



Bowral



Mittagong



Berrima



Moss Vale

# BERRIMA DISTRICT HISTORICAL & FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY Inc.

Founded 1960

Located in the Wingecarribee Shire,  
Southern Highlands of NSW

ABN 29 362 616 937

## NEWSLETTER

No 534 February 2021



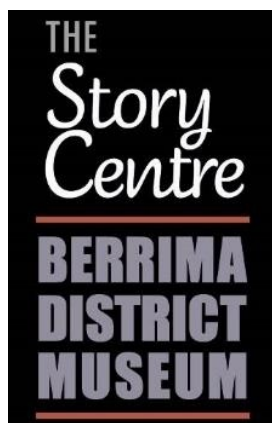
### From the President's Desk

A Happy New Year to all our members and welcome to 2021. I hope everyone had an enjoyable Christmas break with family and friends.

I think we are all pleased to see the end of 2020 with this time last year experiencing unprecedented hot weather and bushfires followed by flooding in some areas and to top it off the COVID-19 pandemic which none of us has experienced before. The year was very challenging with all the restrictions and lockdowns. Australia, the lucky country, is experiencing a much lower level of infection than most of the world, with decisive restrictions quickly put in place to contain any local outburst.

One light at the end of the tunnel is the re-opening of the Berrima Museum after being closed for about six months, now operating in a COVID-safe mode and generating some much-needed income.

The Museum team is working on the next exhibition which will be a digital display in the Williams Gallery showcasing some of the historical gardens of the Southern highlands. This project is a joint venture between the Museum and the Southern Highlands Garden History Society.



Our first Management Committee meeting for the year was held on Thursday 14 January. As a result of this meeting it has been decided, with advice from the Department of Fair Trading, to defer all general meetings including our Annual General Meeting until all restrictions have been lifted.

The Family History Group met on 3 February for its first meeting of the year. The group will continue to meet on the first Wednesday of each month at 1.00pm at the Mittagong Archives.

Our Society year ended, not with the usual end of year lunch, but a day at the Burrawang General Cemetery transcribing new headstones.

This was followed by a picnic lunch and a delicious birthday cake made by Ros Dale as a small celebration of our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, in lieu of a mid-year birthday lunch that was originally proposed.

As we launch into 2021 the world is still in the grip of the COVID-19 virus with no end in sight.

As the vaccines are rolled out around the world we wait to see if the results are favourable.



Ian Mackey

**ALL GENERAL MONTHLY MEETINGS POSTPONED TILL FURTHER NOTICE**

**The Family History Group** will meet each month on the first Wednesday at 1pm.

## Moore Memorable Musings



### COVID SHOPPING

During our demi-semi-lockdown, I've volunteered to risk life and limb, braving the traffic and crowded

shops in order to purchase our weekly groceries.

Like most males, I guess, a shopping list is indispensable, carefully vetted by my bride and briefly rehearsed in which aisle to begin and roughly where each item is kept.

All of this sounds pretty anal, but keep in mind my main tactic is to spend as little time as possible in the shop in order to keep the cost to a minimum. A case of 'hit and run' I believe. In military terms it's a 'shock manoeuvre' or 'surprise attack'.

Now on one of my shopping routine days my bride decided to help me shop. I unwisely thought it a good idea and would save time. Unleashing a trolley each (I got the one with the club wheel) we split our shopping experience into 'your side' and 'my side'. I couldn't believe how speedy this was, reaching the checkout like a Captain Flash. With a flourish I waved my magic card and unloaded \$50 worth of goods into the car.

There was no sign of the bride so I raced back inside to pull her out of the ice cream chest freezer, and help thaw her out. Luckily, she was still searching the 'special' racks.

To my surprise her trolley was packed to the gunwales with stuff that wasn't even on the list.

'What's this?' I enquired.

'Oh, it's called an air purifier, ready for the fire season', she announced.

'Just what we needed', I chirped sarcastically. 'And all those towels?'

'They're on special along with these 1000 thread Egyptian cotton sheets.'

Stunned, I tried desperately to edge away from that special counter and shimmy more toward the milk section. 'Oh, look, we need a battery-driven hedge clipper'.

