

The Oaks Historical Society Inc

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Newsletter

FEBRUARY 2026

Wollondilly Heritage Centre & Museum

ST MATTHEW'S - A COLONIAL TREASURE

For 187 years the slab church of St. Matthew's has stood on a ridge close to what is now the village of The Oaks.



The site bordered the estates of John Wild ('Vanderville') and Major William Russell ('Orthese') and had already been cleared and put under cultivation. (It was a usual practice of the time to informally use Crown land for farming whilst waiting for land to be formally granted or purchased. When land holders were granted a ticket of occupation, a prescribed portion of the land in proportion to the size of the total land granted was decreed to be cleared and put to cultivation.) In this part of The Oaks, agriculture focused on sheep, dairying and the production of wheat and tobacco.

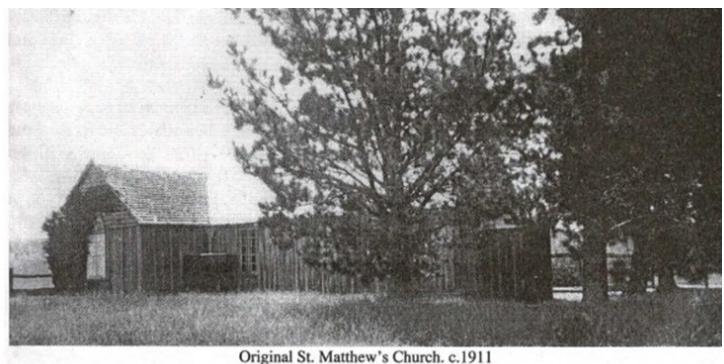
A small cottage which served as a teacher's residence was the first building to exist on the site with the school for the children of the neighbouring estates being located closer to Werriberri Creek. Severe termite damage led to the demolition of the cottage and there is no longer a footprint of this building evident.

'The Oaks Chapel' was erected on the Crown land by Wild and Russell for private use by both of their families and their assigned servants. The exact date the church was completed is unknown as early records related to the site have been lost – but is sometime between October 1838 and April 1839. It is known that one of the earliest services at St. Matthew's was the baptism of Alfred Russell Wild, the 5th child of Emmeline and John Benton Wild, which occurred on the 21st of April, 1839. The T-shaped church building was constructed from locally felled iron bark slabs, commonly used because

the timber is strong, durable and resistant to weathering, termites and fire.



Shingles for the roof were made from Forest She-oak (the tree for which the township of The Oaks is named) as the she-oak has a straight grain, is resistant to borers and easy to split. To secure the future of the church, on the 23rd of July 1874 John Henry Wild III, John Dunn and Reverend Samuel Fox jointly purchased the 20 acres of Crown Land on which St Matthews then stood - for the sum of 30 pounds Stirling. [Shown as Lot 51 on the Parish map on page 4. These men had strong links



Original St. Matthew's Church, c.1911
Photo – Mrs Barbara Kolodzey

to the local community. John Henry Wild III was the first born child of Emmeline and John Benton Wild and was born and raised at 'Vanderville'. Reverend Samuel Fox was the Anglican Minister for the Parish of Picton from 1870 to 1882. John Dunn was a well loved and respected local dairy farmer who lived with his family at their property 'Sunnyside'. *Continued page 4.....*



President's Report

Trish Hill

Happy 2026 everyone! I hope you all had a lovely break over holiday period and are refreshed ready to go.

Our congratulations to Colleen Haynes who was a nominee in Wollondilly's Australia Day Awards and congratulations to all of the worthy nominees.

During the holiday period Wollondilly Council conducted one of their school holiday programs with us at the Centre. It was a great success, both for us and the children and their parents and thanks to our volunteers for their support on the day.

My thanks to Michael Haynes for the admirable job of lighting up my computer corner space and the other odds and ends.

We have a new weekend duty roster for the next six months and thanks everyone for putting your hand up for this and hope you are not inconvenienced too much. Mart Rampe & Krista Ford popped out last week to deliver a certificate from the Estonian Ambassador to acknowledge our Estonian Exhibition and there is a feature further on with more details. Thanks Mart & Krista!

Just a reminder our bottle & can recycling is underway again

■



Family History & Local Archive Report

Sue Davis

Welcome to 2026! I wonder what conversations you had with visiting family to find out more about your family during the Christmas break. While visiting Young we were invited to visit



our family property that was sold last year after 106 years in our family. It is no longer an orchard but now a cattle property. The physical features are still there such as the undulating paddocks and meandering creek. The house my grandfather had built was a standard Returned Soldiers Settlement house that had been extended many times. The new owners have decided to restore the nature of the house and include some character features while making it a modern home. I think they are doing well as the then (1920) and now (2026) pictures below illustrate. They have also discovered some historical artefacts that they have generously set aside for the family to check over. Some items under the flooring were perfectly kept 1942 Sydney Morning Herald newspapers that my grandfather would have put there after he read them. They give some interesting reports of WW2. We are grateful to the new owners even though at first the changes were hard to accept.



