

The Oaks Historical Society Inc

Est. May 1979

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Newsletter

JUNE 2026

Wollondilly Heritage Centre & Museum

FROM LITTLE THINGS, BIG THINGS GROW

The History of the Robin Davies Wollondilly Community Nursery by Sonya Male



The Robin Davies Wollondilly Community Nursery has been part of the Wollondilly community for 30 years and continues to expand as a significant example of community-led environmental stewardship in the Wollondilly region. The nursery supplies plants, functions as an education hub and provides a meeting space for many local organisations - **but how did it all begin?**

Picton local, Mr Fred Pullman was passionate about the restoration of Stonequarry Creek. Fred researched the vegetation of the creek and its surrounds and concluded that planting White Gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis*) would be beneficial. In the early 1990's, he sourced seeds from the State Forestry nursery and planted them along the creek.

In 1995 the Council commenced the *Healing Stonequarry Creek* programme – building on significant interest from the community. (*Healing Stonequarry Creek* is a long-term initiative by Wollondilly Shire Council to rehabilitate Picton's Stonequarry Creek – with a focus on flood mitigation, native replanting, and invasive weed removal.) Works commenced around the Viaduct to restore biodiversity and improve resilience against storm damage with an emphasis on stabilising the creek banks. (Whilst works have now moved downstream, the historic Viaduct was a highly recognisable starting point – being on the State heritage register for the signifi-

cance of its early engineering. It is the oldest existing sandstone railway viaduct still in use in NSW.)

Healing Stonequarry Creek along with other land and bush care projects in Wollondilly needed a source of suitable and reliable plant stock. A community nursery was proposed as a solution and planning and development commenced. Council received funding for *Healing Stonequarry Creek* from the Hawkesbury Nepean Catchment Management Trust and \$6,000 of this funding was allocated for the establishment of a community nursery. Deborah Knoke was head of the *Healing* project and was in charge of the nursery's creation. From three potential locations, in 1996 it was decided that the best site would be a disused tennis court in the grounds of Victoria Park (Crown land under the custody and control of the Council). There was a very small club house on the site but the location was easily accessible, had parking available and was in a highly visible spot for passing traffic. The situation close to the Viaduct meant that the regeneration works being carried out there could be a showcase for bush regeneration and what could be achieved from environmental initiatives. The funding was used to build a potting and growing area, a poly tunnel and an irrigation system. The community embraced the project with the donation of pots from all over the shire – and the Wollondilly Community Nursery was born. Fred Pullman was the very first volunteer.



The Viaduct. At left in 1872 (State Archives), at right in 2019 (Mark Franks via Facebook)



President's Report

Trish Hill

It has been another productive month for our Museum. We had a wonderful turnout for our 'Oakdale Street Names' book launch early in May for our National Trust Heritage Festival Event entitled 'Changes'. Thanks to Oakdale School for their support and the amazing artworks of Oakdale streets and houses by the students. The book is now available for purchase in our Museum shop.

During the month we hosted a LibraryThing workshop at the Museum, attended by representatives from both Picton and Camden Historical Societies. The workshop provided valuable insight into this database and discussion on the use of LibraryThing cataloguing platform and sharing of ideas, best practices and collection management and it was an excellent opportunity to strengthen connections. Thanks to Marlane Fairfax for coordinating this. We also attended the 'Macarthur Together' inaugural event held at Mt Annan Plant Bank. This event was hosted jointly by Wollondilly, Camden and Campbelltown Councils and the community event provided an opportunity to showcase the Museum's activities, engage with like organisations from across the region to strengthen collaboration and promote awareness of our museum.

Thanks to our volunteers who attended the working bee this



weekend. The team achieved an impressive amount of work, including planting out the garden along the front car park area, spreading mulch, office tasks as well as tackling a substantial list of maintenance throughout the Museum. The dedication and hard work of our volunteers

make a significant difference to the presentation and operation of the Museum.

A reminder to members who have not yet renewed their membership, the bank details can be found on the back page for direct credit. Your membership support assists the ongoing success of the Museum and enables us to continue our programs, exhibitions, and preservation work. To those members who have already renewed, thank you for your continued commitment and support—it is greatly appreciated.

