

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

JUNE 2017

Wollondilly Heritage Centre & Museum



John Hickey and Les Watton



Visit to Illawarra Museum Wollongong



Members were made very welcome by John

Shipp, President of the Illawarra Museum then we toured around this delightful historic building in Wollongong. One interesting display—Mrs Davis, the “model” teacher is seated in her dream classroom.

(Photos by Allen Seymour, Robyn Gill & Jenny Wood)



President's Annual Report

Trish Hill

Congratulations to our incoming committee for the next 2017-18 financial year. Welcome on board to Debra Seymour who has stepped into the role of Treasurer, we all look forward to working with her. Our immense gratitude goes to retiring Treasurer, Maureen Whyte for her dedicated service in the position for over 20 years, working tirelessly for the museum. Welcome to Richard Guelfo of Premiere Real Estate, Narellan for his generous support in the sponsorship of our monthly Newsletter.

J.J. Richards Waste Management Services have donated funds towards an instant hot water system for the Drill Hall and we are very appreciative of their generosity.

Belgenny Farm is the destination for our next social day out on Wednesday July 19th. A self drive/car pool event, it will include a morning tea tour. See back page for details.

Some special events we have scheduled at the museum in the coming months include '1960s Pop music at the Magpie Milk Bar' on Sunday September 10th 11.00am – 4.00pm celebrating History Week 2017. Bring your dancing shoes and retro outfits and share your vinyls and memories with us! We have a black and white theme to remember the Magpie Café.

To celebrate Grandparents Week, we are having a Grandparents Day on Sunday 29th October. An open day with the theme 'Relive the good old days,' activities will include butter making, apple grader, bush school and Indigenous artwork. More details will be available closer to the date.

Congratulations and well done to Ian Welsh for organising another successful Truckies Reunion.

Keep warm everyone! ■



Display Officer's Report

Doreen Lyon

On your next visit to the museum, make sure you take a look at the new display near the old mine in the main building. Kevin and his team have begun the task of transferring the objects and photos into the new location and it is looking very professional! I am hoping the next stage will look as good when we move the Nattai-Bulli Lodge Banner into the place originally used for 'Trucking'. My original decision to mount the display in the Federation building has been re-assessed and I think it should stay with the old mine and associated stories. It will be easier for people to see it in the new location. Research on this significant banner is continuing and the more I look at archives concerned with Trade Union banners, the more I realise what a unique and unusual banner we do have! The images painted on it are altogether different to any other banners! But one thing is for sure – that without the efforts of the Miner's union, most of the benefits they still have today would not have been possible! ■



Bus Visits & Marketing Report

Louisa Singleman

May Bus Tours

Unfortunately May has been a very quiet month for bus tours with only three bus tours, one from Glenbrook Historical Society, one from the Salvation Army Seniors Group and the Three Bridges Community Group. However there is always a silver lining at the end of the tunnel with already eight groups booked in for the month of June. June is bursting out all over!

Timetable for June

- Tues. 6th** June Mickey / Village People Ray & Robyn
- Wed. 7th** June Goulburn U3A Trish & Kevin
- Wed. 14th** June David Hughes ??? TBA
- Mon. 19th** June Bankstown Comm/ IRT Peakhurst Viv & Bob
- Wed. 21st** St. Andrews Parish Betty Villy, Maureen & Jim
- Mon. 26th** Windang CPSA ??? TBA

If you can help on any of the days [with a TBA] please ring me on 4680 8358 or 0408 669287.

Marketing Report

I have sent out seventy letters and brochures over the past month or two so I hope we get some responses to increase the number of bus tours over the next six months or early into next year.

I hope to have a small stand at Taara Gardens Retirement Village's upcoming gala day on Sunday, 18th June to display *From Estonia to Thirlmere*. If anyone would like to come along and help out, you would be most welcome. ■



Acquisitions Corner

Allen Seymour

Another month with lots of items.

- A number of educational posters used in schools.
- A bottle of Penguin Indian Ink.
- A tin of zinc ointment
- Some home-made oven mitts, including some from hessian bags.
- A kitchen aid which is a flat wooden figure with hooks attached for hanging items on.
- A small brass hammer.
- A tube spanner with wooden handle.
- A brass plumb bob.
- A miniature pair of tongs and small hammer.
- A shoe button hook.
- A corkscrew.
- A self-rescue unit from the mines.
- A toolbox used in Wollondilly Little Pit.
- An air horn from one of Clutha's White Road Boss trucks.
- Two plates from the Australia Hotel in Sydney.
- A wool holder.
- A British Red Cross first aid book from 1938.
- A child's wooden T square.
- Some school magazines ranging from 1961 to 1965.
- A Fowler pudding bowl. This is identical to one we already had, only larger, giving us a matching set.

