

# The Oaks Historical Society Inc

Est. May 1979

The Oaks Historical Society Inc.  
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## Newsletter

May 2021

### Wollondilly Heritage Centre & Museum

# A JOURNEY THROUGH ART & IMAGES

On Saturday 17th April we opened 'A Journey Through Art & Images' our Australian Heritage Festival event which continues through the month until Sunday May 16th. The festival features digital images of Alan Baker's artworks along with selected artworks from our collection showcasing Wollondilly. Gary Baker (pictured), an artist in his own right talked about his father the artist, the family's move to Belimbla Park, house building and their passion in developing extensive gardens on the property. Gary went on to detail each of the images and the story behind the image. The Alan Baker collection tells a story of life, Australian tradition, culture and the artistic journey of an artist. Visitors can collect a passport at the entry and proceed on a walking tour though the museum to view the trail of over 50 artworks culminating with the digital images in The Drill Hall. The artworks from our collection include local scenes, Burratorang Valley and Yerranderie as well as portraits. Visitors may also vote on their favourite artwork which will be announced at the event closure. The exhibition also includes a display of artworks depicting 'A Moment in History' contributed by students from participating schools. The festival will continue through until May 16th at 11am with an event announcing the award winners for the student art (pictured below) and a morning of children's activities coordinated by our volunteers to show what life was like in the 'olden days'. Further details are on page 3 ■



Pictured top-Event opening.

Centre-Gary Baker with Alan Baker images.

Below left-children's artwork.

Below right - artwork from our collection





## President's Report

Trish Hill

As our May meeting is our Annual General Meeting, the first since 2019 I'd like to use this opportunity to thank our volunteer team for the valuable work they do to in every aspect of the museum and in particular our executive team. Thank you! We have several new volunteers that have joined our team and this has been a welcome boost especially to the schools program which had suffered from some retirements. Reopening after our closed period introduced some challenges for all of us in developing our Covid policy, managing group bookings and ensuring appropriate cleaning was done. Congratulations everyone for your diligence, well done!

As we began 2020, it seemed we were in for a busy year but by March that was all over. Behind us now, suddenly we're a year on and are back on track for busy year. Our newsletter was a constant throughout the period of closure and sometimes difficult to fill as there was not a lot happening. My thanks to all who contribute to the newsletter, whether it is just your report or a story, I very much appreciate your input as it makes my role as editor much easier. We have tried to be more 'visible' through some of our programs and hope this increases our visitation.

Our treasurer commented that our income last year was down by some 58% but we managed well and now with bus and tour groups booking and schools booked into September it is very reassuring.

Always on the lookout for funds to improve our facility, Debbie has a number of funding applications awaiting determination. If successful, these could see us able to move forward with the new Indigenous Exhibition in the old library area and upgrades to the main building and collection storage among other things.

Working bees on the last Saturday of the month are proving to be a busy event, with jobs scheduled in advance our volunteers are getting through lots on the day and having allocated roster duty volunteers on the day enables those working to complete tasks uninterrupted.

Great news...we have been notified we are a finalist in the Small Business Awards.

Just a reminder that membership fees are due at this time. Thanks to those members who have already renewed and we will send out a reminder in the coming month.

And to all of our mothers, have a Happy Mothers Day ■



## Family History & Local Archive Research Corner

Sue Davis

### ANNUAL REPORT: 2019-2021

The past two years have continued to bring to us a steady stream of researchers for family history and local archives. It is gratifying that we are able to help people find new information and often to gain new resources to add to our files. Reunions and special days are often useful times for researchers to get active. The Burratorang Reunion in particular is a busy time of the sharing of memories and not before seen photographs often appear. Seniors Day also allows some of our visitors a chance to research an ancestor.

During April 2019- March 2020 we had 45 registered researchers. Twenty of these were from online enquiries and 25 were visits to the centre. In addition to family history, the topics of research included Burratorang Valley, Werombi, Yerranderie, Bimbo's Roadhouse, soldiers of Wollondilly, fire brigade captains, Menangle, The Oaks Airfield, Guest Houses, and Tuberculosis Hospital at Thirlmere.