Thanks everyone for your contribution to the Museum ■



Schoolies Report

Bev Batros

Last week we were delighted to welcome 55 Kindergarten pupils from The Oaks. Despite being a large group, we found the children interested and attentive, answering questions well. It is always lovely to have local children who recognise our volunteers.

This was the second time for us to use our revised program to fit in with the new HSIE Syllabus which becomes mandatory in 2027. Many of our activities did not require much change but there is a greater emphasis on visual aids such as in the laundry they now have a modern iron to make comparisons with the old iron. The mining session has undertaken the most change with the focus now on a dad's life 80 to 100 years ago. Some time is spent discussing life without a car and the inevitable need for a blacksmith's shop. The concept of a 'shop' with horses in it is quite unheard of for the children and it is not surprising that no-one so far has guessed what the trough is in the middle of the area. The size and shape of the horseshoes always causes some interest, especially the heart shaped one. When asked about what the

traps made by the blacksmith might be for, inevitably rats and mice get suggested, as well as bears and even a horse! Rarely rabbits. Bruce tells them how he trapped rabbits and sold them to the local butcher to get his pocket money. Eating a rabbit is not part of most children's knowledge. Following the theme of a dad's life 80 to 100 years ago the children then visit the mine.

In the indigenous art activity Pam explains that whilst the Aboriginal people had no paper, pencils or books they could still write stories. They see stories written and illustrated by Aboriginal children today which their teacher could not read because they were written in the children's language. On their boomerangs they paint a story using the signs and symbols.

Our busy term continues with all 11 weeks filled with a range of ages, including a home school group ■



Family History & Local Archives Report

Sue Davis

"Connecting Threads" is the theme chosen for our next exhibition. It will focus on fashion and how women of Wollondilly have "made do" in their lives. We are currently researching stories that might be included and have located some wonderful artefacts in our collection that will fit very well. Some stories come from the mouths of women such as in their diaries that they frequently kept.

Diaries or Journals can be immense sources of information. They can help with both family and local history. In the Women's Column of the Sydney Morning Herald in July, 1923, Maude B. Jacob outlined that..." The diary habit is a splendid mental exercise. Its advantages are indeed numerous. Good conversationalists are often diary writers... The diary practice also impresses on the mind many a beautiful scene, many a valuable discourse, many a wise maxim, and many an interesting story of incident, to say nothing of its record of music, books, pictures, and its gleanings from newspapers, magazines... All these are lost, to some extent, if not recorded. When recorded they are, as a rule keenly remembered. They can also be reconsidered on the written page. Incidentally, diary keeping helps to promote method and accuracy, with wiser arrangement of time. A disposition to bear in mind and keep appointments; a tendency to good and regular letter-writing. Its advantages are many undoubtedly."

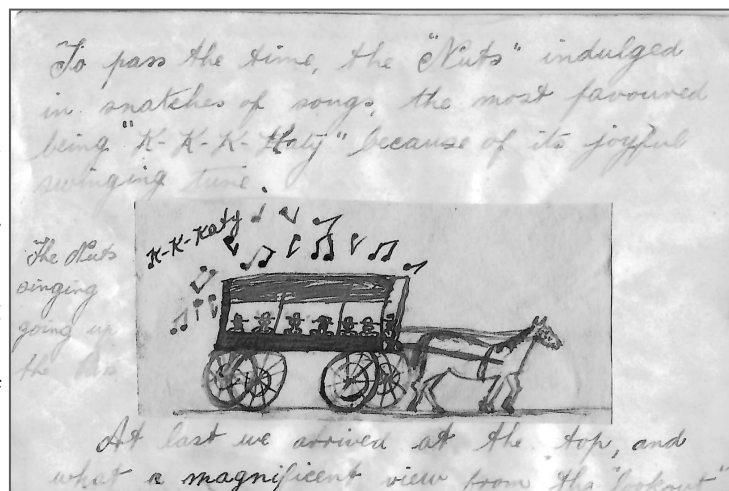
In our collection, Volunteer, Doreen Lyon, found a diary written by Rita Maxwell (nee Garlick) in 1919. It is about a holiday in Thirroul which she calls, "The Eight Nuts Special Holiday at Thirroul" The writing tells of a very happy time of walks, sight-seeing, trips to the beach and enjoying each other's company. It includes small illustrations of some of the activities (see one attached). It must have been a time of great rejoicing after the tension of World War One. Personal diaries offer a unique first-hand perspective of significant moments in history in a way

that official historical records rarely can.