We were also given a book from Wollondilly Extended Miners Lodge, showing contributions to the Workers Industrial Union over the period 1946-1951. This was a huge book with only a very small number of pages actually used and was in very poor condition. Thanks to the efforts of our new member Paul, we have managed to salvage the pages that had information on them. They provide a useful record of those who were working at the mine during this period. Thanks Paul, and thanks to all those who have donated items. ■



Schoolies Corner

Bev Batros

Our visitors from The Oaks School were kind enough to send us some thank you cards. The pikelets were the most mentioned item, apparently enjoyed by all. It seems the old adage "the way to a man's heart is through his stomach" applies to children too.

Here are some of their comments. Imogen wrote,

"I liked the little house because she showed us the fire, bath, fridge and the bedroom. But there was no toilet. The toilet was a potty then."

Chelsea loved the pancakes but also liked "the washing because you got to do the ironing, washing the clothes and hanging the clothes on the line."

Sam liked the Heritage Centre "because the little house had a challenge for us and we had to find 11 mice and we found 10."

Some of our volunteers are also set to undertake a new challenge. As this newsletter goes to press we will have The Oaks Preschool Kindergarten visiting us on three mornings in the one week. They will do a shorter tour and a range of activities adapted for their age. ■



REPORT ON TOURISM AND HERITAGE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 13 MAY AT COUNCIL

Council advertised for interested people to apply to join this subcommittee and I was accepted. This was the first meeting and it was chaired by Tate Ryan, Jennifer Baldwin the team leader for Economic Development & Tourism who was joined by Councillor Blair Briggs and Ali Dench, Executive Director - Community Services & Corporate Support. The Tourism Committee has two support members, Wendy Foggarty and Jenny Luu who will run the website, organise meetings etc and five other new members.

Doreen Lyon

Agriculture in The Oaks 1897 - Part 3

Courtesy of Trove. This is the third in a series of articles on agriculture in The Oaks. It appeared in the Camden News on Thursday 29th April, 1897. The author is not named. Via Allen Seymour **Continued from last month**

The waterfall creek is the dividing line between the *Hermitage* and *Strathmore*, a small compact unpretentious holding, now in the occupation of Mr Phil Smith, a cheery, outspoken fellow, of the genial Burragorang type. The farm is traversed by a belt of soil red with the oxide of iron, to which the corn takes kindly. The weather has blighted the crops, but there will be a little corn notwithstanding the drought. Broadcast corn and sugar has not been a success, even for fodder purposes corn should be shelled. The valley here is seamed with water courses, there is a creek on either side of this property. Unfortunately the absence of an adequate watershed converts these watercourses into drains, so that irrigation will never be possible, and the farmer will always be at the mercy of the seasons.

Adjoining *Strathmore* is *Wild Oaks*, originally part of the *Vanderville* estate, but now the property of Mr Robert Seymour, a quiet methodical hard-working man. The homestead is of stone surrounded with well grown pines. The crops have been much affected by the weather, and the rain which is now falling is too late for the turnips, which do well hereabouts.

Though butter has not been profitable of late years, dairying is still the chief feature on farms like *Strathmore* and *Wild Oaks*. Mr Seymour, much to his credit be it said, is anxious to

obtain the seed of wheat possessed of rust-resisting properties. We trust he will be successful in his quest. The remembrance of the past clings around this corner of The Oaks. Osier willows luxuriantly line the banks of the creek, and huge old pear trees, reminiscent of the *Vanderville* days, still yield their crops of fruit. A few quinces and hazel bushes grow behind a protective screen of willows, and straggling vines, trailing unattended, mark the site of the once splendid vineyard – now a piggery – Sic transic Gloria mundi. **(To be continued)**



Robert Seymour with grand daughter Jean (Wheeler)

My latin is restricted to pig latin, but after searching the internet, I believe the latin phrase should actually be Sic transit Gloria mundi which translates to "Thus passes the glory of the world" and is used during the election of a new Pope. Some biographical details on Robert Seymour: He was born in 1849 and died in 1938, and is buried at St Matthews. He is the son of George and Hannah Seymour (nee Rolfe) of Burragorang. He married Maggie Allen in 1873. The late Jean Wheeler and her sister Audrey are his granddaughters.—Allen Seymour

Bats, campfires in valley now lost

Seniors magazine—Memory Lane with Lindsay Ballard

Ron Schofield's reminiscences about the Burragorang Valley, near Camden, and The Oaks in NSW (Memory Lane, March), rekindled pleasant memories for some readers.