And so finally we reached the checkout. 'That will be \$3876 & 40c, cash or card?' 'We'll have to sell the house!' I retorted.

**Bruce Moore**

## Berrima District Museum

### THE STORY CENTRE

1a Market Place cnr Bryan St,  
Berrima 2577

OPEN WEDNESDAY TO SUNDAY  
10.00am to 4.00pm throughout the  
year. This includes during school and  
public holiday periods. Closed  
Christmas Day and New Year's Day.

Groups welcome at other times by  
arrangement. Ph John 4854 0165.

Museum: Phone 4877 1130 or  
email [bdmuseum@bigpond.com](mailto:bdmuseum@bigpond.com)

Managed and operated by members  
of our Society who volunteer their  
time and expertise.

### Archives' opening hours

Monday 10:00 am – 4:00 pm

Tuesday 10:00 am – 4:00 pm

Saturday 10:00 am – 1:00 pm

## Membership Details

Please note that all membership  
enquiries and changes of address  
details should be addressed to:

The Membership Secretary  
c/- the Society's postal address  
or email: [bdhsarchives@gmail.com](mailto:bdhsarchives@gmail.com)

### Arrangements re pandemic

#### PLEASE NOTE:

While our Archives/Research Centre  
at Mittagong is once again open to  
the public, those wishing to visit are  
asked to make contact beforehand so  
their attendance can be scheduled,  
thus allowing us to keep numbers  
within the current prescribed limits.  
Visitors must sign in on entry.

Visitors to the Museum at Berrima  
are required to sign in and out, and to  
observe social distancing. Our staff  
are dedicated to maintaining hygiene  
and well-being measures.



**A SIGN OF THE TIMES.** Ian Mackey cuts the Society's 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary cake at Burrawang Cemetery in December 2020, with members Jenny Higgins and Frank Mitchell in background. Perhaps our 70<sup>th</sup> can be more extravagant!



## If these walls could speak

Linda Emery

Houses are more than just bricks and mortar. They are 'containers of life' and the stories of those who have lived, laughed and loved in them bring the history of a building to life.

The Dreier Collection of postcards in the archives includes a lovely image of Mittagong Road and The Gib after a heavy snowfall in August 1939 which shows a cottage on the corner of Victoria Street.



Long-time residents of Bowral will remember the house as a lovely, well-cared for building, now sadly sitting marooned on the edge of a future building site, surrounded by steel perimeter fencing and slowly deteriorating (the photo below taken in 2002).



The Society often undertakes house history research, so before this particular house disappears altogether, I thought we should put together its story.

The land was originally part of the Oxley Estate and later part of a large parcel of land purchased by Patrick Lindesay Crawford Shepherd, who subdivided it in the 1880s. William Star Rays, a farmer from Glenquarry, bought a large lot from Shepherd on the corner of Victoria Street and Mittagong Road which he in turn sub-divided into four building blocks – who thought development in Bowral was a recent phenomenon?

One of the lots was bought by Charles McDonald in 1895 who had the house built as his family home, possibly by his brother William who was a builder.

The house remained in the McDonald family for the next 90 years, passing down through three generations. Charles McDonald had come to Bowral with his parents Samuel and Mary Ann in about 1870 when the township was just a few years old. He established a successful carrying business in Bong Bong Street and with his wife Elizabeth (nee Moore) raised a family of five children. Charles died in 1937, only a week after one of his sons, Clem, died from pneumonia, with just one of his children surviving him, Newton Alonzo McDonald who inherited the house.

Except for a few years during World War 2 when Newton served in the AIF in the Northern Territory, he lived in the house from the age of two until his death in 1950. He and his wife Ruby had their share of tragedy, losing two of their six children within weeks of each other in 1945 – their second daughter Lorraine at the age of 25 and a son, Bill, who was shot down over Belgium while serving with the RAAF. The house must have been a sad place at that time.

After Ruby's death in 1976, the house passed to two of her children, Joy and Alan. It was rented for some years and finally passed out of McDonald ownership in 1988.

## A tribute to member Maxine Gray

Maxine Rose Gray, our Society member of 13 years, sadly passed away on 11 November 2020.