As reported on 2022, in this column, I have several family diaries that I use for Family History research but also for enjoyment to remember the writer. One diary was compiled by my grandmother when she was 81. She was such a busy lady with family, Red Cross, Church, Senior Citizens Club and the RSL. When I read it I feel a reconnection with her and remember her so well. I have her husband's diary from 1917 when he was serving in the Australian Army in France. He was my grandfather and was said to have had a great sense of humour. Even though recollections of the war are horrible, there

are still moments when his sense of humour is portrayed in his diary. Their son, my father, left the diaries he had written from 1949 to 2011 to me when he passed away. They give us so much information about local and family history and are written in the same style as his everyday speech. You can almost hear him talking when you read his diary. When family members have a special birthday, I photocopy the day of their birth from Dad's diary so that they can see what he was thinking that day! It also gave a great account of the weather because as an orchardist, he was a great watcher of the weather.

Do you keep a diary or journal? What type of information will it give your descendants?



Recent research requests have been on Big Hill Station, Colong Stock Route, Yerranderie. Robert A. Nelson, mine manager Yerranderie. If you have any information on these I would enjoy sharing it with our researchers.

Happy researching

Sue Davis, Local Archives and Family History.

Pictured Top -Rita Garlick and below a page from her Diary



Acquisitions Annual Report

Allen Seymour

Betty Yewen was a co-founder of the Macarthur Country Tourist Association along with the late Jennifer Eggins and recently Betty donated copies of the first and last tourist booklets she produced for the Association. These contain a wealth of information on the entire Macarthur region, not just tourist attractions but places to eat along with accommodation and other business listings and provides a wealth of information on what used to be around the Wollondilly Shire. Looking through them you realise the things we have lost

over the years. Thank you Betty, not just for the donation but also for the work put into producing them, they are a very valuable record of what used to be around.

Work is still going on with the Alp scans. I have just finished about 140 on the 1956 Bargo Wattle Blossom Festival. This was a huge event with a street parade, events at the show-ground and a ball in the evening and the crowning of the Wattle Blossom Queen ■

OUR DIGITAL TABLET INSTALLATION COMPLETED

A significant development for the Museum has been the installation of four digital information tablets to enhance the visitor experience and support our exhibitions. These interactive displays provide additional interpretation and historical content, extending the stories we are able to share with visitors and complementing our existing displays. Thanks to Jeff for his work on this project and Bruce from Mental Media for his expertise and attention to detail with the installation. The project required a full day of work to complete, and we are grateful for their commitment in delivering this valuable addition to the Museum. Our thanks to Angus Taylor Stronger Communities

Program grants/ Camden Men's Shed/ Caldwell, Martin & Cox/ Our Volunteers. Pictured below : close up of the tablet screens and Bruce from Mental Media and Jeff during the installation. Thanks guys!■



FROM LITTLE THINGS, BIG THINGS GROW continued.....



At this time there was a significant demand for plant propagation to create material for the nursery. Robin and Ron Davies became founding members of Wollondilly Regenerators and Propagators (WRAP) - the group being based at the nursery to propagate local seed and pot on seedlings for use on the creek project, as well as for Council's Roadside Reserve Strategy. (This innovative and award-winning programme enhanced vegetation in roadside corridors – proactively conserving the ecology along the 1600 lineal kms of the Shire's roadsides.) Robin and Ron were the next two original volunteers at the community nursery. From Werombi (both were originally from the Burragorang Valley) they had broad knowledge, also volunteering at the Mt Annan Botanic Gardens and with Land-care groups in the area.

