

The Oaks Historical Society Inc

Est. May 1979

The Oaks Historical Society Inc.
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Newsletter

APRIL 2026

Wollondilly Heritage Centre & Museum

EMPIRE DAY 1905 - TROOPER PHILLIP REILLY

by Trish Hill

Before Anzac Day became the nation's key day of remembrance, Australians marked Empire Day to celebrate loyalty to the British Empire. It was widely observed in schools with ceremonies, flag raising and patriotic activities.

After the First World War, the heavy losses at Gallipoli and beyond reshaped national identity. Anzac Day, first commemorated in 1916, gradually took precedence as a more personal and solemn day of remembrance focused on sacrifice and national service rather than imperial pride. Over time, observance of Empire Day declined (later evolving into Commonwealth Day) while Anzac Day became Australia's principal commemoration of war and national identity.

A recent local history enquiry had us take a closer look at our own War Memorial in memory of Trooper Phillip Reilly and we discovered the following article which confirmed the memorial is unchanged since it was erected in 1905. This is an extract from the front page of the Camden News of Thursday 1 June 1905.

Empire Day, the 24th May, 1905 must be distinguished in our local centre, the main function being the unveiling of the memorial erected to the memory of the late Trooper Philip

Reilly of the N.S.W. Mounted Rifles, at the corner of the public school ground, facing the main road of The Oaks leading to Camden and thence to the Metropolis. The monument is a fitting testimony, and by sanction has been erected on The Oaks Public School grounds. Preparatory to the official ceremony the beautiful monument was inspected and received the approbation of all residents. In detail it may be mentioned the monument consists of a very large bottom stone box base with two marble bases and one marble dye, with beautifully moulded caps comprising passion flowers discreetly carved on the face together with a large ornamental pattern cross surmounting all. The monument contains also emblems—crossed rifles with helmet—discreetly and wisely portrayed in solid

marble. Thus is the memorial so erected. The monument is enclosed with octagon top kerbing with iron railings on the top thereof, the enclosure being neatly and discreetly paved over a smooth surface. The marble monument has the following wording engraved on it: — Erected to the memory of Trooper Philip Reilly, of The Oaks Troop, N S W. Mounted Rifles, son of Philip and Rose Reilly, of Burragarang, who died at Bloemfontein, South Africa, in the service of his Queen and Empire. 30th April, 1900, aged 23 years. Dulce et Decorum est pro patria mori. (Which translates to 'it is sweet and fitting to die for one's country')

Preparatory to the unveiling ceremony, the committee of gentlemen who took so prominent a part in this national movement dined together at The Oaks hotel, at which were noticed the Hon G. W. Fuller, M.H.R, and Mrs. Fuller, the Hon. Henry Willis, M.H.R, Mr F W A. Downes, M.P. Camden-, Messrs A V Moore, J P., John Lakeman, J.P. James E. Moore, C Dunn, M. Devitt, F. C. Willis, A. L. Bennett and other gentlemen. Mr. Wigram, the chief Government architect, was also present. No speeches were delivered at the luncheon table. The committee of gentlemen formulating this impressive occurrence were — Messrs E P. Moore, hon. sec., James Bensley hon. Treas., Mr M Devitt president, A. L. Bennett, G.M. M. Onslow, A. V Moore and J. O. Moore. The cost of the monument would not be less than £70. The gentlemen and ladies then adjourned to the unveiling ceremony.

There was a very large number of ladies and gentlemen and joined by a considerable gathering of the community, Mr. and Mrs. Reilly, Messrs Edward and William and Miss Reilly, Mr. and Mrs Robert Reilly, Mrs Patrick Reilly, (relatives of the deceased), Mrs. and Miss Macarthur Onslow, were present during the proceedings taking their seats within the rails. of the monument ■

In 2026 as we pause to remember our Anzac's, may we carry forward not only the stories of courage and sacrifice but also a renewed commitment to the values they upheld—service, resilience and community. In honouring their legacy, we ensure that their spirit endures, not just in remembrance but in the way we live and support one another every day.





