

Bowral



Mittagong



Berrima



Moss Vale

# BERRIMA DISTRICT HISTORICAL & FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY Inc.

Founded 1960

Located in the Wingecarribee Shire,  
Southern Highlands of NSW

## NEWSLETTER

No 484 June 2016

### From the President's Desk

It seems that we are looking to redefine ourselves these days. Who am I? More so, who are we? And then the big one is, where do we come from?

I wonder why there are increased visits to our Archives? More family trees have burst on the scene, growing like Topsy.

At dinner parties when raising the subject of family and background, it sparks a conversation which can become so lively and lengthy that finally someone says "my goodness, is that the time?"

Shows like "Who Do You Think You Are" and Ancestry's DNA project have been so well accepted and watched. Especially by those 'over a certain age.' Therefore more interest is taken in Historical Societies, which seem to be a growth industry nowadays. Here's some observations I've made over the last few years...

We are obviously trying to find our own uniqueness, our own place in the world. A world that is gradually turning 'grey'. It is *de rigueur* to paint our houses grey, inside and out.



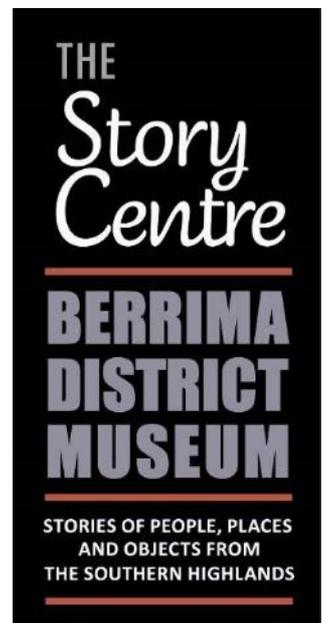
**Bruce Moore,  
President**

*Continued on page 2*

### GENERAL MONTHLY MEETING

**JUNE LUNCHEON:** Thursday 23 June at 12:00pm for 12:30 pm  
**VENUE:** Lion Rampant Hotel, Main Street, Mittagong  
**GUEST SPEAKER:** Max Rogers and Shylie Brown  
 Max and Shylie will provide a brief history of the Lion Rampant Hotel.

**JULY MEETING:** Thursday 28 July at 2:00pm  
**VENUE:** Society Research Centre, Old Council Chambers Building, Bowral Road, Mittagong  
**GUEST SPEAKER:** To be announced  
**AFTERNOON TEA:** To be served following the speaker. Members please bring a plate or a donation.



## From the President

*Continued from front page*

However we're all secretly seeking a little bit of our own colour, a colourful past, we love colourful characters. At present, they are scarce on the ground.

I think David Nicholls sums it up beautifully in his book "Us" when he observes... "Familiarity, TV, globalisation, cheap travel and mere weariness have diluted our sense of foreign-ness. Cities are more familiar than you want them to be."

It's true that The Body Shop and McDonald's are identical world-wide. We are eating the same foods, hearing the same music and wearing the same clothes. A Parisian shopping street could be an extension of George Street, Sydney.

Shopping malls the world over are a clone of themselves, thanks to globalisation.

We are becoming more insignificant in this colourless identical world.

Trying to make sense of all this, inspiration from social researcher and local author Hugh Mackay in his book "The Art of Belonging" describes...

"the desire to belong is a throbbing urge that won't be stilled until our hearts find safe lodgings".

I hope a visit to our Archives and Museum will help you find your tribe.

On a lighter note:

1 in 5 people in the world are Chinese. There are 5 people in my family, so it must be one of them. It's either my Mum or my Dad. Or my older brother Colin. Or my younger brother Ho-Cha-Chu. But I think it's Colin.

## Research fees

Research fees for non-members:

\$20.00 per hour or part thereof for telephone and postal enquiries.

\$5.00 per hour or part thereof for enquirers who attend the archives and carry out their own research.

## Would you consider . . .

As we all know Australia Post has significantly increased their postal charges, and as we have a sizable membership the cost for postage each month is quite substantial.

Therefore it would help immensely if you would agree to receive the newsletter by email.

However for those members who find it difficult to use a computer, we will continue to post it to you.