During 2020 the Heritage Centre was not open from mid-March to June due to the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. However, in my weekly checks to see how things were going there was still a steady stream of online researchers. This was an ideal time to start scanning and filing online the requests addressed for our researchers. Although this took longer, in future it will be quicker for those with the same requests. In the period April 2020 – March 2021, we had 34 registered researchers with 21 being online and 13 visiting researchers. Beyond family history requests the topics have included; The Oaks Airport, Aborigines of Burratorang Valley, Razorback, Douglas Park, and history of properties.

During 2019 Family History month of August, we had a fireside chat

segment with Shirley Carlon and learned more about her family's life in Burratorang Valley. In 2020 we were unable to hold a special event for Family History month due to the pandemic.

Thank you to volunteers who have assisted from time to time over the last two years. We have also been fortunate to have some local school students completing Community Service for different levels of the Duke of Edinburgh award. In 2019 Amelia Mangan was invaluable in assisting in a variety of museum tasks to complete her Silver Level. Over the last two years Lachlan Brooks completed his bronze and silver levels while providing excellent assistance in the maintenance and outdoor areas. In 2020 Erin Large and Holly Lollback were able assistants in museum and office activities while completing community service for their bronze level.

### LOCAL HISTORY COLLECTION:

In 2020 a large amount of time was spent in researching for the "Hope Out of The Ashes" exhibition to ensure history of all the brigades in the Wollondilly Shire and Balmoral Village were included. The exhibition was opened by Commissioner Fitzsimmons in November.

During the lockdown months I started research about The Oaks Hotel and have developed a large file that is almost ready for reporting.

From the beginning of 2021 we now have a consistent Thursday morning team of Helen Perry, Judy Murdoch, Sharon Ihlein and myself. We are gradually getting through cataloguing the large stack of Local History files. I am very grateful to this team. We hope to plan online cataloguing in the future ■





# Acquisitions Report

Allen Seymour

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We have 5020 items listed in Mosaic. These cover everything from photographs and artwork through to the Bennett wagon. The total includes loan items for the fire exhibition and these will be returned when the exhibition concludes. In 2021 we have had 40 items added, and there are some donations waiting on paperwork so they can be processed. 2020 saw the addition of 142 items, including loans. Storage space is our biggest concern and we have a grant application pending for a compactus in Store 1 which would increase our space. We are also reviewing new storage options for our artworks and large photographs. Currently a lot of our artworks are on display, so come along and have a look at them. We have also allocated space to display recent additions to the collection in a cabinet in the shop area, where our awards are now located.

If you want to search for something in our collection, this can be done by logging into Mosaic as a visitor. We have two licenses for it and it should be accessible from any of our computers once a few problems are sorted out. Please contact me if you want to search for something.

Recent additions to the collection include a wooden fire-

place mantle piece. This is around 100 years old and came from Camden through a visitor on one of our group tours. We were visited by the Picton VIEW club last week, and one of the ladies was Gwen Wilton, widow of Jack Wilton, former Wollondilly Fire Control Officer. We already have Jack's helmet and leather jacket as well as some badges, and Gwen has now given us his leather fire controllers peaked cap to go with the jacket. A very welcome addition. Thanks Gwen.

At the opening of the art exhibition, Gary Baker gave us a diary that his father Alan kept when he was building his house at Belimbla Park. This was in 1962 and it was one of the first brick veneer houses out there, and the diary details the costs of everything that was used in the building. We're unsure if the house is still there, as it's very difficult to see from the road.

Another addition is from the Dwyer family at Bargo and consists of a set of six glasses and a decanter, brought out in 1988. They show a Lyrebird and a Koala, and state that the first sightings of these was in the Bargo area in 1798. Does anyone have any more information on this?



# Schoolies Report

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## The Olden Days in Action

Bring the family to visit the Heritage Centre at 11am on Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> May to try life like it was in the olden days. You can churn butter, wash with a mangle, grade apples, clean eggs (not real ones!), pump water, use slate boards and paint a boomerang, just to name a few.