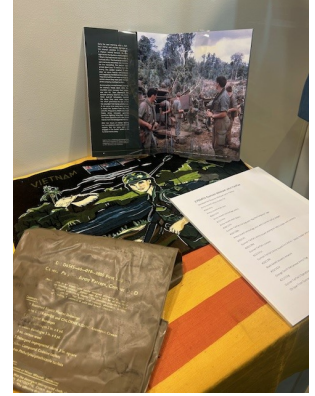
President's Report

This past month we've completed the Vietnam feature to our Drill Hall exhibition and a collection of Vietnam stories will be added to the folder alongside the cabinet. Extracts of these stories can be found on page 5. The touchscreens for several of our exhibition spaces are being prepared for installation and Jeff has arranged a visit with the installer this week for planning and locations.

Our Schools Education Program is underway with a couple of visits and a fairly full calendar for next term.

We had another busy working bee last weekend and thanks to our fantastic volunteers for their efforts. We have also welcomed some new volunteers. Lots of cleaning and gardening,

getting rid of pest weeds and preparing the car park for a new and exciting facelift ■



Marketing & Treasurer's Report

We welcomed several group visits this month, one was a large bus group from Cumberland City Council and hosted a meeting of The Burra Burra Indigenous Historical Research Group (pictured). Both groups enjoyed their visit and were able to use our facilities to enhance their meetings. The volunteers who helped out with bus groups worked hard and delivered another wonderful morning tea and historical experience at the Museum.

We have reached 101 followers on Instagram, and we have 2100 followers on Facebook. Our social media reach is expanding all the time with positive comments and many likes. Our website is also well used by the public to gain information about the Museum so the public can plan their visits and make bookings. The



long-awaited touch screens are due for installation in the next few weeks and thanks to Jeff Brown who has been getting the content ready to upload onto the screens. It's a very large job so I am grateful to him for helping to get this part of the installation completed.

We have done some marketing to remind groups to book their visits, thanks to Sonya who has shared the contacting of the various organisations and reaching out to new ones. If you know of a group that would like to visit, please share our information to promote the Museum. Go to www.wollondillymuseum.org.au for booking information or give us a call.

With Easter and Anzac Day just around the corner we will have plenty of gifts in the shop ■



Acquisitions Report

Allen Seymour

Fairly quiet on the acquisitions front, a pen and a key ring made from bullet cases and a mortar shell from Vietnam from Mick Fairfax for our Vietnam exhibition.

I'm still going through the scanning of the Alp collection. About 3500 done so far. There have been some interesting ones lately. A number taken at a Legacy Ball at which a woman was given a framed certificate declaring her a Legacy Torchbearer. There was also a lot of the opening of the Picton Ambulance station. This was opened by the then Governor of NSW, Lieutenant General Sir John Northcott. He was the first Australian born NSW Governor and had a

distinguished military career before serving as Governor from 1946 to 1957. He unveiled a plaque on the front of the building and attended a luncheon at the Bowling club. I don't know what year this occurred as there is not a photo of the plaque. Does it still exist? It seems like it was a big occasion, as there is a huge crowd there and school students were bussed in from all over the district. There are two ambulances visible, one is a 1946-48 Buick, but the other is hidden by the crowd. Another event was a Masonic picnic at Nepean Dam, which included a tour of the dam ■