## Berrima District Museum

### THE STORY CENTRE

Please note that the museum is now open at least 5 days a week

MUSEUM OPEN: 10am to 4pm  
WEDNESDAY TO SUNDAY

and every day during NSW school holidays and on public holidays.

Groups welcome at other times by arrangement. Please phone John on 4872 1660.

## Bundanoon's big book sale

The Bundanoon History Group will be holding another mammoth book sale on Saturday 23 July in the Bundanoon Memorial Hall.

Past book sales at Bundanoon have been a huge success, and this year it will follow a similar pattern with stock priced at \$1, \$2 and \$5 and a table of special and collectable books priced in a higher cost range.

## Research fees

Research fees for non-members:

\$20.00 per hour or part thereof for telephone and postal enquiries.

\$5.00 per hour or part thereof for enquirers who attend the archives and carry out their own research.

## June Luncheon

Thursday 23 June

The venue this year is the dining room, Lion Rampant Hotel, Main St, Mittagong (opp St Stephens Anglican Church).

Our luncheon will be two courses, with alternate drop.

### Entrée

Salt & Pepper Calamari *OR* Bruschetta

### Main

Grilled Fish of the day *OR* Chicken Supreme

Complimentary tea and coffee will be provided.

Please let us know when booking if you have special dietary requirements.

The cost is \$30 per person. Lunch will start at 12:00 for 12:30pm. There will be the usual door prizes, and a brief history of the venue by Max and Shylie.

Please book and pay at the Archives as soon as possible; seating is limited.

A great opportunity to meet up with friends and members.

## June lunch location: a brief history

Our popular publication *Life Behind the Bar: Inns and Hotels in the Southern Highlands 1824-1924* provides a comprehensive description of all the licensees who ran the inns and hotels that operated in the district in early days, researched and written by Shylie Brown.

Extracts follow here regarding the history of the Lion Rampant location, our June Luncheon venue.

### Commercial Hotel/Lion Rampant Hotel

Cnr Old Hume Highway & Victoria Street, Mittagong

A three-storey brick building, erected for Frederick Draper, was purchased by his brother John for £100. In 1876 Frederick was auctioneer and store keeper. John died one year later. Frederick opened the building as the *Commercial Hotel* in 1880. It was licensed to sell beer and spirituous liquor catering for the needs of travellers along the busy Main Road. The exterior of the building was brick with a first-floor verandah and skillion roof with a decorative cast-iron balustrade around the two street frontages. A most unusual mansard roof topped the third floor with dormer windows inserted into the steep sides where a number of bedrooms were situated.

Peter Murphy leased the Commercial Hotel in 1885 and was engaged for some time in modernising the interior to the satisfaction of his customers. The ground-floor community room was laid with expensive carpet and on the first floor there were eight double bedrooms. The second floor could provide sleeping accommodation for as many as 35 people. In 1888, he was offering his customers a chance to combine business with pleasure as he was prepared to convey visitors for day trips from his hotel to the Wombeyan Caves. Peter Murphy had left the hotel by June 1889 and Draper returned as licensee in 1890.



Although only 50 years old, the Commercial (above) was demolished in 1927. A new hotel building was erected in the Inter-War Georgian Revival style. It is two storied with splayed corner and corniced parapet concealing the roof. Named the *Lion Rampant Hotel* it is still catering to the public to this day.

## Day trip to Bungonia with BHG

Several members of the Society recently joined a bus tour organised by Bundanoon History Group for a day trip to Bungonia, a locality rich in history about 20km south of Marulan.

On arrival at Bungonia the 50 tour participants were met by tour guide Anne Wiggan of the Bungonia Historical Society. She provided a wealth of historical information about the area and led the group through a busy itinerary. She is pictured here with Ralph Clark, BHG President.



For a time Bungonia was a flourishing settlement on the Argyle Road that in the 1820s was the only inland route to the south. Large estates were established in the area with convict labour. Other settlers came and the area's village, known initially as Inverary, gained a school, post office, shop, both Catholic and Anglican churches, and numerous inns.

The tour included both churches, the ruins of an early inn (seen here), the local cemetery and a private home built in the early days. Morning tea was served in the Hall and later lunch was provided.



