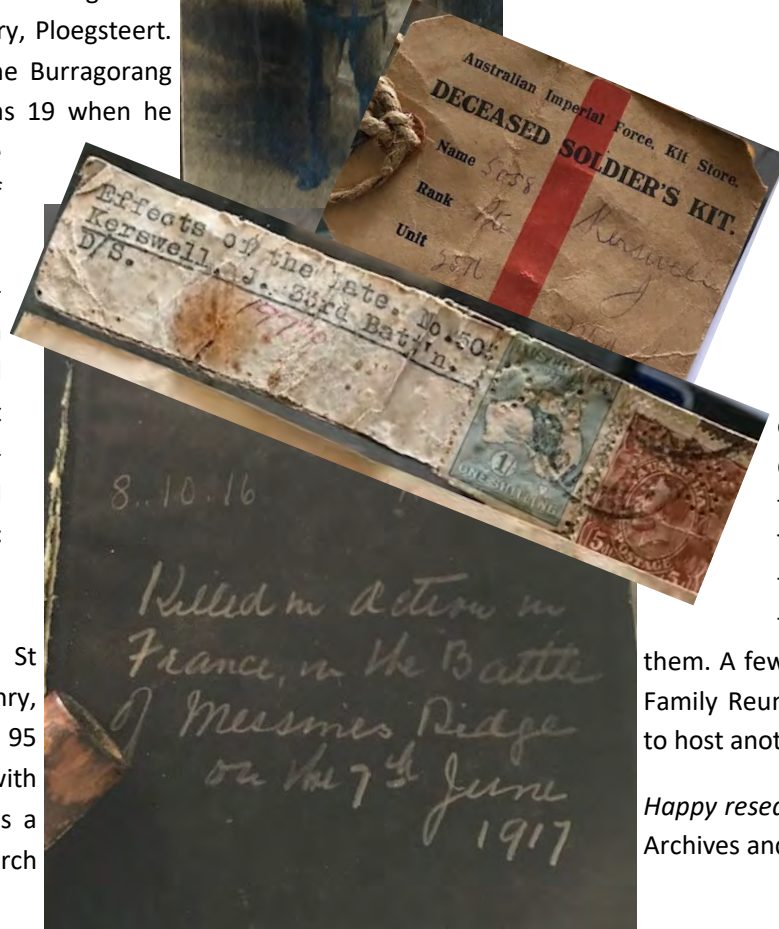
One of the items donated was Private Kerswell's bible. The Army Chaplain had written on it to show Private Kerswell's date of death before the bible was sent home, with other

effects, to the next his kin, his father, Henry Kerswell. The items are currently on display in our New Acquisitions cabinet in our entry exhibition building.

The Kerswell family of today are very proud of their ancestors and different branches of the family have visited The Oaks from time to time to remember those who came before

them. A few years ago we hosted a Family Reunion for them and hope to host another in the near future.

Happy researching! Sue Davis, Local Archives and Family History ■





Acquisitions Report

Allen Seymour

Much busier this month, with lots of items, some quite exciting. To start with there are some maps of Buxton and surrounding areas and original plans for the community church that was built at Buxton during the 1950's.

One of the significant things we've received are some items that belonged to John Lewis Kerswell. Jack as he was known was born in Burraborang Valley at the family farm on Cox's River. He enlisted in 1916 and went to France where he was killed on June 7th, 1916 in the Battle of Messines Ridge. His family have donated a number of items and among these is a pocket testament with his name written inside. It has also had the details of when he died added by the chaplain. There is a label that was attached to his kit when it was returned to the family, as well as a packing slip and the stamps off the package. Other personal objects include his razor & sharpening stone, a sewing kit, and a home-made pipe along with a lapel badge and cap badge. The cap badge has been modified

by having an Australia badge added to it and a safety pin soldered to the rear so it can be worn as a brooch. Some of these items are displayed in the 'New Additions' cabinet in the shop.

Another amazing item is an album of photographs of NSW Beauty Spots. There are 50 photos in this and over half of them are taken in Burraborang!! These have already been copied and are located in the File Management Directory under Mosaic Photos/NSW Beauty Spots Album. Trish will be going into more detail on this.

From John Fergusson comes two land saws and two scythes, complete with a spare handle. From The Oaks Rural Fire Service comes a set of Sydney Water plans from 1985 showing the layout of the water supply system.