Back at The Wollondilly Heritage Centre and Museum we have been at work in the Jim Whyte Room since 15 January and have hit the ground running with research requests. Our readers may be able to help: 1. The parents of Celia Mitchell who arrived on the *Lady Nugent* in 1838. 2. Convict, Daniel O'Toole, who worked for the Wilds. 3. Camden Go-carts of the 1960s.

When searching for records remember to try and locate at least two sources to compare for authenticity. This is even more important now that AI has entered our lives! Below are some sources you could use to check family history dates as not everyone was born or died in NSW! ■

<https://familyhistory.bdm.nsw.gov.au/>

<https://www.familyhistory.bdm.qld.gov.au/>

<https://www.bdm.vic.gov.au/search-your-family-history>

<https://bdm.cbs.sa.gov.au/bdmsaonline>

Happy researching !



Marketing & Treasurer's Report

Vicki Madeley & Team

We started the year with a vacation school holiday event on the 15th Jan which was very successfully sold out and the Education team made the day a great success. With help from volunteers in the kitchen we sold Devonshire teas, drinks and lots of shop sales. This event was in conjunction with the Wollondilly Shire Council Vacation Care Program and gave us great social media and advertising coverage and is an event we will look at doing again in the future.

The shop has new stock and the register is being regularly used. Thanks to Sonya who has supported me in a stocktake, we can see what sells and when we need to restock.

There is a need to have some price increases both in the shop and for our visitors. This is all part of keeping up with the costs of running the Museum. Price changes became effective from 1st January 2026 and signage has been altered.

Our social media continues to grow and is a great place to see what's happening at the Centre. I look forward to keeping you posted on the socials and seeing you in the shop. The website is looking refreshed, and Vanessa is doing a good job keeping up with changes even in her busy schedule of work and 3 very busy children.

Over the next few months, we will be installing and adding content to the touch screens, we will have them ready for the public to use soon, thanks to Jeff who is supporting the content addition with the touch screen company person- the other Bruce Brown ■

Looking forward to a great 2026!

Vicki, Vanessa and Jeff.



Schoolies Report

Bev Batros

For the first time our schoolies team has been involved in the Wollondilly Council holiday workshops. The scheme is free for school children, thanks to the sponsorship of Wests Group Macarthur, through their club grants. Our group is paid to run the activities. We set a maximum of 25 children aged from 5 until 15 and that was easily filled. The children took part in the usual 'hands on' activities such as washing, grading apples, using the egg cleaning machine (pictured), beating cream etc. We also sold morning tea and some people purchased from the shop, resulting in a profit of over \$400 for the two hours at the centre. Everything was very well organised by the council, with their representative taking care of bookings, marking children off etc. It was a great initia-



tive I am sure we will take part in again.

We have 8 weeks booked for 2026 so far, most of which are still using the older history curriculum. In preparation for the changeover, The Oaks has booked 3 weeks, including their kindergarten pupils, to ensure no one misses out.

After Australia Day our team will be hand delivering pamphlets to our local schools, explaining our new kindergarten program and how it incorporates the content of the syllabus, which will be mandatory in 2027. Emails will also be sent out. We hope many schools will continue to come with older grades as well, as our program can enhance so many other aspects of the curriculum ■



Acquisitions Report

Allen Seymour

We've started the year off with a donation of items that were used at the Post Office at The Oaks. There's a license from 1993, a 2005 finalist award plaque and scales for both letters and parcels, complete with weights. A couple of large ink pads and postmark stampers and well as some other stamps and a couple of credit card imprinters used to physically imprint the card onto paper before tap and go. Our thanks to Max Scarborough for these.

I'm still working on the Alp scanning, with about 2700 done so far. I've just completed some from the 1958 Royal Easter Show, this was a big year for the Alps as the Southern District exhibit which they worked on won first prize in the district exhibits. Some recent ones of the Anzac Day marches in the 50's were interesting as you can see some of the buildings that are no longer there. There are also some delightful ones showing Wally and Lorraine Alp standing in front of the Honeymoon Point Lookout sign in the Blue Mountains. There were also a number taken at various Estonian functions ■

The holding was then donated to the Church of England Property Trust of Sydney on the 21st of December 1884.