An afternoon highlight was a visit to Reevesdale, one of the properties established on the Argyle Rd in the 1820s. A coach house was built on the property and for a time it was a stop-over for Cobb & Co coaches on the route. When the Great Southern Road opened in the 1830s as a more direct route to Goulburn and beyond, the Argyle Rd declined in importance. Yet the Bungonia area, with its fine pasture land, minerals and spectacular scenery, has continued to thrive.



Reevesdale homestead built in 1829 with fake door and windows to trick bushrangers and Aborigines.

*Photos courtesy Christine Miller, Bundanoon*

## Our new cover features landmarks



The sketch shown here has served as our newsletter masthead since June 2000.

Now, in order to showcase some of the district's landmarks and to feature photos from our extensive collection, the newsletter team (Bruce and Philip) have decided to replace the sketch with selected photos.

We hope that readers will appreciate the importance of highlighting our district's location and composition. Wingecarribee Shire (Southern Highlands of NSW) has grown from when Berrima was the district's main centre to now be a thriving urban and rural area. Our Society's collections cover the towns of Bowral, Mittagong, Moss Vale, Robertson and Berrima and many villages including Avoca, Aylmerton, Balaclava, Braemar, Bundanoon, Burrawang, Canyonleigh, Colo Vale, Exeter, Hilltop, Kangaloon, Penrose, Sutton Forest, Tallong, Wildes Meadow and Wingello.

The four images on the newsletter's new masthead have been specifically chosen because they are all of historic places that still exist and, while their use may have changed, they are still immediately recognisable and are identifiable landmarks of the main towns.

They highlight some of the iconic locations within our Historical Society's area and convey a glimpse of the rich heritage the area encompasses. After 12 months we may use other photos - any suggestions welcome. A brief history of each image is provided here.



**Empire Picture Theatre, Bong Bong St, Bowral**

Amidst much excitement, the theatre was opened on 15 September 1915, with the first feature film being 'Rupert of Hentzau', a sequel to 'Prisoner of Zenda'.

Patrons entered through a foyer opening directly onto Bong Bong Street. On one side of the foyer was a confectionery shop, run by owner Roy Painter's sister, and, on the other side, the Empire Lounge served tea and homemade cake. The Empire Picture Theatre, now the New Empire Cinema, has a history of which locals are very proud. It has now provided over a century of entertainment to numerous generations of Southern Highland patrons.



**A large crowd at memorial clock tower, Mittagong**

This photo in our collection is not dated, but the cars suggest it is in the 1960s. The flags are at half mast, so perhaps it is an Anzac Day commemoration. Our Historical Society building is in the background.



**Surveyor-General Inn, Berrima**

There are numerous photos of this historic building in our collection. The one here dates from the 1920s as indicated by the vehicle and the people's outfits.

It was built in 1832 by James Harper who obtained a licence in 1835. The NSW Heritage Office has listed the Inn as an item of State Heritage Significance.



**Moss Vale Post Office and Alcom Clock tower**

This photo is of interest as it shows the 1897 Queen Victoria Jubilee water fountain usurped as the town's unique landmark by the memorial clock tower which was built over the top of it in 1937. The clock was erected in memory of Dr John Alcom, well respected in both his military service and civilian life. Moss Vale Council removed the fountain in 1978 and built a traffic island around the clock tower. The fountain now resides nearby in a garden setting and the old Post Office building is now a cafe.

## James McCleery, founder of family business at Moss Vale in 1883

In 1883 James McCleery established a blacksmith and coach building workshop on the corner of Argyle and Valetta Sts, Moss Vale.

After a long illness he died in 1904, aged 70. Two of his sons, who had come into the business in the 1890s, built a fine reputation for quality workmanship. By 1914 the firm of Messrs McCleery & Sons also included sawmilling operations, wood bending and joinery work, motor repairs, welding and tyre fitting.

The firm won Defence Department contracts during WW I to manufacture vehicles, tool carts, spare parts, stretchers and tent pegs for use in the Middle East and Europe.

In the early 1900s Arthur Howard was taken on as an apprentice. In 1912 he came up with the idea for a power tillage machine that would revolutionise ploughing. He experimented and fine-tuned the rotary hoe cultivator with Everard, the youngest McCleery son. War interrupted this collaboration as Everard enlisted and Howard went to England to work on munitions. Sadly, Everard died at war in 1918.