There will be a short presentation at 11am for our children's art competition winners, followed by the activities until 1pm. Please RSVP to Bev on 0409913679 to help us with the organisation.

## Moment in History Children's Art Competition Winners

K-2

Winner - Dakota Adams - Mawarra

HC - Felix Wallace - Mawarra

HC - James Tzortzis - The Oaks

HC - Brayden Perez - The Oaks

HC - Matilda Hill - Oakdale

3-6

## Winner - Xavier - Mt Hunter

## HC - Year 3 - Macquarie Fields

After most of last year's full year of bookings disappeared, we are pleased to report that the School Program is running smoothly this year, as we are booked solidly until September 9<sup>th</sup>. Ten schools will have attended by that time including two new ones, Robert Townson and Condell Park Christian School. Our regulars The Oaks and William Carey again have bookings plus most of our schools book in every second year. Included in all of these is a Playgroup which will test our skills! From originally taking classes from Year 1 to 6 we now have regular visits from schools like Picton High and our last group included Kindergarten.

Our volunteers always do a sterling job. Whilst we are down one permanent member we have a great range of reserves including new ones Colleen Haynes, Judy Murdoch, Sharon Ihlein, Bruce Brown and Les Watton. All of these have now had one opportunity to be part of the program and have done very well. Congratulations to all our volunteers who have handled the extra work created by COVID in a conscientious and diligent way ■

# YERRANDERIE MEMORIES

From our archives-written by Maurice Cowan. Part two.....continued from last month.....Meanwhile back at the Silvermines Hotel.

There was no cellar at the pub. Beer was then seven pence a half-pint, sixpence in Sydney. It was served in half-pint mugs with handles. I don't remember any pint mugs. For some reason the mug wasn't gripped by the handle but gripped as you would a glass with the fingers through the handle. If a dad was in the pub there was a free lemonade and raspberry for the kids outside. Bottled beer, one shilling and seven pence in Sydney was two shillings at the pub. It came in cement-type bags of 24 bottles, each bottle in a jacket of straw and in the bag was a simple cast-iron opener suitably inscribed 'KB' or whatever. Shorts, mostly rum, were served in a glass of about 4 fluid ounces. A nip was one ounce and these glasses



had a white line at the one ounce level up to which the spirit had to come. The levels were never skimped. I can't remember any jiggers as measures. Oil of cloves or raspberry cordial was

often added to a nip of rum. One of these glasses filled with fortified wine was the traditional fourpenny dark.

There was no power at the pub. Lighting was by kerosene lamps and pressure (pump up) lamps, the fuel for the latter being 'Shellite' which came in 4 gallon tins. There was even an iron heated by shellite. These tins and kerosene tins were square and came 2 to a wooden case, hence kerosene cases which are collectors' items now. The cases were used extensively to make bush furniture and the tins, cut up and flattened out were used for building, cladding mostly. To the left of the front door was the bar and to the right a room with a ¾ billiard table. The pressure lamp above the table was of special design and threw a downward shadowless light. There were no snooker balls. I enjoyed playing billiards but my best break was only 21. I was going great guns with cannons playing Jim Burke when his ball went down accidentally. To pot your opponent's ball was unthinkable even to bring up 50 or 100 to win a game. Even when a white ball went down accidentally there was a certain amount of chacking.

The only drama I ever saw in the pub was one weekend

night. A group of young men related to some of the locals came in and had a lot to drink. One chap had a party trick which was to stand a matchbox on end on the floor and then from a distance 'stand' on his hands and 'walk' to the matchbox and pick it up with his teeth. He had a spiel like 'little matchbox I'm a coming to get you'. Perhaps this was done for a wager. There were ladies present (something of a rarity) and these chaps became a bit boisterous. Roy Quig (publican) ordered them to leave. One had to be ejected, an easy task for Roy. There was some shouting of abuse outside and one of them threw a half house brick through a window of the billiard room and broken glass landed on the table which, fortunately was not damaged. Ordering that no-one else was to become involved, Roy went outside and 'dealt with them'. Again, no sweat for Roy Quig. Roy was also a noted horseman and had been a noted horse breaker. Once we rode to a property some miles beyond Basin Creek, on the right hand side with yards right on the road. Was it Delveen? (Twin Peaks) Roy had been asked to break in a horse. It turned out to be a 7 year old stallion which had never been ridden. Roy declined "Too old", he said, "Both of us".



