



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 546 March 2022



### From the President's Desk

Welcome to your Society newsletter for March. Without labouring the point too much, it is a great relief that life is returning to pre-COVID normal.

General mask wearing and QR check-in requirements for retail, cafes and restaurants have been lifted.

At our Christmas lunch in the Hermitage restaurant Linda Emery presented an interesting history of the Marist Brothers Mittagong. Linda's presentation is reproduced on page 3.

Our Berrima District Museum is now open three days each week, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, beginning from 4 March. The present exhibition in the Williams Gallery, *Gardens and Landscapes of the Southern Highlands, Then and Now* is creating much interest and is a must see for members and friends.

On Wednesday 9 February, I together with Linda Emery attended a meeting with Wingecarribee Shire Council to discuss the progress with the design of the upgrade to our home at the Old Council Chambers building, Mittagong. We were advised that due to the extensive alterations planned it will be necessary to relocate our Society to temporary premises away from the construction site.

Suitable premises are currently being assessed.

Important books, newspapers and documents will be relocated offsite in a safe storage facility. This temporary relocation could be for a period of 12 months. Every effort will be made to maintain the day to day operation of our Society.

Beginning on page 5 is the final chapter on a history of the Old Council Chambers/Memorial Hall complex at Mittagong.

Our general meetings will recommence on 24 March at 2:00 pm upstairs at our Mittagong Archives. The meeting will include a much-anticipated presentation by Bud Townsing on his collection of glass slides taken in 1891 which he recently purchased.

At a recent Wingecarribee Shire Council meeting approval was granted for a new 21-year lease for our Society. This new lease covers our imminent relocation to the first floor of our building. A copy of the lease has been received for review and signing.

We appreciate receiving items of historical interest from members and comments on newsletter articles from readers. Our thanks to members Glenda Miskelly and Bernadette Mahony for their content in this issue.

Ian Mackey

### SCHEDULED GENERAL MONTHLY MEETINGS 2022

**MARCH 2022:** Thursday 24 March at 2:00pm

**SPEAKER:** Bud Townsing with 50 Magic Lantern slides of an 1891 NSW/Qld tour

**APRIL 2022:** Thursday 28 April at 2:00pm

**SPEAKER:** Linda Emery with another in her "Captured in the Light" series

**AFTERNOON TEA** is served following the speaker

The **Family History Interest Group** meets at the Mittagong Archives on the first Wednesday each month, at 1pm

THE  
Story  
Centre  
**BERRIMA  
DISTRICT  
MUSEUM**

## Moore Memorable Musings



### Christmas Cards – a thing of the past?

What a world of change we're experiencing. Apart from the pandemic over the last couple of

years, there has been an upsurge of minority groups trying to change our time-honoured ways of celebrating.

In the US, many schools have banned the word Christmas from their vocabulary. Cutting down the traditional pine tree is one thing (appeasing the US Forestry Dept) but calling it a Holiday Tree is another story. In some states Christmas carols are banned altogether.

I'm sad and most perplexed by the lack of Christmas cards to add to our decorations. We received a miserable handful, two of which we sent to each other. Was it something we said?

Gone are the days when we cut and folded our own stack of cards. The fun was using Print-Gocco or silk screening a fresh batch, waiting for the paint to dry before writing a personal note on the inside of each one. Addressing the envelopes and carefully sticking the designed Christmas stamps in the corner was fun.

The excitement mounted as the postie delivered several cards to us each day.

Dangling over string across the lounge room was a tribute to friends and relatives who took the time to care.

My parents used to stand their cards on the piano lid. Each time the outside door opened, they usually blew off and any spare children would rush to collect and re-set them.

My mother was horrified that the (nosey) Parkers across the road displayed their numerous cards poked through their lounge room venetian blinds, on show for the whole world to see! "How crass!" she commented.

Today the world has gone digitally mad. The result being no more cards, no letters about the family, no travelogues, no personal messages and, most of all, nothing in the letterbox to expectantly open.

What has caused this lack of caring? It's easy to blame the internet, Covid, anxiety, fear, postage prices, ScoMo, share prices, Putin, etc. Perhaps around Christmas time we could turn off our self-absorption channel and re-set our empathy buttons?