Back from England, Howard helped rebuild the Moss Vale workshop after a fire in 1919. In the 1920s he took over the works to develop his rotary hoe and later established a factory in Sydney. By the 1940s his business was a global success.

Thus the smithy and coach building works established at Moss Vale grew in reputation and significance. An overview of the life of its founder, James McCleery, is presented here.

In an obituary in the *Scrutineer* of 30 July 1904, his life before coming to Moss Vale is briefly mentioned. "He was in business in Mittagong many years ago when the railway was in process of construction. Leaving there he established a business in the Wollongong district, and later came to Moss Vale where he carried on the coach building business."



Research into his early life has revealed a little more, but specific details are scarce. Most likely he was born in Ireland around 1834 and arrived in Sydney in the 1850s. He became a farrier and blacksmith by trade, finding his way to Nattai (now Mittagong) in the 1860s to work while the southern railway was

being built. From there James moved to the coast and established a smithy and wheelwright business at Albion Park. In 1869, then aged 35 years, he married Euphemia Thomson at Kiama. She was 25 years of

age, born at Enfield, Sydney in 1845. The birth of their first child, James William, was registered at Kiama in 1870.

James placed a notice in the *Illawarra Mercury* on 7 November 1871: "To Blacksmiths & Wheelwrights: wanted to sell privately, my interest or trade. Also, a good set of blacksmith's tools, and a general assortment of iron. Also a lot of timber, suitable to the wheelwright business. Apply to James McCleery, Albion Park."

He and Euphemia moved to Wollongong, where he established a blacksmith and coach building shop opposite the Post Office in the centre of town. He announced this business in the *Mercury* on 19 April 1872 and continued advertising until July 1876.

**JAMES M'CLEERY,**  
COACH SMITH, SPRING MAKER, AND  
BUILDER,  
BEGS to inform the inhabitants of Illawarra that  
he has commenced business  
OPPOSITE THE POST-OFFICE, WOLLONGONG,  
And that he intends to work according to the  
times.  
Ploughs, Mouldboards, Drays, and other Farm  
Implements made to order.  
Horses carefully shod.

A second son Samuel was born in 1872 but died in infancy. Their first daughter Euphemia Margaret was born in 1874, and then two more sons - Frederick Thomas (1875) and John Edward (1877).

James' wife Euphemia had two younger brothers, Robert and William Thomson, also born at Enfield. They moved to the south coast and took up the Nowra to Moss Vale mail contract in the 1870s. Described as 'whips' they had the tough job of carrying the mail, goods and passengers along the rugged, steep track from Nowra, through Kangaroo Valley and up Barrengarry Mountain to Moss Vale.

These brothers lived eventful lives and both died in 1923. The *Scrutineer's* obituary for Robert described him as one of the most prominent whips of his day. "When there were only bush tracks to travel on, people always felt safe when Bill had the whip. It was nothing for him to be hung up for days owing to washaways and bad and impassable roads. For many years only pack horses were able to carry the mails from Nowra to Moss Vale; he had charge of these, and was the first man to drive a coach along this route."

From around 1877 James McCleery was working as a mail contractor at Nowra, perhaps taking over a run from one of his brothers-in-law. He did not fare well, however, as debts accumulated.

He is listed in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 19 November with liabilities of 311 pounds and assets of only 122 pounds. Court proceedings followed and his

estate was declared insolvent but by 1882 he had satisfied the legal requirements.

He then moved to Moss Vale with his wife and their five children. In 1883 he established a blacksmith, wheelwright and coach building business at the corner of Argyle and Valetta Streets. In his fifties and with a wealth of experience, he specialised in quality buggies and carts which were in great demand. In 1885 he received first prize for his spring cart exhibit at the Berrima District Show in Moss Vale.

No doubt he instilled in his sons a desire to enter the business. His eldest son James William was in his teens with Frederick Thomas and John Edward a few years younger.

Another son, Arthur, was born in 1884. Three more daughters followed: Ethel Florence (1886), Eva Amelia (1887) and Lillian Myrtle (1889), and youngest son, Edgar Percy Everard, was born in 1893.