We have also received an airflow testing set, a wind velocity tester and a clamp type ammeter. These were not used locally, but are representative of similar items that were used in the mines ■



Schoolies Report

Bev Batros

As most of you know the School Program has been operating for over 30 years and was begun by some amazing and visionary people, some of whom are still involved at the Centre. The program is quite unique because of its 'hands on' approach to learning about days gone by.

The tradition of amazing volunteers continues now but four of our school volunteers deserve a special mention. Not only do they do the Schools' Program but on other days they can be found greeting bus groups, serving lunches, attending meetings, working on the garden and taking part in working bees. Kevin Wintle, Margaret Battam, Pam McVey and Pat Rawnsley how would we survive without you? Every week you are at the Centre, sometimes 3 or 4 times a week, except for Kevin who lives there!

Of course, it is not just hard work, there is lots of laughter over our morning cuppa, sustained by the goodies left over from bus groups. We have the occasional lunch and always some amusement and surprise at lunch time over what the kids say or do.

Long serving member Shirley Carlon reflected on some of these. Some you will have heard before but if it makes us

smile it is worth repeating.

Shirley says in the early years volunteers dressed in the clothing of the early days and greeted schools as they got off the bus. One boy getting off the bus said, "Wow look at them". He then asked me "Did you used to know Captain Cook?"



We ask the children what they think the jerry pot under the bed is used for. We get many different ideas. One thought it might be used for bathing the baby. Another thought it was used to catch mosquitoes because they slip down the mosquito net above and fall in.

One said you smoke pot! Best of all one child said it was used as a toilet but the teacher quickly said, "Don't be disgusting, it wouldn't be used for that." She was quite shocked when I said the pupil was right and apologised.

Children look inside the kerosene fridge and they think the little freezer is a toaster. The bathtub always causes consternation because the water is used by everyone in the family with the dad going last because he is the dirtiest. One girl looked at the small oval tin bath and asked, "How would dad fit all his bits into that little bath?"

Reminiscences of Toovey's Transport

By Ken Toovey

In May of this year we held the Truckies Reunion which was well attended by those who had been involved in the Burragorang Coal Industry. Toovey family members Ken ,Aiden and Shane travelled from Moruya to attend. Soon afterwards we received the following note from Ken and several weeks later we got the sad news he had passed away suddenly. The following is Ken's letter.....

Our father Desmond Toovey was an old Valley boy who cut and carted timber to wood merchants in Sydney including the suburbs of Rose Bay and Vaucluse. He also transported produce from Burragorang Valley growers to the Sydney Markets.

In 1953 he became a contractor for S. & M. Fox transporting coal from the local coal mines.

In 1961 Des was joined in business by his son, Ken, and they were contractors for Clinton's Collieries and Transport Pty Ltd. After the addition of several more trucks and trailers they were able to further expand their contract to include

LoadHaul from collieries at Appin, Towers, Corrimal and Westcliff etc for many years.

When Des' eldest son, Aiden, came into the business Toovey's became quite a large Transport Co. Pty. Ltd .

Before Des passed on Aiden became a contractor in his own right and was very successful with LoadHaul, S.& M. Fox and Clinton's mines. He drove Bedfords & Internationals for 14 years. We all miss our transport business and our great workmates and "the Valley". Everyone loved our valley and we miss our wonderful times there. We are related to the Noakes (family). Both Aiden and myself wish to thank the Historical Society for a marvellous and memorable reunion and Oaks and Valley history. We will never forget your generosity and attention. It was the best turnout we have been to and hope we can be there more for you guys there no doubt know we adore our valley and all our friends there.



I prattle on a bit I know but I guess you know we are proud of our valley heritage and especially our father Desmond and our mum Doreen (Gallop) —(she grew up in Marj Campbell's house and went to Catholic School at The Oaks) --for the upbringing they gave us , "We are very proud".

Desmond born in 1915 and the baby (on his mothers lap in the photograph) was the youngest of 13 children to James and Florence (née Kar-koe) Toovey. He married Doreen Alice Gallop 1937 in Camden. Des died 1987 ■



←Pictured left—Irwins Saw mill Upper Burragorang behind the Hotel. Des Toovey is on the truck and behind is Nick Toovey on the left and Ted Irwin (owner) on the right.