Bruce Moore

## Berrima District Museum

### THE STORY CENTRE

1a Market Place cnr Bryan St, Berrima

### NOW OPEN FRIDAY to SUNDAY

#### HOURS

10.00am to 4.00pm. This includes during school and public holiday periods. Closed Christmas 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)



## Lone Pine, Moss Vale Walkway

Members Glenda and Paul Miskelly recently moved to Moss Vale, and have let us know that they found something of historical interest at the rear of their place on Whites Reserve.

Below is a photo collage supplied by Glenda, showing a plaque that was uncovered at the base of a large pine tree, bearing the inscription:

*"This Lone Pine is in memory of those who gave their lives in war for their country. It is a seedling from seeds of pines that grew in area of Gallipoli".*

Glenda says that the tree had slipped into obscurity as the identifying plinth was only stumbled across when a neighbour cut back the overgrown area with his whipper snipper.

She was curious to know more about the project of planting trees. "You would think that if they exist then they would be at cenotaphs and the like, but this is just in an overgrown

corner next to a large (and laden) blackberry bush."

Linda Emery has informed her that seedlings of these Lone Pines trees were grown in Canberra and planted in a number of places.

The tree and plinth at Moss Vale are located on the Roy Baker Walkway, and Roy was active in having it planted. He served as Shire Engineer from 1962 to 1985 with Wingecarribee Shire Council.

His dream of creating the walkway along White's Creek was made a reality by Moss Vale Rotary Club just prior to his death in 2003.

More in next month's issue.



## March Speaker: Bud Townsing

As noted on the front page, our monthly meetings are resuming this month. The Society is pleased to have member Bud Townsing as our speaker at the March meeting.

Recently Bud purchased a collection of 50 glass slides produced in 1891 by Richard F Lean of Lithgow, being of scenes taken while on a tour through New South Wales and Queensland. Bud also tracked down a 21-page booklet published by Lean in 1891, held at the State Library of NSW, that provides a descriptive lecture by Lean of the photographic tour.



Lean's slides will be shown by Bud along with reading lecture extracts and providing some historical details.

Our speaker has many interests and commitments, including being the curator/co-ordinator of *Gardens and Landscapes of the Southern Highlands, Then & Now*, the new exhibition at Berrima District Museum assembled in conjunction with the Australian Garden History Society (AGHS) Southern Highlands Branch. Details were provided in our December newsletter.

Bud's keen interest in photography and its history was inspired by the life and photographic works of W A 'Gus' Nicholas. Bud and his late wife Maureen published two books showcasing the works of Nicholas, plus others including photographic studies featuring Bowral streetscapes and properties.

Bud has collected early photographic equipment, including stereoscopic viewers and a magic lantern once used to show images from glass slides. At the meeting, he hopes to demonstrate the magic lantern by showing some slides from the old equipment.

Please consider attending this unique experience.

## Marist Brothers at Mittagong

Linda Emery

Marist Brothers Hermitage, on Old South Road, Mittagong, was the venue for our 2021 Christmas lunch. Guests enjoyed the occasion in the beautiful rural setting with excellent meals and great service.

On the day, Linda Emery gave a short talk about the brothers' history on the site. In response to a member request, her speech is reproduced here.



The Marist Brothers had been established in Sydney since 1872. In 1905 they purchased this 155-hectare property from Dr Edwin Chisholm for £2,300. You may know Chisholm's Hill at Burradoo – it is named for Dr Chisholm who built Abergeldie on the corner of Moss Vale and Burradoo Roads.

The reason for the purchase was to establish a novitiate for young men being prepared to become Marist Brothers. It was named Our Lady of the Hermitage in honour of the Mother House of the brothers near Lyons in France built by the founder of the order, St Marcellin Champagnat.

When the first of the brothers arrived in Mittagong in December 1905, after a three day walk from Sydney, they moved into the only cottage on the site, Rose Hill Cottage (also known as Rowe's Hill). They established the farm and began preparations for a new building for the novitiate. Work began during 1906 on the attractive two storey building that features wooden arches and a louvred bell tower.

Bricks for the building came from Cornwall's brickworks at Balaclava using clay taken from the bed of a stream that crossed Bong Bong Road.

The first novices, with Brother Stanislaus as the novice master, arrived in Mittagong in November 1906 to find that their accommodation was far from complete. Along with some of the ten farm Brothers, they lived in Rose Hill Cottage, while others had the use of a house on a nearby property as well as some galvanised iron sheds near the new building.

Conditions were tough to say the least, especially once winter set in. The novices finally moved into the new building in September 1907.