**James McCleery (centre in apron) with some customers and staff - possibly several of his sons, c1893.**

The coach building business thrived. McCleery was able to turn out any work required in the district. New and second hand vehicles were always in stock. As well, buggies, spring carts, farm wagons, drays and coaches were made to order using the best material and workmanship. Plough and other farm implements were also made and repaired.

The **Scrutineer of 2 August 1892** carried a lengthy report about him under the heading 'A Local Industry: Mr McCleery's Coach and Buggy Factory'. It included the following:

"The other day we paid a visit to the factory of Mr James McCleery who has been carrying on the business of coach and buggy builder, practical horseshoer, general blacksmith and wheelwright some eight or nine years in Moss Vale. We noticed a new hearse was just about approaching completion built to the order of Mr Matthews of Berrima.

This hearse is of superior workmanship and most modern and best design; with plate glass side windows, nickel-plated mounts, well-finished corner ornamentations and is built with a double-socket fore-carriage. It is fitted with a dual self-acting brake easily manipulated and which throws equal leverage on

each wheel, giving an easy and gentle motion so necessary in a vehicle of this description to avoid undue pace down-hill.

A buggy of a special design was also in hand by Mr McCleery, a feature of which is that it can be altered to suit a commercial traveller or be formed with a back seat and a drop tail board. This was fitted with best buffalo hide side and real leather covered cushions. McCleery had also just completed a very stylish looking gig for Mr Wynne. In fact it looked such a handsome vehicle that we became covetous.

Any order entrusted to his care is turned out quite as promptly and accurately as could be done by any Sydney firm for the latest improvements in the trade are availed of, including a tyre bending machine, a machine for bending shafts and rims, and a number of other mechanical appliances.

McCleery has on hand large stocks of seasoned timber used in the trade: American hickory, ironbark, and box dressed and undressed. The iron used by him is of best quality. McCleery has two sons with him in the business who are well grounded in every branch of the trade."

The sons referred to were most likely the oldest two, James and Frederick, although it was their younger brother, John Edward, and the youngest, Everard, who were later prominent in the business.

In 1894 McCleery called for tenders for the erection of a brick house. A substantial two-storey residence, 'Rosebank', was built facing Argyle St on land behind the workshop. Further blocks of land were later purchased along Valetta St by the family.

The business was renamed 'McCleery & Sons' in the 1890s and gradually built a fine reputation for quality workmanship.

James McCleery died at Moss Vale in July 1904, aged 70, and was buried in the Presbyterian section at Christ Church Bong Bong.



**Blacksmith tools stamped 'Jas. McCleery Moss Vale' - courtesy Alf Wilford, ACT**

This overview of the McCleery family and Moss Vale business compiled by Philip Morton will be continued in next month's newsletter.

## General meeting at museum

The Society's monthly meeting on Thursday 26 May was held at the Berrima District Museum, rather than at the usual meeting room in the Mittagong Research Centre. Around 40 members and guests arrived at the museum for the 2:00pm meeting.

President Bruce Moore commenced proceedings with a brief official general meeting and then made way for the feature of the occasion: a session to provide some insights into the museum's processes, activities and outcomes that happen behind the scenes.

Manager John Schweers welcomed attendees and briefly spoke about the history of the museum which had been operating at the present site for 40 years. A Moss Vale house, known as Weyhill, after having been donated to the Society, was relocated and mounted on new foundations on the museum site at Berrima. It was officially opened by Justice Mitchell as the Berrima District Historical Society Museum in March 1976.

Prior to that, a folk museum had operated in various locations from the 1960s and Hillview at Sutton Forest was used for storage. The museum premises has grown and expanded since then. Today there is a team of 40 volunteers and the museum is open at least 5 days every week. A steady stream of visitors from near and far enjoy a visit.

John then introduced Michele Woods, a volunteer at the museum. She began by explaining about how the Southern Highlands 1200 Exhibition grew from an initial list of local men and women who served in WWI. This list had evolved for over 10 years or so from bits and pieces collected at the museum. Harlan Hall and Linda Emery worked the list up to the comprehensive wall display of all the 1200 personnel who served.