Below —Ken Toovey's Kenworth SAR at The Oaks

Below left - Toovey's Transport P/L V8 Scania at Mayfarm Depot 1985



FIRES IN WOLLONDILLY an extract from 'Hope Out of the Ashes'



This month is the third anniversary of the start of Green Wattle Fire which went on to wreak havoc over a vast area of Wollondilly Shire. The following is an extract from our publication 'Hope Out of the Ashes'

Over the years most major fires within the Wollondilly Shire have had their origin within the Sydney Water Catchment area west of our main towns and villages. These have been predominately the result of lightning strikes during dry storms, escaping from camp fires or from burning of rubbish.

Their regular paths have been via Wild Goat Plateau, Martins Creek, Nattai River to Little River Gorge and Hoddles Head, these are all south of Sheehy's Creek and on rare occasions there has been a spot over from the Tonalli Plateau.

As a result of these paths the villages mainly threatened are Buxton, Lakesland and Nattai, with Thirlmere and Oakdale being next in line. Yanderra and Bargo are also at risk because fires which come across Wild Goat Plateau come through the Bargo State Recreation Area. When the Group System of Brigades was decided these paths dictated the groupings.

Fire paths tended to divide at Sheehy's Creek with the winds usually from the north west or west of the valley. Fires which have started around Nattai Village tend to go north and south of Oakdale Village. They head to the southern side towards Belimbla Park and on the northern side towards Orangeville.

There have been some fires which have started within the Shire. These have been a major concern as they head east into the catchment area. They are also a threat to Wilton and Appin - some of these have finished up outside the shire within the Wollongong and Sutherland areas.

Major fires have occurred west of the Burratorang Valley within the Wollondilly Shire. These have started mainly through lightning strikes and burn for a considerable length of time causing some problems around Yerranderie. Fortunately, most of these have been controlled before they have crossed the Wollondilly River or Lake Burratorang as it is now known.

The town of Warragamba has suffered a major fire which originated west of the Warragamba River. It crossed south of the dam wall and destroyed a number of dwellings and businesses. This fire also caused problems further east across the Nepean River in the Wallacia and Luddenham areas. These have been the principal fire paths through the Shire over past years with

major fires occurring in 1951/ 1957/ 1965/ 1968/ 1973/ 1975/ 1977/ 1984/ 1990/1991/ 1997/ 2001/2 /2005, 2006 and 2019/20.

While these are the major fires there have been many within the Shire which have caused problems in local areas.

History of Bushfire Management by The Water Board

Large tracts of land for Sydney's water supply were gazetted in 1880 including areas of Wollondilly. Later areas included O'Hare's Creek in 1927 and Warragamba in the 1950s, together with Picton's Water Supply. The Water Board was then known as the Metropolitan Water, Sewerage and Drainage Board (MSWDB) and came under the control of the Chief Medical Officer to prevent contamination of the water and protect infrastructure. In 1949 this changed to the Forestry Officer, also under control of the Chief Medical Officer, and the priority became protecting the catchments from bushfires, erosion and the effects of human activities.

From the early 1950s work began on building six fire towers for use in fire prone seasons and fire trails. Fire Maps showed the location of the trails and towers and water sources. A radio system was set up between fire towers, plus officers and trained staff in 4 x 4 vehicles - initially Blitz ex-army trucks. A numerical system identified the fire trails. These became the "P" series in the Picton Catchment. Water Board Rangers were appointed 'Fire Patrol Officers' under the NSW Bush Fires Act. The Warragamba Dam was completed in 1960 and the fire trails in the Burratorang Valley became the "W" series.

All manner of plant was used to create over 1400 kilometres of roads, which was also used to fight fires. These included Caterpillar bulldozers plus front end loaders and graders. Water board rangers worked closely with Bush Fire Brigades but had their own Standing Orders which were later replaced by Bush Fire Management Plans to align with Bush Fire Brigade training. The work force was reduced once the fire trails were completed; in 1970s there were over 200 staff but by 2014 only 53 basic trained personnel remained. Since the 1970s State Parks and National Parks have been gazetted but the Water Board continued to manage the bush fire protection. As more National Parks were added National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) staff increased and the joint co-operative management of bush fires began.