A knowledgeable and passionate researcher of family history, Maxine was a regular visitor at the Archives and an enthusiastic member of the Family History Group. She shared her vast experience of family history and offered constructive ideas on strategies for solving those difficult problems. On occasions Maxine gave informative talks, her last being early in 2020 on Cornwall in England.

Maxine was born in Penshurst, Sydney on 10 August 1936. She attended Penshurst and Hurstville Public Schools and St George Girls High School. Secretarial work was her career path until she married in 1959. During the next few years three children were born at her home in Engadine, with further abodes in Canberra, Maitland, Peakhurst and the Southern Highlands from 2007. Throughout her life Maxine had a thirst for knowledge and a passion for learning.

She will be sadly missed by all.

Denise Mackey



## The de Mestre family and Garryowen story

Ian Mackey

In our last newsletter it was stated that we would be doing an article on private hospitals in our district, in particular *Garryowen* Elizabeth Street, Moss Vale. On carrying out research into the local hospitals, the de Mestre family came to light as former residents of *Garryowen* prior to it becoming a private hospital.

The de Mestre family have a colourful and interesting past and we will trace their arrival into Australia, their transition from Sydney to the Shoalhaven, then on to the Southern Highlands and their connection to *Garryowen*. There are descendants of the de Mestre family still living in our district.

Prosper de Mestre senior was born in 1789 in Lorent, Brittany, the son of a French Army officer Andre Charles and his wife Helene. In 1791 Andre, accompanied by his family, was transferred with his regiment to Martinique in the Caribbean. His father was killed during a battle there in 1794. Prosper and his mother later went to America, where Prosper was educated in Philadelphia.

Prosper arrived in Sydney on 6 April 1818 on board the three-mast schooner *Magnet*, having sailed from Calcutta. Of French lineage, but an American citizen he was regarded as the first American merchant to open a permanent business in Sydney. His nationality was not then questioned. At the time the East India Company held a monopoly on the local sea trade, but de Mestre, who was regarded as an alien, was not bound by the Company's charter.

On 1 March 1821, de Mestre married 20-year-old Mary Ann Black. Mary Ann was the step-daughter of Simeon Lord, Sydney's most influential and wealthy emancipist merchant. Prosper and his wife Mary Ann had 10 children born between 1821 and 1842, including Etienne Livingstone de Mestre who will be the subject of our next section.

Prosper soon established his business on land in George Street, Sydney opposite Wynyard Railway Station, which is still called *de Mestre Place*. With the colony's tea trade concentrating in de Mestre's domain, Edward Eager, a rival merchant, tried to ruin de Mestre by legal action, relying on an old statute that prohibited foreigners from trading in the colonies. De Mestre stood to forfeit all his property, one third of which would go to Eager as the informer. However de Mestre had a legal trick up his sleeve. Eager was an emancipist and as a former convict he was technically banned from suing in the local courts.

De Mestre's argument prevailed and his business continued to thrive.

Although assimilated into Australian life, de Mestre, as a foreigner, was open to attack by his business rivals, so in 1825 he applied for naturalization. This was a complex process called denization. It first required the Governor's approval, then a special act for each applicant to be passed by the Legislative Council. In June 1825, William Charles Wentworth won Governor Brisbane's approval for the colony's first denization statutes, for two American nationals, Timothy Gordon Pitman and Prosper de Mestre.

Sir Thomas Brisbane promised de Mestre a grant of land in 1824, comprising 1300 acres selected by him on the southern bank of the Shoalhaven River. After application the land was not surveyed until 1829 and the selection was transferred into document form by Lieutenant Ralph Darling in March 1829. De Mestre formally took possession and indicated that he had already established a stockyard and ran cattle on the property. As no objections were raised, Governor Sir Richard Bourke signed the Deed of Grant in February 1836. The property was named Terrara, though recorded as Terar in the Register of Land Grants and in 1835 Terara. De Mestre obtained another 1280 acres granted by Governor Gibbs in February 1841 situated about 10k west of Terara.