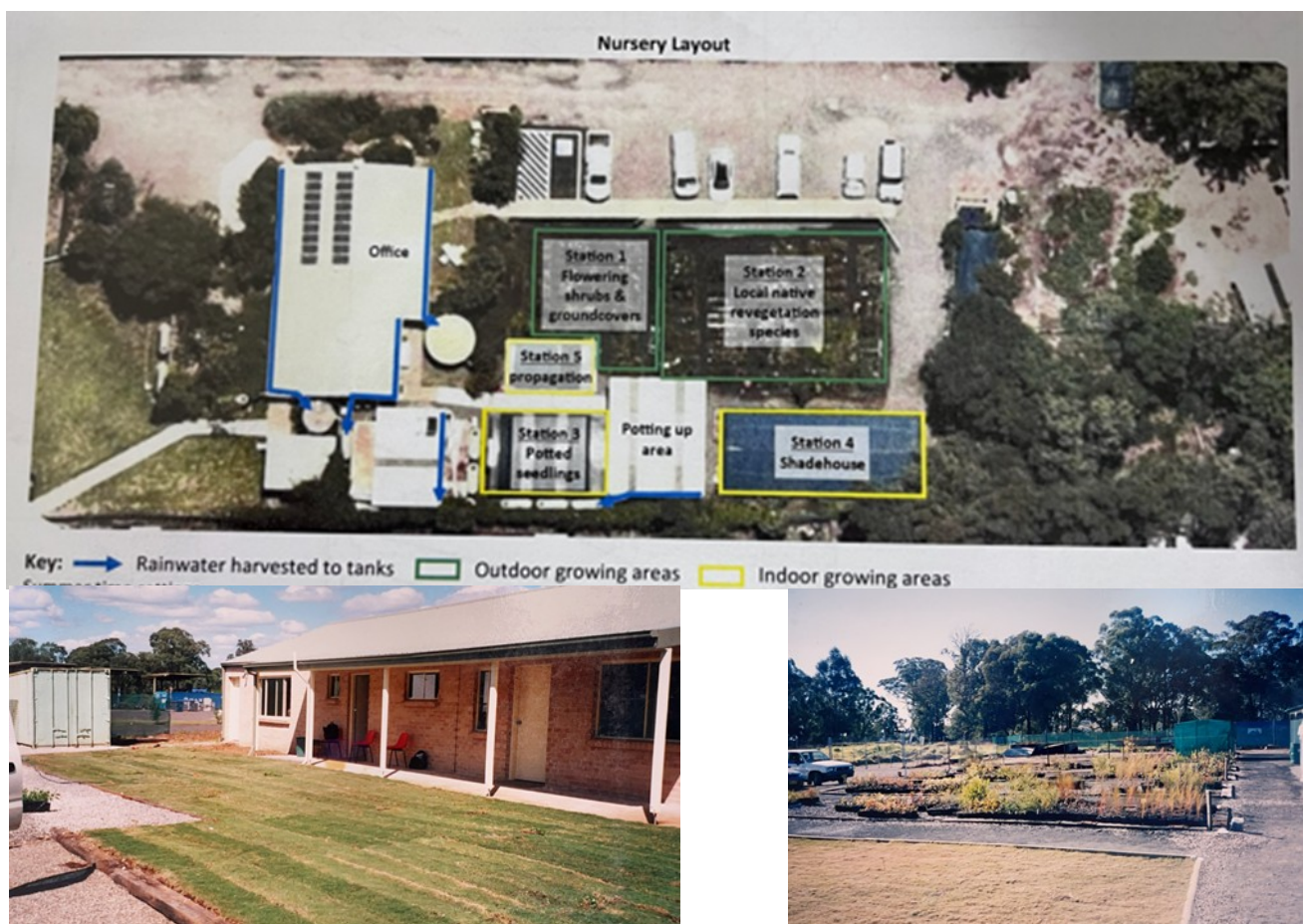
The community nursery was enormously successful and it became evident that a larger site was necessary to accommodate its growing output. In 1999 a new home was found for the nursery on land at Wonga Road, adjacent to the animal shelter. Despite resistance to moving the nursery from the well-loved location at Victoria Park, the Wonga Road site was cleared and rubbish cleaned up at the end of 2000. Deborah Knoke remained in charge of moving and re-establishing the nursery at its new location. Landscaping commenced in January 2001 and the building was completed in that same year. On the 6th of June, 2001 the new site held its grand opening - officially being named by Mayor Christine Towndrow as the Wollondilly Environmental Resource Centre.

New gardens were established, mulched and planted, plants propagated, new volunteers were mentored, recycling was encouraged and importantly native provenance plants were championed across Wollondilly and the Macarthur region. From a paddock with gravel the nursery literally grew out of the ground.