Throughout all the changes the priority remains to protect the water catchment to supply clean water to Sydney and the local areas. Bush Fire management is an essential part of this ■

From research compiled by Col Miller & Dennis Ashton

Wonderful Wedding Reports from Local Newspapers



In the past our local newspapers were a wonderful source of information on a wide range of news in our area and the events were often recorded in great detail with every aspect described. Weddings were among those reports and we will feature some more of those in the coming editions. One such event was reported in The Camden News (NSW: 1895-1954) of Thursday 11th September 1952 on page 2.

WEDDING.

CHESHAM— NOAKES.

St. Luke's Church, The Oaks, was chosen by Valerie June, second daughter of Mr. and Mrs. H. J. Noakes, of The Oaks, for her marriage to Thomas James, youngest son of Mrs. and the late B. H. Chesham, of The Oaks Rev. I. Booth officiated. The bride, who was given away by her father, wore a frock of satin and lace, with long tulle veil held in place by a coronet of orange blossoms. She carried a bouquet of camellias and stocks. The bride was attended by two matrons of honour, her sister, Shirley (Mrs. Ray Cook) and the bridegroom's sister-in-law, Pat (Mrs. Dudley Chesham). Their frocks were pink and mauve lace and net over taffeta respectively, with head-dress of flowers and small veils, and they carried bouquets of camellias and sweet peas. The two flower girls, Lorraine (sister of the bride) and Jeanette Norman (cousin of the bridegroom) were dressed alike in pink taffeta frocks, with head-dress of flowers. They carried posies of pink camellias. The bridegroom was attended by his brother, Dudley, as best man, and Ray Cook as groomsman. During the signing of the register Mrs. Connell sang 'Thanks be to God.' The reception was held in The Oaks Hall, where the

bride's mother, dressed in junior navy with black accessories, assisted by the bridegroom's mother, dressed in grey with black accessories, received about eighty guests. The usual toasts were honoured and the beautiful two tiered wedding cake, made by the bride's aunt and decorated by her cousin, was cut. Many beautiful and useful gifts were received. The bride's travelling frock was a dusty pink with which she wore a pink hat and black accessories. The honeymoon was spent down the South Coast ■



Pictured left
Tommy & Val leaving the Church

Below -St Lukes Church 1988

Wedding photo courtesy Anne Davies (daughter)



When on duty

If you are looking for something to do whilst on duty the following could need attention

- ◆ Clean and tidy building inside and out and collect any rubbish left.
- ◆ Check toilets and supplies
- ◆ Empty indoor rubbish bins if necessary.
- ◆ Check and remove out of date items in the fridge.
- ◆ Garden weeding and watering if required.
- ◆ Check brochures and leaflets are tidy and are up to date, removing any out of date.



Please note completed jobs or concerns in the Day Book or if there are any problems. Remember to turn off all lights, heaters, air conditioners and lock all doors when you leave.

Reminders, News & Info

WEEKEND ROSTER

NOVEMBER

Vivian & Bob	Saturday, 5
Betty & Trish	Sunday, 6
Colleen & Kathy	Saturday, 12
Vivian & Bob	Sunday, 13
Sue & Helen	Saturday, 19
Bev & David	Sunday, 20
Working Bee	Saturday, 26
Sue & Paul	Sunday, 27

MONTHLY SUPPER ROSTER

November	TBA
December	Bring a plate

NOVEMBER GUEST SPEAKER

Steven Bennett– from The Oaks Airport will be presenting and discussing the planned development for the airport and the elevation of the development to State Significance.

BOOK LAUNCH

BARGO—TWO HUNDRED YEARS IN THE MAKING

by Marjo Hallowell

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 20,
2022 BETWEEN 10AM-2PM

AT THE BARGO
SPORTSGROUND HALL

STALLS, FOOD, FACE
PAINTING, COMMUNITY

INFORMATION STANDS

For details contact: Marjo Hallowell; marjofrombargo@gmail.com



Museums & Galleries of NSW Standards Program Field Visit

Our Volunteer team with Tamara Levrencic at the Blacksmith Shop during our tour of the museum.→

The purpose of the Field Visit was for the Reviewers and the museum to familiarise themselves with each other, to aid understanding of the Summary Report and to address any practical issues identified in the report. It has been a team effort in assessment and self evaluation and been very successful.

We were thrilled with the feedback during the field visit and look forward to the final assessment report but feedback on the day was very positive.



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 November 7th followed by the next general meeting on December 5th. 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.

If undelivered, please return to:-
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