Family History & Local Archive Report

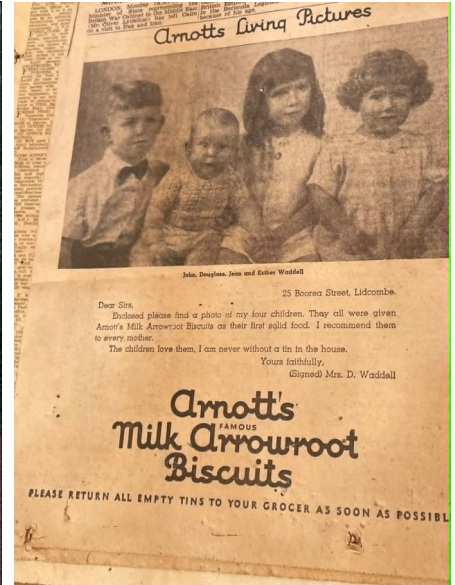
We have been busy continuing with organising and cataloguing files in the Wollondilly Archives, Liz Vincent Collection, library, newspapers and family history. The team are doing a great job. We are always ready to help anyone access our resources to help them with their research whether it is local or Family History. Our most recent request was about the Trooper Phillip Reilly memorial on the corner of Burragorang Street and John Street, The Oaks, adjacent to The Oaks Public School. We were able to use our own resources and as well as verify information using Trove and military resources.

I like to continue to polish up on my skills in helping people with Family History. Resources that can be used in Family History are wide reaching and not just a simple family tree. This cartoon from the Dubbo Historical Society Facebook page is a simple reminder of questions often asked to Family Historians.....



This month I am going to focus on “Want to go to the cemetery?” as this is what happened to me recently when a friend invited me to a *Heritage Tour at Rookwood Cemetery* organised by the *Friends of Rookwood* group. At Wollondilly Heritage Centre and Museum, Trish and I have conducted several cemetery tours of St Matthews Graveyard, Old Oaks, and St Aloysius Cemetery at The Oaks. We have informed visitors of the various lives of pioneers buried in these facilities. Our little cemeteries are mere specks in size compared to Rookwood which is so big it has its own postcode. I could fill several volumes with the interesting information I learned from our guide. I think most of us would have an ancestor buried somewhere at Rookwood cemetery. However, I think

we all have a connection to one grave I will highlight this month. He is William Arnott who started the Arnott Biscuit Company. I think we have probably eaten an Arnott’s biscuit some time in our lives.



The grave (pictured above) has been in place since 1901 and is in good repair. William Arnott was born in Scotland and came to Australia with his family in 1847 as assisted migrants. He started a baking company in Morpeth in 1848 and gradually expanded his business to Sydney. In the early days a favourite was the Milk Arrowroot but is now a certain chocolate biscuit starting with T!

I found more information in a Sydney Morning Herald that had been buried under the floor at my grandparents’ home since 1942. A mother had written to William Arnott Junior on how the milk arrowroot biscuit was essential in her children’s development. (as pictured above) You never know where you will find information for Family History stories!

I highly recommend booking in for a Heritage Tour of Rookwood Cemetery. You can book in to focus on different themes for whatever might interest you. If you know an ancestor is buried at Rookwood and you would like to find them then you can ring the Friends of Rookwood and they can help you locate them. Our assistant guide has an ancestor buried at St Matthews at Old Oaks and we were able to have a chat about them!!

Happy researching, Sue Davis Local Archives and Family History.



Schoolies Report

Bev Batros

Despite our initial concerns we seem to be very well booked for 2026. Eighteen weeks are filled, with only three of them, the new Kindergarten program. The new syllabus becomes compulsory in 2027 and we are ready. On school staff development days in January our volunteers delivered our new pamphlet to schools. Thanks to Sue Davis it looks very professional and welcoming. On our planning day in March we consolidated our new Kindergarten program, revised our first aid, reviewed our Risk Assessment and discussed teaching younger students.

And so they came, our first school, a delightful group of Kindergarten pupils from Narellan Vale, who were a credit to their teachers and parents. After only being at school for about six weeks it was great to see how settled they were. All the



volunteers felt both days went really well as the children were attentive and got involved in all activities. If our other Kindergarten visits are as good as these, we will be very pleased.