There was a well at the pub and each morning water had to be pumped up by hand to fill an elevated tank to provide pressure. Hot water was provided by a water jacket in the large fuel stove in the kitchen. During the Quig's tenure the stove was fired each morning

by Arthur Mealing, payment being a generous slug of rum.

The pub was more or less the social hub. Card games, euchre mostly and cribbage were usually in progress. Dominoes was also popular. I don't think my father ever lost a game of crib.



There was a tennis court and my memory is of it being in the dip just west of the pub. Jack Gaudry was the best of the younger players. For kids, you could climb The Peak and roll down rocks. Finding rollable rocks however was a chore and getting them to the launching point, the gully to the west, even more so. Unacceptable behaviour now but the thing to do then, besides it proved you'd made to the top.

Photo centre —Yerranderie Hotel c early 1950's

Group—New Year in The Silvermines Hotel Lounge c early 1950's  
Continued next month.....

# THE CAMP AT ROCKY WATERHOLES by Elizabeth Villy

The first train steamed into Picton station on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 1863. It was two years late due to the constant flooding around Menangle – on one occasion in 1860, the navvies and their families had to flee as their tent town was submerged under water. In the meantime, contracts were let and work commenced on the line beyond Picton to Mittagong. This line, now known as the old loop line, avoided the ridge on which the Great Southern Road ran and instead, went along a parallel ridge between the western side of the Bargo River and the tributaries of the Nattai.



The line left Picton viaduct over Stonequarry Creek, then through the now abandoned Picton tunnel to emerge on the ascending tableland at Thirlmere, up the range and another tunnel through Saddleback Range, to

Hilltop, Colo Vale, and Braemar to meet the southern road at Mittagong. Along the way, the landscape was dotted with navvie's camps, tent homes made comfortable to accommodate the men and their families. Tracks forked out from Picton to communicate with the construction teams, the main one was later called Wilson Drive after the explorer John Wilson.

The largest camp and the longest occupied, was in the high country at Rocky Water Holes, about half way between Balmoral and Hill Top. The contractors faced a solid wall of sandstone that had to be cut through, a monumental and skilled piece of engineering. The original plan was for a tunnel but this was abandoned as engine staff and passengers would be suffocated. The alternative was the cutting, which when completed, was some 27 metres deep. It was nearly six metres wide allowing for the ballast on either side of the single track. A wooden bridge spanned the road above it, allowing through traffic to Mittagong. This was the deepest and longest cutting hacked through by the men at the main camp. It was brutal work with the pick and shovel, despite the use of gunpowder to break through the wall of rock. When the line was finished, train passengers looked out on high perpendicular walls of rock soaring upwards, and if they were reckless enough to peer upwards from an open window, withdrew rapidly gasping for breath and covered in soot.

This was rough country. A reporter from the *Herald* journeyed over the still unopened track in 1866. He wrote: 'It

*may be safely said that the rocks, hills, mountains, gullies and precipitous watercourses which border the line between Picton and Gibraltar Rock [Mittagong] - a distance of more than thirty miles - are for the most part appalling. The country stands remote... full of its rugged grandeur and unpromising desolation...'*

Consolation though was at hand. At least two businessmen in Picton saw opportunities, so in February 1863, Tom Hilder, the licensee of The George ran the *Red Lion*, a coach licensed to carry ten passengers and a driver, from Picton to the Rocky Water Holes and back. Soon after, James Smithers opened the Camp Hotel, which he ran for several years. In 1865 Smithers was in trouble on several counts. Two navvies attacked him and one was fined 14 shillings in the Picton court. Smithers himself was charged with illegally allowing dancing and music at his public house and on another occasion was fined for allowing drinking on a Sunday. Smithers also supplied the labourers and their families with food or household goods as he was given a hawker's licence. Local farmers provided the camp with meat and food.