In those days the countryside was in almost virgin state and covered with a dense mass of scrub and vines and it was obvious that help was needed to clear the land to fulfil the conditions of the grant. In 1837 de Mestre was assigned two convicts, Thomas Emery and Samuel Gilbert. It is likely that they were brought to the Shoalhaven to work on the estate as de Mestre's children were too young. Prosper developed the Terara holding into a farm but with the depression of the early 1840s, failing health, and despite substantial resources and influence, de Mestre's business empire failed, when he, like many others, were unable to survive the prolonged depression. By order of the Supreme Court in August 1843, the estate of de Mestre was placed under sequestration, in the hands of the Chief Commissioner of Insolvent Estates. He was forced to dispose of property in Sydney to dissolve his debts.

The demise of Prosper the merchant was accompanied by his very poor health and he died on 13 September 1844 at Terara. He was buried in a special de Mestre cemetery granted to the family. Prosper spent 26 years in NSW and saw it grow from a convict colony to a free-settlers colony. He played a significant role in this transition, but could not survive the economic depression of the 1840s.



Mary Ann lived for another 17 years at Terara. She raised her large family and created a very productive property complete with wharves, a flour mill and sawmill.

She oversaw the creation of Terara (Terrara) House (pictured below) and Millbank House, both residences owned by the de Mestre's and Dr. Thomas James Pickburn. It was Mary Ann who donated most of the funds for the construction of St. John's Church of England at Terara.



The Terara area was troubled by floods and in January 1860 a flood washed away the wharves built by the de Mestre's. This did not retard the progress of the Terara village which by 1869 had more than five times the inhabitants than nearby Nowra. Terara then boasted nine hotels, four general stores, town hall, post office, butcher's shop run by de Mestres, two banks, flour mill, iron foundry, a newspaper, a school as well as doctors, chemists, dentists and lawyers. After another disastrous flood in 1870, however, Terara slowly declined.



## ETIENNE DE MESTRE AND HIS HORSES

The de Mestre property continued with cattle and crops but the interest of sixth child Etienne Livingstone de Mestre, born in Sydney on 9 April 1832, was in horses. He was an excellent rider and at the age of 15 won the main event at the Bathurst races on his own horse, *Sweetheart*.

In his twenties he set up a horse stud, stables and race track where he conducted unofficial race meetings. Etienne earned himself a reputation as an exceptional trainer and was in high demand.



In 1859 Etienne had charge of the horse *Veno* which won the first inter-colonial challenge race in Melbourne. The horse belonged to George Taylor Rowe, who owned a property at Lower Mittagong and was destined to become de Mestre's father-in-law 14 years later. That challenge race is said to have inspired the running of the first Melbourne Cup in 1861.

In 1861 and 1862 Etienne won the first two Melbourne Cups with the horse *Archer*, owned by Tom Roberts of Exeter Farm, Braidwood. The jockey on both occasions was John Cutts.

Tom Roberts had a Southern Highlands connection – his mother Ann nee Badgery was a sister of Andrew Badgery who established Exeter Farm.

Seen here is a painting of *Archer* at Flemington after winning the first Melbourne Cup in 1861. On the left are trainer Etienne de Mestre and owner Tom Roberts (holding the reins), with Cutts in the saddle.

The artist is unidentified but thought to be Frederick Woodhouse. At right is the third placegetter, *Prince*.

The images on this page are from the book 'The Master's Touch: Racing with Etienne de Mestre - Winner of Five Melbourne Cups', by Keith W Paterson, Nowra (2008).

***The story of Etienne and the de Mestre family will continue next month, including that they enjoyed a very happy social life in the Southern Highlands.***

## The Bowral Free Press and its struggles

A history of the district's newspapers, provided as a series in this newsletter from July to October 2020, concludes here. As noted previously, newspapers were published at Moss Vale, Mittagong and Bowral from the 1880s and circulated district-wide. The first of these, *The Scrutineer and West Camden Advocate* was commenced at Moss Vale in April 1874 by a young man from the coast, William McCourt.

*The Bowral Free Press and Mittagong, Burrawang and Kangaloon Advocate*, first appeared on 7 July 1883. The Bowral-based paper was established by William Webb and came out on Saturdays at a cost of 4 pence. In March 1884 Webb sold the newspaper and business, including a lending library and print shop, to brothers William and Daniel Beer.