Of course there were a few funny moments, like when a child lost his tooth in one of our pieces of apple. Fortunately, it was retrieved as evidence for the tooth fairy. In the mine I told them my dad was a miner and a child asked if the model in the mine was my dad. I would be delighted if my dad was immortalised at the centre but alas no! In the cottage when asked what they kept in their fridge, one quick reply was wine, while another said her dad wouldn't be last in the hip bath because he was dirty but because he was hairy! Out of the mouth of babes! ■

WOLLONDILLY HERITAGE CENTRE VOLUNTEER PROFILE - BEV BATROS

I was born in 1946 in Camden at Sunshine Private Hospital which was opposite Coles but has now been demolished. My parents were Pearl and Harry Cuthel and at that stage I had an older brother Rob and in years to come, a younger brother Geoffrey. I began life at a dairy farm at Werombi which my parents owned having been passed down through generations since 1854. We lived in an old house about a kilometre from St Barnabus Church. There was no electricity, tin walls, a fuel stove for cooking and no running water. The house had 3 bedrooms and 2 verandahs. Outside there were several fruit trees, mostly peaches, a packing shed for apples and oranges, an outside toilet and about 50 meters away, the dairy. Our family lived in this house until they built a new one on the hill nearby. I went to Werombi Primary School at the age of 6. It was a small school and closed in 1958 due to lack of numbers and I began at Camden High School in 1958. I received a scholarship to Wollongong Teachers College and was appointed 2 years later to Miller Primary

School in Green Valley. In 1970 I married David Batros who also taught at Miller. The reason I volunteer at The Heritage Centre is I took my class to the schools program and enjoyed it so much, I resolved I would return as a volunteer, which I did. At the end of 2014 I joined the Schools Program, initially to be a reserve for Glenis Pryde in the schoolroom but was quickly encouraged to take over the coordinators role from Jan Noakes, which I did in 2015. My role is to contact all schools attending with information about the excursion. I also coordinate all volunteers, replacing those who will be absent. I purchase our requirements and am part of a team who set up some of the day's activities. After a few years I became one of the Vice Presidents and then became part of most activities at The Centre. David and I also do the weekend roster. At the 2021 Wollondilly Council Australia Day Awards the Schools Program was awarded Local Community Group of the year, a tribute to all the Schoolies Volunteers ■



Pictured top Bev with Jan Noakes and below with husband David

THROUGH THEIR EYES—MEMORIES OF VIETNAM

PRIVATE ALLAN DAVID AUSTIN

I grew up at Oakdale and joined the army on the 6th December 1967 at the age of 18 years. I did my recruitment at Kapooka, Wagga for 3 months and then asked to join the infantry. I did my infantry training at Ingleburn Infantry Training Centre for the next 3 months. At the end of this time I was sent to the 5th Royal Australian Infantry Battalion at Holsworthy but my best mate who I met at Kapooka was sent to Reinforcement Platoon at Ingleburn ready to be deployed to Vietnam. His name was Paul Edwards and we played for Oakdale Workers Reserve Grade football in 1968 and we won the grand final after Paul left for Vietnam. My training continued with 5RAR until February 1969 when our Battalion was deployed to Vietnam taking over from 1RAR. This was probably the hardest 13 months of my life. Lost 8 good mates and many others wounded. I saw my mate Paul over there when he came to visit me and 3 weeks later he was killed in a bunker system. Late in my tour I was promoted to Lance Corporal and transferred from support section to 4 section 8 Platoon Charlie Company where I took charge of that section as we lost our Corporal through illness. I remained in that position until we returned to Australia in March 1970. I was transferred to 3RTB Training Battalion at Singleton where I trained and an old friend from The Oaks, Bartley Chesham was there and watched him march out 3 months later. I left the army on 6th December 1970 after completing 3 years. I regretted that decision and wished I had stayed with my Battalion but I commenced work at Nattai Bulli Mine a few months later ■