Brad Staggs (Council's Environmental Services Manager) and Scott Soper (Council's bush regenerator/seed collector) were fundamental to the nursery as was Eileen Burnus – the very first Community Nursery Co-ordinator. Eileen started with the nursery as a volunteer and initially acted as nursery co-ordinator on a part time basis whilst she continued her work (as a nurse at the QV Memorial Hospital). Damion Stirling took over from Eileen as co-ordinator in July 2008. Damion came from Greening Australia (a national not-for-profit committed to restoring Australia's diverse landscapes and protecting biodiversity for the benefit of communities, economies, and nature) and had a background of working with conservation volunteers. Damion moved to another environmental role within Council in 2012 and Fiona Proust took over the post. Many locals would recognise current co-ordinator Hannah Rebelo – for her welcoming smile and excellent advice on all aspects of our indigenous vegetation ■

Concluded next month.....

The new nursery facilities at Wonga Road, Picton.



IRISH BIGAMY-New insights into colonial New South Wales

A publication By Damian Gleeson

Colonial marriage and bigamy were complex with far reaching implications, especially for first families living in Ireland. This book examines Irish bigamy with particular emphasis on its widespread practice amongst Irish Convicts in penal New South Wales.

At play were complex forces involving the attitudes of Irish prisoners transported for bigamy, convicts entering bigamous marriages in penal New South Wales, the inconsistent adoption of Catholic Church marriage policies in the penal colony and the changing perspectives of English administration to bigamy.

Marrying in the penal colony while a first spouse was alive in Ireland was a situation that convict women hoped would provide a better opportunity than being housed in the over-crowded Female Factories at Parramatta or Emu Plains, where many became pregnant within a short time of being sent there. When convicts married a second time their new bigamous relationships had significant implications for spouses and first families remaining in Ireland, who were impacted by the loss of a breadwinner and or a husband/wife or father/mother. Colonial marriage occurred without censure or regard to an existing marriage in Ireland or England. As Henry Finlay noted: The fact that many convicts, once in the colonies, contracted new alliances, including putative if bigamous marriages, does not seem to have disturbed the authorities. The home authorities did not seem to care what the convicts did about their marital arrangements once they were safely out of the country. More probably, these conditions simply mirrored the official attitudes to poverty and or crime.

A range of reasons may explain why convicts abandoned their marriage vows and entered colonial bigamous marriages. There was a popular perception amongst convicts that transportation marked the end of a marriage or represented 'forced divorce'. This led to many convicts to chance their luck with a new partner.

A bigamous colonial marriage also explains 'why a considerable number of convicts never petitioned the government for a free passage for their wives left behind'.

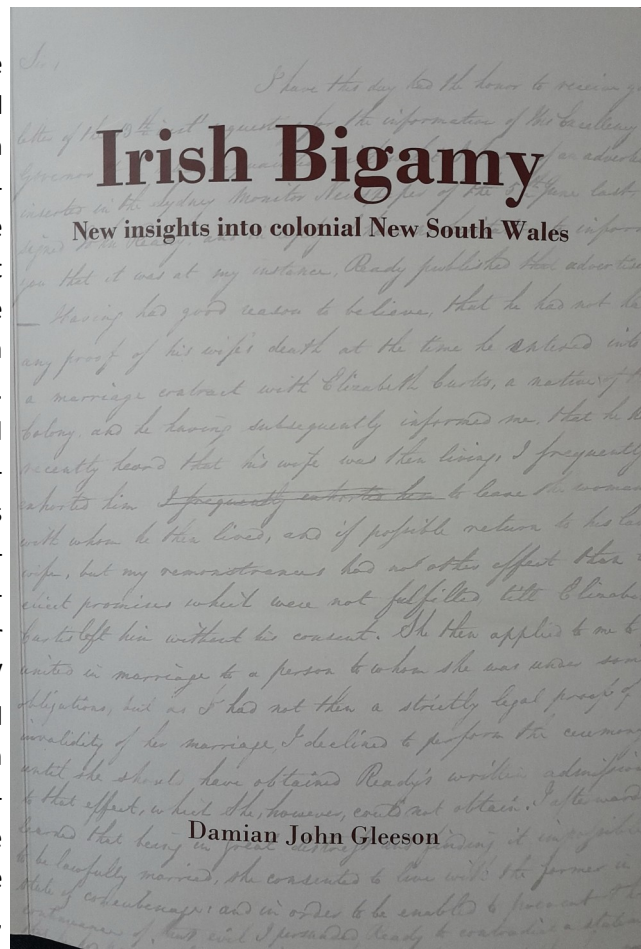
Irish wives either rejoined their convict husbands, died in Ireland or were not prepared to risk the long journey to New South Wales. Brothers Robert and Thomas O'Reilly, and a near relative, Bernard (Bryan) Carolan (Carlon) of Moybologue, Balieborough, County Cavan were members of the St Patrick's Society in the province of Ulster. The men were part of a larger group convicted for their involvement in the murder of a gauger (tax collector) in 1815. Transported per *Hadlow* (1820), the three men gained the support of their master, Sir John Jamison of Regentville and petitioned several times in the