The brothers were sons of Elizabeth and Eli Beer, early local settlers. Eli had a successful career with the railways and purchased land on the western slope of The Gib, naming the property 'Mt Gibraltar'. An outline of the early years of the *Free Press* under the Beer brothers was provided in our October issue, including that William retired as a partner in February 1885, leaving his younger brother Daniel as sole proprietor, editor and manager of the printery, stationers, photo studio and library. Daniel applied his considerable skills to the enterprise, even though his health was gradually failing due to consumption (tuberculosis), which he had succumbed to after a drenching on a Christmas outing in 1882.

With the *Free Press* attracting a wide readership, in September 1885 Daniel turned to the rapidly growing township of Mittagong, where no paper existed, and established his second newspaper, *The Mittagong Mail* published on Wednesdays. Four months later he sold the paper to J C Murphy who changed its day of publication to Thursday. The paper continued to do well and was renamed *The Southern Mail* in 1887.

After the sale, Daniel Beer then concentrated on his Bowral businesses, relocating into larger premises on Bong Bong Street, and in March 1886 launched *Beer's Royal Monthly*, an illustrated magazine circulated for free throughout the district until 1890, when it became a supplement within the *Free Press*.

In 1886 Daniel married Emily Ada West at Newtown. They had two children – Estelle and Frank – and lived at the Free Press Buildings.

From 15 October 1887 the *Free Press* again came out twice a week – it had reverted to a weekly while Daniel was producing the Mittagong paper.

The Bowral business continued successfully but by 1889 Daniel's health had so deteriorated that he could no longer do the literary work. His brother William, who had originally been joint proprietor, filled the gap. He had remained in Bowral, and in the print and publishing trade, having purchased other premises in Bong Bong St, living there with his wife Christina and three sons. With Daniel struggling to cope, however, William had gradually played a more active role in managing the *Free Press* business.

Together they handled the commercial aspects of the business, by then facing increased competition. They were under threat from *The Scrutineer* which had become a twice-weekly, district-wide paper, and from *The Southern Mail* which had expanded from its base at Mittagong. J C Murphy, who had bought the *Mittagong Mail* from Daniel Beer in 1886 and renamed it *The Southern Mail*, had also established the *Robertson Advocate*, *Moss Vale Record* and *Mittagong Express* papers. All these papers owned by Murphy were purchased in 1893 by a group of newspaper men who by 1901 had opened offices in Bowral and branded their *Southern Mail* as 'the Berrima District paper'.

This paper, renamed *The Four Mails*, became the district's dominant paper from the 1920s. In 1961 it was merged with a newly established paper, the *Southern Highland News*. This remains as the only local paper today, and can thus trace its origins via the mergers mentioned above back to the Mittagong paper started by Daniel Beer in 1885.

### Untimely death of Daniel Beer

On 7 November 1891 the *Bowral Free Press* conveyed the sad news that Daniel Luther Beer, aged 28 years, had died of tuberculosis.

"The melancholy news reached Bowral yesterday morning that Daniel Beer, proprietor of the *Bowral Free Press*, had died at Young, whither he had gone six months ago in the hope of prolonging a life which was, alas, already too near its termination. The news was not unexpected, but nevertheless caused poignant grief to relatives, and called forth expressions of sincere sympathy from a very large circle of sorrowing friends."

"Neither youth nor an originally robust constitution could withstand the direful effects of the dread disease. After a few months of suffering, Daniel, a hitherto strong and vigorous man with a robust constitution, became a complete invalid. The last two years of his life were further embittered and made more painful to himself through his extreme weakness, bringing on partial deafness."

Fearing the winter in Bowral, and acting on medical advice, Daniel had moved to Young, but the change of climate did not help, and his relations held out no hope of his return. The sad news article concluded that his last moments were soothed by the presence of his wife, a sister and younger brother. His remains were brought to Bowral, and interred in the Wesleyan cemetery.

Daniel's widow, Emily Ada Beer, was executrix of her husband's estate and from the *Free Press* issue of 11 November was shown as printer and publisher. Her chief editor for eight months was G S Beeby who later became a Sydney judge. In October 1893, wishing to retire from the business, Emily put the paper up for sale but received no suitable offers.