PRIVATE MICHAEL (MICK) FAIRFAX

I enlisted on 1.10.1969 and the term of service was for 2 years until 1.10.1971. From day one training for recruits at 2 Recruit Training Battalion (2RTB) at Puckapunyal, Victoria began at a fairly intense rate and was hard to handle for about the first month. 2RTB was like a prison with rules to be obeyed without question. This was to instil in us a very strong sense of discipline. Discipline and obeying orders was of paramount importance. Doing duties 'according to the book' gave most of us a sense of pride in ourselves and the Units we served in. I want to make things very clear, National Servicemen like me didn't have to go to Vietnam. We had to volunteer. I quote—*"The National Servicemen had to specifically volunteer for overseas service by signing a declaration during Corps training"*— Brigadier Colin Khan, DSO, 'Vietnam: The Australian War' by Peter Ham. I did volunteer to serve in Vietnam. There were financial benefits like War Service Loans.

My proper job was in HQ Battery Tech Storeman. I trained up in Lavarack Barracks, Townsville. We all had to do jungle training in Canungra, Qld. My regiment was 12 Field, HQ Battery, Royal Australian Artillery. Our motto was 'I always go where right and glory lead'. I was at Nui Dat Base— the main Australian and New Zealand Military Base in South Vietnam. We were to clean out the Viet Cong and Northern Vietnamese. They were really good fighters. Part of my job as a Tech Storeman was to go into the city of Ba Ria daily with dirty laundry from the Base—shirts, trousers, sheets etc. There wasn't enough water on Base. We washed our 'smalls' in the showers. Soldiers were not normally allowed out of Base and I had to carry my weapon. I'd trade cartons of Benson & Hedges cigarettes with the locals. As they were like currency. The kids would see me and call out '*Uc da loi*' which meant big red rat. Our vehicles all had a big red kangaroo on them as our logo and the Vietnamese hadn't seen a kangaroo and thought it was a rat. My job was also to re-supply Infantry soldiers. Operation Overlord had a convoy of trucks with ammunition & food. Operations were still going on overhead while we were working. We lost 7 or 9 of our young Aussies. They were hit in their armoured personnel carrier by a VC rocket propelled grenade., very sad. Overall, Vietnam was an almost positive experience and made me grow up and I had good welfare follow up by Veterans Affairs ■



THE LAST FLIGHT OF THE DRAGON

The month of April is an anniversary of the disappearance of an RAAF aircraft during WW11 in rugged country and is one of Australia's greatest unsolved aviation mysteries.

If wreckage of the De Havilland Dragon A34-47 could be found, the families of the three Australians and two Americans on board would be able to lay their loved ones to rest at last. The last flight of the Dragon was April 17, 1943 when it took off just before 10am from Sydney's Mascot Airport bound for Wagga. In the pilots seat was Sergeant Douglas Doyle from Wagga who was described as a careful and mature pilot. Sergeant Frank Doyle, 19 (no relation) also of Wagga was the co-pilot. The co-pilot, . He was the youngest of five children and

an apprentice watchmaker before he joined the RAAF. Flying Officer Tim Lester was a passenger, headed home on leave to Mansfield, Victoria. Two United States marines, Lieutenant CJ Unstead and Lieutenant MA Teague were on their way to report to their Melbourne Headquarters.

Aircraft historian Bob Piper of Canberra said the aircraft took off in the north-west lane which was slightly unusual. However it was assumed Sgt Doyle was treating the Americans to a little sightseeing before heading south-west. The usual flight path was to follow the road to Goulburn and then to Wagga. But taking the more direct route over 'tiger country' near Burratorang was also acceptable, given the favourable weather conditions.

An air sentry reported sighting the Dragon at 10.07am as it passed over the Sydney suburb of Chester Hill. At 10.25am the postmistress in the village of Werombi, who was also a spotter for the Volunteer Air Observer Corp, recorded the aircraft flying overhead. Central Burratorang resident, Hilda Donohoe reported having heard an aircraft with an irregular engine noise at about 1pm. She was putting the child she was baby sitting to bed when she saw through the bedroom window what she described as a cloud of dust come up from a mountain on the eastern side of the valley.