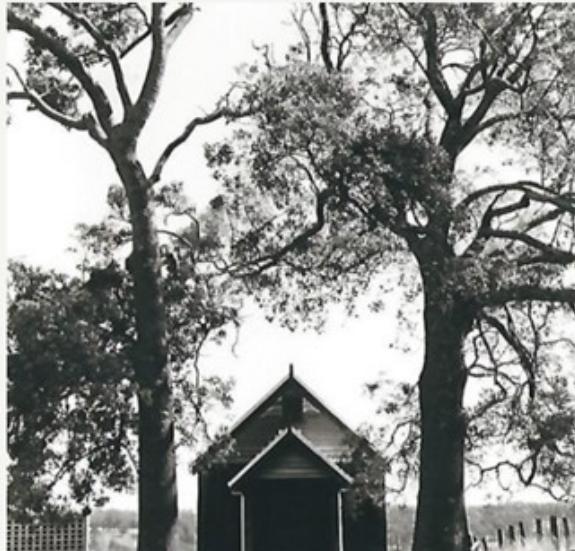
Since its establishment, the grounds of St. Matthew's have been 're-configured' several times – with fence lines and entrances moved to different parts of the property. Parts of the original 20 acres were leased for grazing and parcels have been sold through the years – with the site now encompassing a total area of just over 2 acres.

The image below right shows a previous fence line in place quite close to the church building – which has since been removed.

Several publications have been written about St. Matthew's and numerous documents and photographs are held in the collection of The Wollondilly Heritage Centre.

The two iconic kurrajong trees framing the church entrance are an important identifying and historical feature of the site and are an intrinsic part of the site's character. The trees feature in most photographs of St. Matthew's and were once part of an avenue of kurrajongs that lined the original carriage-way leading to the church entrance ■

Concluded next month....



Sources:

Collison, N. (2004). *The little slab church: St Matthew's church of England, The Oaks NSW*. The Oaks Historical Society.

den Hertog, S. (1987). *The History of The Oaks from the Records*. The Oaks Historical Society.

ESTONIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY RECOGNISES CITIZEN DIPLOMATS AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

Earlier last year the Estonian Ambassador, Jaan Reinholt visited us at the Centre to view our 'From Estonian to Thirlmere' exhibition and in November we were invited to attend Estonian House in Sydney for the presentation of a certificate acknowledging our contribution to the Estonian Culture through our exhibition. Mart Rampe attended on our behalf and last week both he and colleague Krista Ford, members of the Estonian community visited and presented us with the certificate. Quite an honour for The



Wollondilly Heritage Centre & Museum to be acknowledged along with many other people and organisations world wide.

The following are the details and significance of the event from the Ambassador. *On 26th November – Citizen's Day – the Ministry of Foreign Affairs recognises citizen diplomats and civil society organisations that have, through long-term and outstanding voluntary contribution, helped preserve the Estonian language, culture and spirit, or have promoted Estonia's business environment, digital society and business culture, thereby contributing to Estonia's good reputation in their country of residence. This year, the ministry will present 34 letters of appreciation.*

Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna noted that celebrating Citizen's Day and keeping it alive is very important for Estonia. "Citizen's Day reminds us that Estonia's strength lies in our people – knowledgeable, caring and active citizens who carry our values forward both at home and abroad. Today, we recognise those whose actions and dedication have enriched our society and repre-

sented Estonia with dignity around the world. Their example inspires us all to protect and develop a free and open Estonia," the Minister said.

Special Ambassador for Global Estonians Marin Mõttus added: "Citizen diplomacy begins with small conversations and big dreams – every time we, Estonians around the world, talk about our culture and share our story, a new bridge is built between Estonia and the world. These bridges are not made of stone, but of trust, creativity and human warmth."

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs thanks and recognises the following individuals and civil society organisations:

*Tiina Wiker, Norway / Karin Margit Samel, Norway
Mardilaat (Martin Markkinat), Finland / Mart Tarmak, Estonia / William Arthur Vesilind, USA / Jüri Lepisk, Sweden / Kadri Thalström, Sweden / Jaan Jakobson, Sweden / Heinar Valk, Sweden / Lia Hess, Canada / Kristel Pappel, Estonia / Harry Liivrand, Estonia / European Estonian Choir / Hannes Heinpalu, United Arab Emirates / Oliver Lant, United Arab Emirates / Dr Yves B. Partschefeld, Switzerland / Mihkel Mäekalle, United Kingdom / Heidi Solba and NGO Let's Do It World / Nora Sööt, Estonia /*

*ESTO 2025 Executive Committee and Organising Teams / Irina Miller, Israel / Vassilis C. Karamitsanis, Greece / Women's Voluntary Defence League (Naiskodukaitse) Brussels Branch / **Wollondilly Heritage Centre and Museum, Australia** / Martin Kurvits, Australia / Hilja Toom, Australia / Eduard Voltshkov, Ireland / Tiina Muru, Ireland / Silvi O'Brien Sindonen, Ireland / Andres Eerits, Luxembourg / Mairis Minka, Luxembourg / Jeffers Engelhardt, USA / Stefano Alberico, Italy / Newspaper Eesti Rada, Germany.*

On 26 November 1918, the Estonian Provisional Parliament (Maanõukogu) issued a decree on Estonian citizenship. Today, the aim of Citizen's Day is to raise awareness of citizenship, strengthen civic pride and draw attention to our sense of civic duty.