The Brothers were largely self-sufficient. They developed the dairy farm, with milk sent to Sydney every day providing an income. They slaughtered their own meat, the vegetable gardens provided fresh produce and orchards were planted in 1912, mostly apples, which again were sent to the Sydney market.

They embarked on a building program that included the completion of the chapel, and a building for the senior brothers in 1910.

At the end of 1917, a decision was taken by the Superior of the Marists to transfer the Juniorate from Sydney to Mittagong. The order was especially dedicated to the education of children and young people and the Juniorate provided accommodation and education for boys who wished to become Marist Brothers but had not yet completed their secondary schooling. The boys ranged in age from as young as 11 or 12 to 17. In order to be accepted into the Novitiate, boys generally had to have completed the equivalent of the leaving certificate.

The juniorate at that time was at St Joseph's College at Hunters Hill. Thirty-six juniors had gone from there to Mittagong for a holiday, but at the end of the vacation they received word that they would not be returning to Sydney.

The Mittagong brothers were unprepared for this and the first six months were very difficult. There were no laundry facilities, no hot water and inadequate toilet and bathroom facilities. They did the washing in the yard using a copper and an old bath tub perched on bricks.

Even after conditions improved, facilities remained spartan – the juniors were to become 'real men – no heating, limited contact with their family and plenty of hard work'. But it wasn't all work and no play. The boys went on long walks, as far afield as Fitzroy and Belmore Falls, and Macquarie Pass.

In the 1920s they ran a program of rabbit eradication and bird trapping in the orchard. The boys were also responsible for wood chopping, grubbing stumps, looking after the flower and vegetable gardens and working in the kitchen.

The Novices and Juniors shared the same building, but it was cramped and more accommodation had to be found. In 1922 large two storey additions were made to the original building, including classrooms, a new kitchen, laundry, boiler room, shower block, a laboratory, meat room and workers' quarters, as well as a cottage for the Chaplain. The following year, a third storey was added to one of the wings.

As the numbers grew, so did the buildings. Additions were made to the Farm Brothers house to convert it to a separate Novitiate and in 1926, the novices moved in. They were not there for long – in 1929 a fire almost completely destroyed the new novitiate and they had to move back into the Juniorate until it was rebuilt.

Teacher training also took place here from 1931 until 1942, preparing brothers to take up roles in Marist Brothers schools. In 1931, the brothers acquired an additional 420 acres from the Webb family. The novices and postulants did all the work necessary to keep the property running as well as the household jobs and cooking.

After providing schooling and early preparation for religious life for close to 60 years, the Juniorate closed in 1973. Hundreds of boys had the benefit of a healthy rural lifestyle and education during that time. The property was renamed the Marist Retreat Centre and was used for school retreats.

In 1984, the Novitiate closed at Mittagong and was transferred to Winston Hills. This part of the Marist property became known as The Farmhouse and became a spirituality centre for young adults.

In the Centenary year of the brothers at Mittagong 2006 – the Marist Centre and the Marist Farmhouse were restructured to form The Hermitage.

This has been a brief timeline of what has taken place here over the years. If you would like to know more, we have the excellent history in our library, 'A Hermitage in the South', written by Brother Tony Butler for the centenary of the Marist Brothers in Mittagong. The book is a comprehensive history with lots of wonderful photographs, including the one provided here.



**Postulants working at the Juniorate woodheap, c1951, watched by two brothers in the background**

## More about Victor Charles Bradman

In last month's newsletter article on Victor Bradman, it stated that he was the second child of George and Emily Bradman, with Islet and Lillian being younger sisters. Born in 1904, he was actually the fourth child after Islet (1894) Lillian (1899) and Elizabeth (1901), with Donald (1908) the youngest.

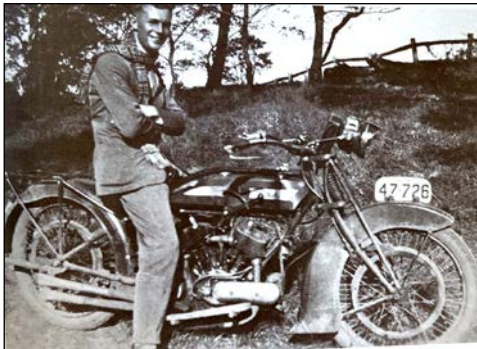
Member Bernadette Mahony of Kangaloon, who has a particular interest in the history of the Bradman and Whatman families, advised us of this error by email. She also pointed out that although "Victor certainly played a lot of tennis and was instrumental in the local tennis association, the article suggested that he didn't play much cricket and gave it up for tennis, whereas he played both for many years. He was quite successful at cricket - just not as successful as his little brother."