When the aircraft was reported overdue a search was instigated. But it was delayed for two days because of a clerical error which gave the impression that the plane had been sighted near Goulburn. Three aerial searches from April 19-20 failed to

find anything because of bad weather. The Sydney Morning Herald reported on April 29, 1943: "Airmen describe the area where the search was made as 'tiger country.' Because of its ruggedness, plane crews who have sought the lost aircraft from the air doubt whether they would be able to detect it in the dense undergrowth." Police then asked Mr Laurie Carlon to lead a ground search because of his extensive knowledge of the area. Mr Carlon was 23 at the time and had lived all his life in the valley and knew the area well. "That was a day out for us to try to climb the mountain." The search party, which included resident Ron Haynes, RAAF personnel and a doctor, set off 11 days after the crash.

On April 28, 1943 The Herald reported 'As the mist lifted this morning the party, which was fully equipped with first aid rescue apparatus and prepared to spend the whole night in the mountains. Mr Carlon said was one of the most arduous and dangerous climbs he ever made. Several members felt the strain of the climb and the Doctor ordered one to return. The search was not resumed the next day probably due to the pressures of war.

Most of what is known comes from the Court of Inquiry which was held in the weeks following the plane's disappearance. According to documents tendered to the court, the pilot Sgt Doyle had noted that the plane had engine vibrations the day before

the disappearance. Sgt Doyle had requested both magnetos, the airscrews and certain wires be checked but everything was found to be in working order. The aircraft wasn't carrying parachutes, nor was it capable of maintaining altitude on one engine while fully loaded. Its unclear whether a cross country kit or emergency rations were on board. In summing up the court mentioned there had been 'many instances of airscrew bolt failure of this type on this type of aircraft.' The court concluded "From the personal experience of the court, the nature of this country is such that it is improbable that the aircraft will be discovered."

In 2026, eighty three years on the whereabouts of the Dragon Aircraft and crewmen remains unknown ■

Source: Illawarra Mercury Weekender June 1999



WEEKEND ROSTER

APRIL

Tony & Kevin	Saturday, 4
Viv & Bob & Kevin	Sunday, 5
Bev & David	Monday, 6
Margaret & Pam	Saturday, 11
Vicki & Linda	Sunday, 12
Colleen & Kathy	Saturday, 18
Sue & Judy	Sunday, 19
Anzac Day (Working Bee)	Saturday, 25
Trish & Kevin	Sunday, 26th

SUPPER



ROSTER

April

Bring a plate

Reminders, News & Info



General Meeting

Monday, 6th April 2026 at 7pm

Guest Speaker

ROWAN MOORE

Talking about Historic Weather



Meeting followed by supper/ All welcome



Australian Plants Society Macarthur

Out and About

Wednesday 15 April 2026

Come and Join us as we spend a morning exploring Wooglemai Sheehys Creek Road Oakdale 2570

On a secluded bush block above the Nattai National Park, there is a fascinating place with a long history of the culture of the people and environment of the Blue Mountains. This is Wooglemai. Today it informs young people of the natural environment and of its deeper history of First Nations and of the European discovery of the area by Francis Barrallier in 1802.

Arrive at 10am for a cuppa.

Following Morning tea there will be a short walk to the site of Barrallier's expedition and to the chapel which overlooks the Nattai Valley.

Attendees are free to explore and enjoy the surrounds.

RSVP: Wed 1 April 2026

Secretary: Carol Ann Meiklejohn

Phone: cmeiklej@gmail.com



Burraborang Reunion

Sunday 12th April

The Wollondilly Heritage Centre & Museum from 10am

All welcome

Enquiries Trish 0432 689034

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 April 6th 2026 followed by the AGM May 4th 2026 meeting. Our patrons are Judith Hannan MP and Ben Taylor CEO, Wollondilly Shire Council. 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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