Jaan Reinholt, Estonian Ambassador ■



Pictured top: Jaan Reinholt the Ambassador presenting Mart with the certificate.

Centre & bottom Mart presenting us with the certificate.

VALE MALLE JUSKE

We would like to mark the passing of a lady who was very supportive of our society in the days when we were installing the exhibition **FROM ESTONIA TO THIRLMERE** and share something of her life with you.



Linda, Malle and Albert Karp c 1944 in Geislingen

Malle Karp was born in the lovely old merchant city of Tallin at a time when Stalin in Russia and Hitler in Germany were fighting over the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. In 1940 the country was occupied by Russian forces and Estonian political leaders were arrested and sent to Siberia. In 1939 Malle's parents, Linda and Malle escaped to the rural home of Linda's mother Lisa when their own home was burnt down. Albert joined the Air Force Auxiliary and moved to another part of the country. When Russia invaded again in 1944 Linda and Malle left on a convoy to Latvia and then by a German ship to Frankfurt. Once again, they were threatened by Russian troops but found safety in Bavaria where Albert eventually joined them after the war. He had suffered while he was away and needed nursing.

Responsibility for those who lost their countries and homes was divided between the Allies; Russia, USA and UK. In Germany the town of Geislingen was cleared of people for the American camp and the Karp family shared a house with several other families. They were given rations for food and clothing and schooling was soon organised for the children and cultural activities encouraged. Malle joined the dancing school and Linda, who was a skilled seamstress, managed to make alterations to her National Costume. She hired a sewing machine. The original skirt was made of woven stripes and Linda found coloured wool in the correct colours and sewed it strip by strip onto old cotton on the sewing machine.

The family was accepted into Australia and arrived by boat to Fremantle where they were met by the Estonian Relief Committee and sailed to Melbourne and then boarded a train to Sydney. They were sponsored by the church, so Albert was not

required to work for a two-year bond, and they settled in Dover heights. Albert found work with Dunlop Rubber and Malle attended Double Bay Primary and then to Dover Heights school. In 1952 she attended Macquarie Fields Secretarial School and got a job with Lysaght Bros. and then in the office at Hardy's Rubber. She resumed her interest in folk dancing and met Helmut Juske and they married in 1955. Helmut worked for Michael Lair Linoleum and moved to Hardy's Rubber where Malle worked.

Helmut applied for Crown Land in Thirlmere where other Estonians lived and in 1956 he was granted 12 ½ acres on Michel Road, Thirlmere, (next to an old man from Burragorang Valley called Mr. Clive Catt). The land value was £230 and rental of £5/15/- weekly. They came out at weekends to clear the land and took courses in Poultry Breeding at Ultimo Tech. In 1957 they made the move to Thirlmere and built brooder and poultry sheds and their first day old chickens were delivered in



1959. Helmut delivered eggs in his van to local businesses twice a week. Their daughters, Helli and Valli, were born in 1961 and 1962. When the Egg Board imposed egg quotas Helmut decided to convert to intensive egg production in battery cages. He became a Director of the Egg Board and the Thirlmere Farmers Group, Kungla and was involved with Australian United Farms, the Estonian Choir and "Koit" the Estonian Society. They built a home on Michel Road from a plan Malle saw in the newspaper. In 1982 they sold the business and then the house in 1987 ■

NB: I remember Malle from the above photo when she donated the egg washing machine and showed us how to use it! Also from the National Costume which Malle loaned for the exhibition!

Doreen Lyon

WEEKEND ROSTER

FEBRUARY

Marlane, Cheryl /Pam	Sunday, 1
Vicki & Linda	Saturday, 7
Bev & David	Sunday, 8
Tony & Kevin	Saturday, 14
Margaret & Pam	Sunday, 15
Sonya & Pam Stephenson	Saturday, 21
Sue & Judy	Sunday, 22
Working Bee	Saturday, 28

SUPPER



ROSTER

February Bring a plate



Reminders, News & Info

General Meeting

Monday, 2nd February 2026 at
7pm



Guest Speakers Stuart & Ally Dench-Where
Have the Bees Gone?

Meeting followed by supper/ All welcome



A vibrant family friendly multicultural festival will celebrate the diverse cultures of our region while immersing residents in the sights, sounds and flavours of the world.

With live performances, dance, music & global cuisine, Cultural Connections invites community members of all ages and backgrounds to come together, explore new cultures and connect with the heart of our community.



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 our General Meeting on February 2nd 2026 followed by the March 2nd 2026 meeting. Our patrons are Judith Hannan MP and Ben Taylor CEO, WSC. 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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