Local newspaper reports do reveal that Vic's cricketing skills were often lauded, for example in *The Southern Mail* of 3 October 1930: "Bradman Makes a Century! The cricket season opened brilliantly on Glebe Oval, Bowral, on Saturday, when Bowral First Grade met the Rovers in the opening match of the season. Vic Bradman, brother of the redoubtable Don, made 101."



As Editor and compiler of the Vic Bradman article, I, Philip Morton, apologise and thank Bernadette for providing extra information, including that in his 20s Victor was a keen motor cyclist and cycle agent.

Vic put the following notice in *The Southern Mail* in January 1926: "Motor Cyclists. Mr V C Bradman announces that he has recently been appointed local agent for the famous BSA and Harley-Davidson motor cycles. All intending buyers would be wise to procure particulars from him before deciding." That year in October the same paper advised that Victor had been elected as honorary secretary of Bowral Cycle Club.



The two photos above are from *Bradman: The Illustrated Biography*, Michael Page, Wakefield Press, 1983 (via Tim McCartney)

## A Building at the heart of Mittagong

The Old Council Chambers building in Mittagong is where our Society has its archives, research centre and meeting rooms. The complex also includes the Playhouse Theatre. Following here is the third and final part of our history of the building.

As noted previously, the building is a composite of three structures – at its core is the two-storey School of Arts building of 1899, behind it is the Hall erected in 1911, and at the front is a two-storey addition built in 1954 as offices and chambers for Mittagong Shire Council and the local Electricity Authority.



The addition of 1954 (seen above at right, c1960) was designed by architect Eric Nicholls as a wedge-shaped structure on the 'pointy' end of the block facing the Memorial Clock Tower, replacing a garden. The new structure was attached to, and integrated with, the original School of Arts building, which in turn was adjoined to the Hall at its rear by means of a new 8-foot, two-storey section, large enough to contain the two staircases and toilet amenities.

File notes provided to the BDHS in 2001 by Greg Elliot (his father having been a Shire councillor in 1954) include that most of the stone used in the new, wedge-shaped section was obtained from the demolition of the side wall of the School of Arts Hall, removed as part of the alterations works. Other stone as required was obtained from a local quarry. Some of the demolished stones, being 300mm thick, were cut in half in order to create as many blocks as possible to dress the new extension. Old and new stones can be identified by the different colours.

When Council meetings were held after completion, speakers found that traffic noise from the Hume Highway outside, particularly trucks and semi-trailers, often drowned out their voices. The architect overcame this by installing electrical air extraction fans in each of the upstairs Council Chambers windows (six in all).



Greg's notes conclude with the anecdote that, a short time after completion, the letters spelling out "HMAS Bradman" appeared on the stonework of the building at its sharp end (ie, the bows of a ship).

The old School of Arts Hall, after being structurally integrated with the main building and renovated, was renamed Mittagong Memorial Hall, dedicated to the fallen of two World Wars, and in June 1955 was officially re-opened by Cr Bradman. In his address, Cr Bradman pointed out that the citizens of the shire would be forever grateful to the School of Arts Committee for its generosity in donating its assets to enable the completion of the new building complex.



Prior to it becoming the Memorial Hall, this photo taken outside the Mittagong School of Arts Hall in February 1947 shows the cast of a production it housed, Misha Burlakov's "First Australian Ballet".

The original, 'elegant' School of Arts building of 1899, at the core of the new complex, ended up being barely recognisable from the outside, sandwiched as it was between the new addition and Memorial Hall. It did, however, continue to house the library and reading room in its downstairs area, run by School of Arts volunteers. Its large upstairs area was converted into a Supper Room, accessed by the new stairways.

Mittagong Shire Council, once settled in its new Chambers and administrative offices from 1954, carried on with its work of local government. Its actions and decisions during this period include the opening of Mittagong Baths and Caravan Park in 1960, the building of footpaths at Welby in 1960, and dealing with water supply problems in 1964.

In January 1977 the *Highlands Post* reported that Mittagong Shire Council had taken out a loan of \$225,000 with the Commonwealth Savings Bank. "The money will be used to assist with provision of settlement of aged persons at Harbison Memorial Home, the public library, alterations to the branch library, provision of library books, an amenities block and improvements at Kangaloon Public Reserve, and Mittagong public baths improvements. These funds are in addition to the \$100,000 for general works already made available by the Bank this financial year."