The display objects for the exhibition were sourced from the museum collection, the Mittagong RSL, the Red Cross and several families who were keen to provide their memorabilia. Various complications and last minute hitches with the display were mentioned by Michele, including how the Nurse's Uniform donated by the Red Cross had to be returned a week before the exhibition opened as it had been promised to the Kangaroo March. The team frantically set about creating a duplicate copy - Bev Schweer's sewing skills were invaluable and somehow one night Linda Emery made an exact copy of the nurse's cap. No one was any the wiser that a duplicate uniform had been substituted.

On behalf of the museum conservation team, Gloria Williams shared some insights into the process followed when an object is offered to the museum. If the object is accepted, an accession form is filled out and a team of volunteers describe, measure and photograph the object. If possible, it is then displayed in the New Arrivals cabinet for a minimum of 6

months. All objects are numbered for storage and recording on the Mosaic system - this is a complex and painstaking process. Volunteer Marg Muntz has the numbering down to a fine art, and was there to demonstrate the process after the talk.

The meeting attendees were then invited to wander around, including into the museum's "inner sanctums" - the storage and preparation areas not usually open to the public.

A sumptuous afternoon tea was provided by BDHS volunteers and heartily enjoyed by all.



President Bruce at lectern; John Schweers with handouts



Michele Woods



Gloria Williams



Marg Muntz with some numbered museum objects

Compiled by Philip Morton

## Berrima District Historical & Family History Society Inc

PO Box 131 Mittagong NSW 2575 ☎ Telephone / Fax (02) 4872 2169

email: bdhsarchives@gmail.com ☎ web: www.berrimadistricthistoricalsociety.org.au

- ARCHIVES:** Cnr Old Hume Highway and Bowral Road, MITTAGONG.  
OPEN: Mondays, Tuesdays 10am-4pm and Saturdays 10am-1pm. Closed Public Holidays.  
Library collection contains reference books, journals and newsletters of other societies.
- MUSEUM:** Market Place, Berrima. Tel: 02 4877 1130. Email: bdmuseum@bigpond.com  
OPEN: 10.00am to 4.00pm, Wednesdays to Sundays, and during school and public holidays.  
**Museum Committee:** John Schweers (Manager, Tour Bookings), Harlan Hall (Project Manager),  
Lyn Hall (Graphics, Exhibitions), Sylvia Carless (Roster), Chris Moore (Artist, Children's programs),  
Judith Green (Procedures), Michele Woods (Exhibition content), Harold Wall (Human Resources).
- MEMBERSHIP:** Any person wanting to join the Society may do so at any stage during the year by completing a form  
and paying the appropriate fee. Joining Fee \$10.00 - Single \$25.00 - Family \$35.00.
- AFFILIATIONS:** Royal Australian Historical Society, NSW Association of Family History Societies,  
Museums Australia Inc & Regional Chapter.

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<b>PATRON:</b>	Mayor of Wingecarribee Shire: Councillor Larry Whipper		
<b>President:</b>	Mr Bruce MOORE	4872 3762	actmoore@bigpond.net.au
<b>Snr Vice President:</b>	Mrs Linda EMERY	4883 4271	lemery75@southernphone.com.au
<b>Jnr Vice President:</b>	Mrs Leonie KNAPMAN	4871 1804	
<b>Hon Secretary:</b>	Mr Philip MORTON	4883 7862	flipmort@bigpond.com
<b>Hon Treasurer:</b>	Mrs Patricia DORIS	4872 3313	
<b>Archivist:</b>	Mrs Linda EMERY	4883 4271	
<b>Museum Manager:</b>	Mr John SCHWEERS	4872 1660	schweers@hn.ozemail.com.au
<b>Membership:</b>	Mrs Peg HARVEY	4861 4521	
<b>Newsletter Editor:</b>	Ms Lavinia FORD	4869 4038	
<b>Research Officer:</b>	Mr Max ROGERS	4861 3526	robert.rogers2@bigpond.com

**Management Committee:** President, Vice Presidents, Secretary, Treasurer, Museum Manager, Research Officer,  
plus members Peg Harvey (Minute Secretary), Carolyn Hutton, Denyse Barker, Robyn Arrowsmith and Ros Dale

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