"The article brought back some wonderful memories for me," writes **Shirley Beaumont** of Brisbane, Qld.

"They relate to my bushwalking days through the Burragorang Valley before it was flooded for the Warragamba Dam. Oh how I wish I could see those places and walk them all again.

"Crisscrossing through the flooded river we walked, carrying our packs over our heads, sleeping in the old mines full of bats—the open campfires, sharing our tucker, the stories we shared and the great social events. "So many memories came flooding back when I read the article."

It also set happy memories in motion for **Pat Allen**, who lives at Springwood in the Blue Mountains.

"As a senior student at Burwood Girls High School, together with six or seven other girls, we would travel via train to Camden, changing first at Campbelltown, and then take the Nattai bus down to the Burragorang Valley," she writes.

"It was 1954 and the residents of the valley were fast moving out, as required by the Sydney Water Board, and the timber cutters were busy at work removing the trees below the expected water level.

"The valley was very quiet apart from the sound of axes felling trees.

"We stayed with Mrs Waldron at the Hillside Guest House and daily rode horses from Ernie Pippin's stables—this same Ernie Pippin had gone to school with my mum at The Oaks during World War I.

"The valley was ours and we rode to the deserted Wills' Farm (a location in the film *Bush Christmas*) and to the ghost town of Yerranderie. The horses knew their way home, even after dark.

"In the summer we went swimming in the river or paddled the Wollondilly in canoes. Brown snakes were usually quickly disturbed when we arrived on a hot sandy beach.

"I remember a two-storey pine-log house we named the Artist's Cottage because there was a studio upstairs with a view of the valley and discarded works aplenty.

"I am wondering if anyone has a photograph of it and could supply a copy? It was a fascinating place but we knew no history for it.

"My remembrance is of a most beautiful valley and fun times with school friends."

Pat can be contacted by email at grannypat@bigpond.com or by phone on (02) 4751 8892.

Australia Hotel 1889-1971



Two new acquisitions to our collection are two pieces of flatware from the old Australia Hotel. Donated by our member, Lyn Greenwood, they represent a significant aspect of Sydney society. Lyn said that, *'It was very posh – this was where everyone stayed when they came up from the country to stay in Sydney'*.

The premier hotel in Sydney on Castlereagh Street was officially opened in 1891 by actress Sarah Bernhardt. The Sydney Morning Herald reported:



French actress Sarah Bernhardt arrived in Sydney, bringing with her 100 pieces of luggage. As hundreds of fans flooded onto Redfern railway platform as her train approached, she was whisked away from the platform to the Australia Hotel where hundreds more excited fans wanted to catch a glimpse of the glamorous celebrity. Her expensive flower filled second floor suite played host to pets including a large St Bernard, a smaller pug dog, a native bear and several cages containing possums and parrots. Theatregoers, many of whom had paid up to £2 for a seat, were genuinely moved by Mme Bernhardt's performance in Dumas' La Dame aux Camillias at Her Majesty's Theatre. After the show, drama critics called her a 'woman of genius' saying she had held the audience spell bound." Next to the hotel, across Rowe Street, stood the famous Theatre Royal.

The hotel boasted international standards of comfort and service. The *Australia* became *"the place to stay and be seen by the upper echelons of society"*. The hotel remained an oasis for those who scorned modernity and sought the more refined atmosphere of the classic European hotels. Apart from the accommodation for guests, rooms were also provided in the Rowe Street wing for their servants, including the children's nurses, who had their own dining room with their charges. Caption under an image of a Rolls Royce



"The Australia Hotel was once 'the' place to stay and be seen by the upper echelons of society. The city now boasts scores of more upmarket and imposing enclaves for old wealth, new wealth and would-be wealth".

Photo and quote by Jeff Carter, 1961 via Trove

In 1968 The Hotel Australia was purchased by the MLC Insurance and Finance group who, amid mounting concerns, announced their intention of refurbishing and maintaining the hotel, one of the city's landmarks. However the following year they announced its impending closure and closed it on 30 June 1971. They demolished it in almost record time, to erect a modern \$200 million, 68-storey office block/skyscraper in its place; the MLC Centre. (MLC was later purchased in 2000 by the National Australia Bank)

- Doreen Lyon

HISTORY SHOWCASE—2 August—Belgenny Farm

Camden Historical Society invitation

Belgenny Farm presents a showcase of local family and history resources on Wednesday 2nd August. It is a chance to go along, tour the site, enjoy a Devonshire Tea in the tea rooms and talk to local history groups and family history associations. This is an opportunity to delve into your own family tree and learn about where to look for further information.