1820's for their families to be granted a free passage to the colony. The outcome of their applications was mixed: Carolan's wife Ann Reilly and a daughter Margaret came on the *Brig St Joseph Banks* (1828) while a sibling Patrick migrated per *Borodino* (1828).

There is no record of Robert Reilly's wife Ann and daughter Bridget gaining a passage. In a sign of growing confidence amongst the Irish, Robert reinserted the O' when marrying Annie Smyth at Parramatta in 1839. Even though it had been 20 years since he had last seen his first wife, if Bridget was still alive, Robert's colonial marriage would have been considered bigamous in the eyes of the Catholic Church. Colonial officials however, who looked to the seven year marriage rule before permitting remarriage, would not have been too fussed. Robert and Annie raised a large family at Cox's River

Burraborang before he died in 1873. The third transportee, Thomas O'Reilly left behind a wife Bridget and four children, Michael, Bernard, Margaret and Mary. The two boys emigrated as free settlers on the *Fourth* (1830) but there is no record of their siblings or mother emigrating. Thomas has not been traced after he received his Conditional Pardon in 1835 the same time as his brother Robert and Bryan Carolan received their emancipation. There is no evidence that Thomas, while a convict, applied to marry again and after 1835 any marriage would not have attracted the State's interest.

This book draws upon a diverse range of case studies to illustrate colonial bigamy in relation to convict, emancipist and free settlers of the Irish Community in early New South Wales and is available from our Museum Shop ■



WEEKEND ROSTER

JUNE

Doreen & Ben	Saturday, 6
Margaret & Pam	Sunday, 7
Bev & David	Monday, 8
Colleen & Kathy	Saturday, 13
Marlane/Cheryl/Pam B	Sunday, 14
Doreen & Ben	Saturday, 20
Vicki & Linda	Sunday, 21
Working Bee Laurette & Phil	Saturday, 27
Trish & Kevin	Sunday, 28

SUPPER



ROSTER

June	Aileen & Bev
July	Bev & Colleen

Reminders, News & Info



June General Meeting

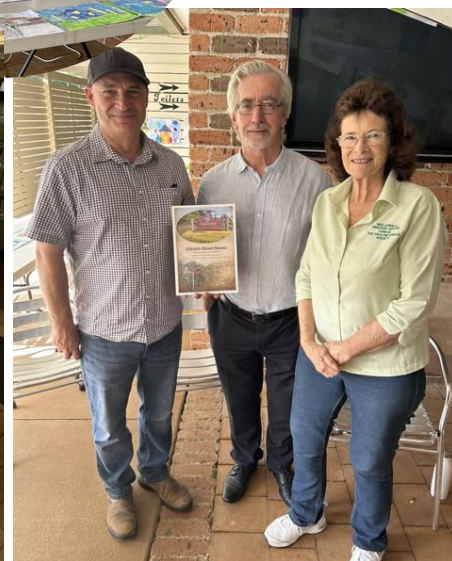
Monday, 1st June 2026 at 7pm

Meeting followed by supper/ All welcome

Guest Speakers Carol & Gordon Micklejohn
On Native Gardens



Some of the scenes from our Oakdale Street Names Publication Launch earlier this month.



REMINDER

Membership Fees 2026/2027

Single- \$10.00 / Family -\$18.00

And Newsletter **postage** is an additional \$20.

However Emailed newsletters are free.

Our Bank details below are for direct credit & **please use your surname** for the transaction reference to enable us to receipt payment.

Account Name: The Oaks Historical Society Inc.

BSB: 062516 Account # 00904093

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 General Meeting on June 1st 2026 followed by the July 6th General 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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