There was a bad accident in the cutting on the 5<sup>th</sup> May 1863 when a five feet charge of powder, rammed into a borehole in the rock, failed to explode. Half an hour later, a workman returned to the site to clean out the hole and while doing so, the original charge exploded. The rock was hard blue metal and it was believed that the friction caused by the second man as he cleaned out the original powder, ignited it by the steel drill. Rock blasted a group of men working below in the gullet. Patrick McHugh, badly injured, was carried on a stretcher to the public house where he died. Jeremiah Con-



nor lingered on in an unconscious state for several days before he died. A number of men were injured but eventually recovered. The inquest was held at the Terminus Hotel in Picton. A few months later, in October, the men downed tools for 11 days when the contractors, Randle and Gibbons, failed to pay their wages for the previous month. 48 summons were issued against W. Dixon, the agent for the contractors, and 17 against a sub-contractor named

Childs. The case was held up initially as Dixon failed to appear. In the meantime the men somehow got themselves to Picton courthouse, only to walk the streets for several days until the magistrates decided that Dixon was evading the charges, so they proceeded to hear the case. The navvies won and both men were ordered to pay the men 24 days wages as well as three days for the lost time. Childs particularly was in a predicament as he employed the 17 men himself, yet Randle the Gibbons failed to pay him. In the meantime he dispersed rations to these men as well as feeding the horses on the site. The magistrates were sympathetic for Child's predicament as well as to the men who had families to support. Continued next page.....



Randle and Gibbons were unsatisfactory contractors in many ways and eventually lost their contract. Larkin and Wakeford were then awarded the contract for the line from Picton to Mittagong. In May 1863 workers under Ambrose Crowshaw who had the contract to construct the viaduct, took him to court for non-payment of wages. Crowshaw, like Randle and Gibbons, was declared insolvent.

The line was officially opened and the special train carrying the distinguished members of society, 'influential gentlemen' and members of the ministry, in the 15 carriages, steamed into Picton on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1867. There the carriages were divided with one engine taking six carriages, and the second the remainder, the line ahead too steep for one engine. The trains, trailing clouds of black smoke, steamed over the viaduct, through the tunnel, through dense woodlands, along huge embankments and through the cutting. They passed the navies' campsites, more embankments, another tunnel and into Mittagong where cheering crowds

awaited. There were no stations along the line except a stopping place at Rush's Platform (later called Braemar) - these would come later, as would sidings at strategic sites.

The railway opened up the country and it was the timber getters who were the first patrons, using the new train to transport timber to Sydney. The navies moved on to other lines although some remained and worked as fitters or maintenance crews. Picton remained a railway town with its engine shed, coal loaders, sidings, cattle yards and turntable until the 1960s.

The site of the camp is long gone but a memorial, a brutal structure of angular concrete slabs has been erected to the workers who died on what is now known as the deepest cutting in New South Wales. It is on Wilson Drive near Balmoral ■



## Exhibitions Development

Doreen Lyon

On Saturday 24th April, I attended the launch of Marjory Kay's new book "*I know a safe place*" written during the 2019/20 bushfires. The book describes the effects of the fires on the animals in her valley and on her neighbours. The animals tell the stories and they are all illustrated in the book, together with beautiful paintings of the bushland.

The launch took place in Balmoral Hall and was introduced by the Hall President Elizabeth Atkins and attended by many local families.



Nancy Shearer (pictured left) owner of the Brown Bookshop in Bowral was the presenter. Marjory displayed all her art work for the book and many more of her prolific collection in the hall for all to enjoy. Her granddaughters managed the Sales desk and website and her friend, Susan, read excerpts from the book to the audience. There are plans to record

the story into an audio book.

Marjory received sponsorship from Wingecarribee Council for publishing the book which gave her opportunity to present free copies to local schools and libraries and the Balmoral Bush Fire Brigade. The Balmoral Bush Fire Brigade volunteers were presented with copies of the book by

Marjory to thank them for their service during the fires.

The book is now available in our museum shop.