The Society will have a stand with DVD's and publications at this event.

Belgenny Farm contact details: 4654 6800
Address: 100 Elizabeth Macarthur Ave.
Camden South 2570



The Big Flat and the Burragorang Waterhole in the Burragorang Valley

Article sent in by Jim Smith

Places which never appeared on any map, and for which only vague descriptions of their locations are available, are very challenging to map accurately.

Two such places in the Burragorang Valley are 'The Big Flat' and the *Burragorang waterhole*, after which the Burragorang Valley was named. I had good success, with the help of old Burragorang residents, in locating the waterholes mentioned in the Gundungurra story of Gurangatch and Mirragan.

These had never been mapped but, using clues in the version of the legend published by R.H. Mathews, together with his unpublished notes, and the memories of former non-Aboriginal residents, I was able to map these waterholes with a high level of accuracy.

Even though the old Burragorangers I worked with had not heard the Aboriginal legend, their familiarity with the topography of the Valley allowed me to locate the positions of the deepest waterholes in the Wollondilly and Cox Rivers.

Very large and deep waterholes, sometimes claimed to be 'bottomless', have an aura about them that left lasting memories in the minds of the former Valley residents. The psychology underlying this is probably similar to that experienced by the Gundungurra people of the Valley. These major waterholes are places of connection between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents of the Burragorang.

The Burragorang waterhole is connected to another Gundungurra legend, the story of the pursuit of a Giant Kangaroo by the Bullan brothers. Information about its location is very scarce, but Billy Russell and other informants told grazer Len Bennett of Camden that it was near The Big Flat. As I said, this place never appeared on any map.

Using the information available to me at the time, I came to the conclusion that The Big Flat was the area around the junction of the Tonalli and Wollondilly Rivers and that the Burragorang waterhole in the Wollondilly River was near the junction with the Tonalli. These locations are shown on the map on page 283 of my recent book, *The Aboriginal People of the Burragorang Valley*.

I recently met Ted Rigby, who came with his family to the Burragorang Valley in 1943. They farmed several hundred acres of land at Kingsfold Park property, west of the Wollondilly River, between the Tonalli River and Byrnes Creek. After reading my new book, Ted presented very convincing evidence, from his memories and family photos, that The Big Flat covered a much larger area than I had thought. As he wrote: "We, several times went for a picnic at the Tonalli River and it only had small flats either side of the river, about 2 to 3 hundred yards wide. Could it be the huge river flats embracing Summer Hill, Kingsfold Park and Apple Grove, about 2 ½ miles long and nearly 1 mile wide?"

Ted Rigby's memory is that The Big Flat, although he never heard this placename used, covered all the country between the Tonalli River down to a little south of Byrnes Creek, and extending about 1.5 km westwards of the Wollondilly River.

Ted Rigby also wrote: "I would think that the large waterhole where the giant kangaroo escaped was the very large one that bordered Kingsfold Park. This started at Byrnes Creek and extended [northwards] about two thirds of a mile. It was quite deep, at an estimated 14 or 15 feet deep, and about 250-280 feet wide. My sister Faye and I explored up and down the river several miles and there were no large waterholes anywhere near the size of our engine pool (as we called it). There was a drought in 1943 which lasted about 2 ½ years. Towards the end of this time the river virtually stopped flowing. The 'engine pool' only dropped about 1 foot in depth".

Translated into metric measurements, this pool was about one km long and 80 m wide. Ted told me that he was in awe of this pool as he felt an inexplicable fear that prevented him from swimming in it. Like the waterholes 'mapped' by Gundungurra people in their Gurangatch and Mirragan story, this waterhole survived long periods of drought and therefore had great practical, as well as spiritual, significance for Gundungurra people.

I am quite convinced that the pool remembered by Ted Rigby is the true location of the Burragorang waterhole, associated with the Gundungurra legend of the Giant Kangaroo. It is about 2 ½ km south of where I thought it was. I am very grateful to Ted for taking the trouble to explain this to me. This is a good example of how precious the memories of our old Burragorangers are. If it were not for them, it is likely that the locations of waterholes of great cultural significance for Gundungurra people would never have been known.

Unfortunately, as shown by the recent death of one of my best informants, Mel Catt, we are losing the last generation of people who knew the Burragorang Valley intimately.