In 1895 William Beer once again came to the rescue, returning as proprietor of the *Free Press* businesses.

He and his wife Christina were deeply committed Methodists. He was a trustee in Bowral for many years and also attended Wesleyan Band of Hope meetings at Goulburn. As well, he was appointed in 1891 as treasurer of the local Salvation Army branch, of which his younger sister Miriam was a member.



**The Beer family at their 'Mt Gibraltar' property, c1895.**

Back from left: William, Miriam, Emily Ada (Daniel's widow), Emily and Robert. Front: Christina and parents Eli and Elizabeth Beer.

In September 1895 the *Free Press* printing plant was moved to William's premises. The 14 September issue was the last published by Emily A Beer and thereafter William was shown as the proprietor. He must have set about building up the advertising base and circulation, for in 1896 the Wednesday issues were enlarged from two to four pages.

As noted earlier, *The Scrutineer* based at Moss Vale and *The Southern Mail* originating at Mittagong had emerged as strong competitors for district-wide newspaper circulation.

To appear to be representing the wider district, in April 1901 William Beer changed his paper's name to *The Bowral and Robertson Free Press*. He reverted back in November, however, and under the *Bowral Free Press* mast-head, stated that the paper also circulated in towns including Berrima, Mittagong, Robertson, Moss Vale and Burrawang. He affirmed that the paper was an advocate of free-trade policy. In 1902 he moved his plant and office to new premises in Bong Bong St.

On 31 March 1906, William changed the name again to the *Wollondilly Press*. His stated aim was to provide better value by extending the paper's scope to take in the whole district. The size of the Saturday issue was increased to six pages.

Christina, William's wife, died in 1910, aged 52. Born near Goulburn in 1858 she had been a resident of Bowral for 23 years. The *Scrutineer* described her as "a woman who endeared herself to all". She had been prominent in the Bowral Methodist Church and an enthusiastic worker for the local YWCA.

William published the *Wollondilly Press* until 27 June 1914. His health was failing and perhaps competition had worn him down. His printing plant and premises in Bowral were bought by the owners of the *Southern Mail*, who thus removed a rival from their path.

William moved to Nambucca Heads to reside with his youngest brother Robert. His health further declined and in January 1920 his son Stanley escorted him back to the old home in Bowral where, on 25 May, he died in the loving care of his sister Miriam.

An obituary on 28 May 1920 in the *Southern Mail*, ironically his old rival, stated: "There passed away one of Bowral's identities in the person of William Beer, at the old family home 'The Gib'. He was 65 years of age, being born in London in 1854. He leaves three sons to mourn the loss of a devoted and affectionate father: Arthur William (manager for Theo King, King St, Sydney), Percy Charles (of the *Tweed Daily*, Mullumbimby), and Stanley Robert (Photographic Studios, Sydney). After the service at the house, the cortege proceeded to the old Methodist Cemetery at Burradoo, where his remains were laid beside those of his late wife."

Here ends the saga of William and Daniel Beer, two of the district's influential newspaper operators and sons of the pioneering Beer family. For those interested, a complete set of digitised *Bowral Free Press* and *Wollondilly Press* issues may be viewed on the Trove website and hard copies are stored as conserved items at our archives.

*Compiled by Philip Morton*

## Berrima District Historical & Family History Society Inc

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

email: bdhsarchives@gmail.com ☎ web: [www.berrimadistricthistoricalsociety.org.au](http://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 a general collection.
- MUSEUM:** Market Place, Berrima. Tel: 02 4877 1130. Email: [bdmuseum@bigpond.com](mailto:bdmuseum@bigpond.com)  
OPEN: 10.00am to 4.00pm, Wednesdays to Sundays throughout the year. This includes during school and public holiday periods.
- 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, Museums Australia Inc and NSW Association of Family History Societies.

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### BERRIMA DISTRICT HISTORICAL & FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY Inc.

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**Museum Sub-Committee:** John Schweers (Manager), Harlan Hall (Project Manager), Lyn Hall (Graphics, Exhibitions), Sylvia Carless (Roster), Harold Wall (Human Resources).

**PATRON:** Mayor of Wingecarribee Shire, Councillor Duncan Gair