### ANNUAL REPORT FOR AGM

The past year has been a challenging one for all involved in museums and theatres and galleries so I would like to congratulate our team of volunteers for striving and succeeding to keep the Centre open during Covid 19 and for installing a new exhibition in spite of all the challenges. Sue and Helen and Trish did a wonderful job of researching the local volunteer fire brigades and many local people were generous in allowing use of their collections of fire related memorabilia. Debbie managed to provide some amazing new glass display cases which really gave the display a professional look. As always when a new display goes in, we discovered many stories and facts which we didn't know and realised the amount of work achieved in providing the community support that we experience today in the face of fire, flood and other catastrophes. But above all we appreciate that all this is achieved by volunteers; men and women who began as local landholders who devised ways to protect themselves and their neighbours from the ever present threat of bush fire as the original Indigenous people had done.

This display is dedicated to them and all those who care for country today.

As the epidemic comes under control we are planning for new displays in the coming year and will keep you updated on them. If anyone would like to join our team of display people please let one of us know. And also if YOU have an idea for a display we would love to hear it!

# Reminders, News & Info

WEEKEND ROSTER	
MAY	
<b>Pam &amp; Jan</b>	<b>Saturday, 1</b>
Marlane & Cheryl/ Kate	Sunday, 2
<b>Viv &amp; Bob</b>	<b>Saturday, 8</b>
Sue & Paul	Sunday, 9
<b>Debbie &amp; Allen</b>	<b>Saturday, 15</b>
Maria & Betty	Sunday, 16
<b>Doreen &amp; Ben</b>	<b>Saturday, 22</b>
Kaye & Jim	Sunday, 23
<b>Laurette &amp; Phil (Working Bee)</b>	<b>Saturday 29th</b>
Trish & Kevin	Sunday, 30

## Memberships Fees

**Single- \$10.00**

**Family -\$18.00**

**Newsletter postage is an additional \$10.**

**Emailed newsletters are free.**

Bank details below for direct credit with surname as reference

**Account Name:** The Oaks Historical Society Inc.

BSB: 062516

Account # 00904093

## Annual General Meeting

Monday, May 3rd at 7pm

Membership renewals are due at this time.

We have kindly been loaned 2 original Alan Baker Paintings to view on the night along with the digital images. All Welcome

Evening concludes with supper

## OUR SENIORS FESTIVAL STEP BACK IN TIME AT THE WOLLONDILLY HERITAGE CENTRE & MUSEUM

On Tuesday 13th April we had a very successful 'step back in time' with seniors as part of the Wollondilly Seniors Festival with some 70 people attending. Activities included card making, apple grading and peeling in our Machinery Shed and butter making as well as bean slicing in the Burragorang Cottage all proved to be very popular as well as the music supplied by Preston & Malcolm. The event was funded by the NSW Seniors Festival Grants Program / The Department of Communities & Justice. Pictured below are some of the activities.



## A Journey through art and images showcasing Wollondilly Shire.

### Our Heritage Our Future—event of the National Trust Heritage Festival

Throughout the month of the Heritage Festival 17th April—16th May, guests to the Wollondilly Heritage Centre can avail themselves of a passport to view over 50 art works and images that depict 'Our Heritage Our Future' including digital images from the Alan Baker collection.



Bring the family to visit the Heritage Centre at 11am on Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> May to try life like it was in the olden days. You can churn butter, wash with a mangle, grade apples, clean eggs (not real ones!), pump water, use slate boards and paint a boomerang, just to name a few.



There will be a short presentation at 11am for our children's art competition winners, followed by the activities until 1pm. Please RSVP to **Bev** on **0409913679** to help us with the catering and organisation.

**MONTHLY MEETINGS:** The Oaks Historical Society Inc. holds its meetings on the first Monday of each month (except January) at the Wollondilly Heritage Centre & Museum, 43 Edward St. The Oaks starting at 7.00pm. The next meeting is Monday May 3rd (Annual General Meeting) followed by the next general meeting on Monday June 7th. Our patrons are Judith Hannan 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.

If undelivered, please return to:-  
**The Oaks Historical Society Inc.**  
**P O Box 6016 The Oaks NSW 2570**