I am hoping the publishers of my book will be able to do a second edition so that I can correct the map and text relating to The Big Flat and the Burragorang Waterhole. Ted also pointed out errors in captions on two of the photos in the book. The top photo on page 111 does not show Brereton Head. It was taken from the Wollondilly River Bridge leading to Yerranderie and shows Tonalli Peak on the left of the picture. The top photo on page 316 was not taken from the Wollondilly Bridge but about three km downstream, near the Tonalli River. ■



A section of the Big Flat with Tonalli Peak in the background
Photo courtesy of Kazan Brown—photo from the book, *The Aboriginal People of the Burragorang Valley* by Jim Smith

WEEKEND ROSTER

JUNE	
Saturday, 3	WORKING BEE
Sunday, 4	Trish & Kevin
Saturday, 10	Colleen & June
Sunday, 11	Ray & Robyn
Monday, 13	Bev & David
Saturday, 17	Louisa & Doreen
Sunday, 18	Allen & Debbie
Saturday, 24	Sue & TBA
Sunday, 25	Maria & Betty

SUPPER ROSTER

June	Doreen & Ben
July	Maureen & Jim
August	Aileen & Pam
September	Shirley & Trish
October	Vivian & Pam McV
November	Jenny & Pacita
December	Please bring a plate

GUEST SPEAKERS

5 June—John Shipp
(Illawarra Historical Society)
on *The Walled Garden: Illawarra
1770 to 1920*

3 July—TBA

7 August—TBA

**4 September—Christine
Yeats** (Illawarra Historical
Society) on *Shady Acres by
Lesley Muir*

**2nd October—Lorraine
Neate** (Illawarra Historical
Society) *Misbehaviour by early
Illawarra residents. From her
publication, Scandal, Slander and
Interfering with our Neighbours*

Reminders, News & Info

WINTERFEST IS COMING TO PICTON SUNDAY, 18 TO SATURDAY 24 JUNE

Embrace the colder weather with a week of Winter Warmer specials from many of Picton's local businesses.

Winterfest will culminate with a Winter Festival on Friday, 23 (4pm—9pm) and Saturday 24 (2pm—9pm) June at the Picton RSL Memorial Park with a synthetic ice skating rink, snow machines and market stalls in the park.

Bookings are essential on line from Friday 26 May—Contact Council

GRANDPARENTS' DAY Relive the Good Old Days

SUNDAY, 29 OCTOBER

10am to 12 noon then BBQ

10am until 12pm with children, grandparents and parents undertaking activities together—6 volunteers needed per hour. Volunteers to supervise the activity in their area. Visitors move around freely between areas at their leisure.

School—slate pencils and boards

Laundry—washing, mangle and dolly washer

Cottage—cream beating, mincing bread and slicing beans

Shed—egg cleaning machine and apple grader

Art—Aboriginal dot painting on paper

Join us to celebrate National Grandparents Day

BELGENNY FARM

WEDNESDAY 19 JULY

Arrive at the farm by 10:15am

Mark your diary for a self drive/ car pool to wonderful Belgenny Farm—2 hour tour

\$20 includes Devonshire Morning Tea

Add your name to the list on the front counter



Happy 70th birthday

Vice President Ray Gill



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. Upcoming meetings are 3 July & 7 August 2017. Patrons are Luke Johnson and Richard Booth. 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.

MEMBERSHIP FEES FOR 2017 /18
ARE NOW DUE

\$10 for single ♦ \$18 for family

Plus \$10 postage for newsletter

EMAILED newsletters are postage FREE

If undelivered, please return to:-

The Oaks Historical Society Inc.

P O Box 6016 The Oaks NSW 2570



PREMIERE
ESTATE AGENTS

Phone: 02 4622 8100

Email: info@premiererealestate.com.au

Website: premiererealestate.com.au

Richard Guelfo, principal of Premiere Estate Agents at Narellan, has kindly offered to sponsor our newsletter this year. His sales brochure says: *Let Richard and his team at Premiere Real Estate move you from where you are to where you want to be – enhance your life!*

On a personal note, Richard has kept a close eye on the management of the sale of my property. I cannot commend him enough on his professionalism and quick response at what can be, an anxious time – Ed.

Here is an extract from an article by John Cunningham (President of Real Estate Institute of NSW) in the Macarthur Chronicle on 9 August 2016 – *Your greatest asset requires presentation, marketing, pricing and negotiation strategies carried out by a professional trusted advisor... a property buying decision is based on 80% emotion, backed by 20% logic.*