The library expenditure specified above included the relocating of the adult section from the Council Chambers to the building in Queen Street that, from 1944, had housed a children's library, being the former Mittagong Public School. This elegant, heritage-listed sandstone building had been built in 1877 and was extensively renovated in its centenary year of 1977.

Despite its many achievements from 1954, Mittagong Shire Council was on a downward slide by 1980, with constant disagreements among councillors. Five of them, a so-called 'majority faction', boycotted meetings. The *Highlands Post* reported on 24 October 1980 that "an administrator will have to be appointed to control Mittagong Shire Council following the resignation of a fifth councillor that has caused Mittagong Council's collapse. Because there is now an insufficient number of councillors remaining to form a quorum, the Council will be declared a 'defaulting area' under the Local Government Act. There will be no election in Mittagong to replace the councillors who have resigned, because elections for the district's new amalgamated Council are due in December."

After it was proclaimed a defaulting area, Cr Jim Gasson, then serving as President of Mittagong Shire Council, was appointed as its administrator.

The proposal to amalgamate Bowral Municipal Council, Moss Vale/Wingecarribee Shire Council and Mittagong Shire Council into the one district-wide Council, to achieve greater administrative efficiency, had been on the State Government's agenda for some time. Referendums held in December 1980 in each town approved the amalgamation, and on 1 January 1981 the new local council, named Wingecarribee Shire Council, came into being.

The Moss Vale Council's civic centre, built in 1971, became the headquarters of the new amalgamated Council. The former Council staffs of Mittagong and Bowral were relocated there.

This freed up further space in the former Mittagong Council's building complex, the library having already vacated in 1977, as stated above. The new Shire Council became the responsible authority for the building, with its Memorial Hall and former council chamber and office space. The first new occupants were staff of the Tourist Bureau, as their premises in Winifred West Park had become cramped.

The Berrima District Historical Society also urgently needed premises for office, library, archives and workspace. Formed in 1960, it initially made use of member's homes for archive storage and workspace, holding its public meetings alternatively at Bowral and Moss Vale CWA rooms.

The Society acquired a building at Berrima that it opened as a museum in 1976 but still required office space. It approached Mittagong Council in 1975 regarding the former Public School in Queen St for Society headquarters but, as mentioned above, this instead became the town library in 1977.

In 1982 the BDHS approached the amalgamated Wingecarribee Shire Council and was granted a portion of the Old Council Chambers building at Mittagong. This consisted of an office, being 40-square metres, carpeted and with a strong room and shelving, and a storage room and archives situated in the former Shire Engineering Office. That October the Society moved into its new home with the help of Shire Council men and trucks. The Mittagong rooms became the administrative centre of the BDHS and from September 1989 its monthly meetings were held there, rather than at Bowral CWA.

With the Hume Highway just outside the door, the Mittagong building was a busy, noisy location. This changed in August 1992, the *Sydney Morning Herald* noting that the imminent opening of the Mittagong By-pass for the Hume Highway would cause an uncanny silence to settle over the town, with an estimated 14,000 trucks and cars no longer passing through.

It was the catalyst, the paper stated, for plans to revitalise the townscape, was causing considerable trepidation among local business people, and provoking furious debate over the future of the town.

"Among the more contentious issues is the future of the old Memorial Hall and former council chambers. A fortnight ago, Wingecarribee Shire Council adopted a motion resolving to demolish all the buildings comprising the former council complex including the Hall. Council also moved to invite expressions of interest for the commercial development of the site."

A Mittagong Townscape Committee, formed in 1991 by a group of citizens, lobbied for the former School of Arts/Council Chambers complex to be restored and used for community purposes. Much debate within council and the local press eventuated over the future of the building. Finally, on 6 June 1994, Wingecarribee Council voted to class the Mittagong Civic Centre as operational but guaranteeing to protect part of it for community use, in a goodwill gesture towards the Mittagong community.

The BDHS members were greatly relieved, but by the mid-1990s the Society was becoming increasingly cramped in its small rooms due to the continual growth of its collection and expanding activities. Additional space in the building was requested and this was granted in 1997 after the Tourist Office staff moved to new headquarters. The Society was given use of the ground-level rooms in the wedge-shaped, front part of the building. Council commenced a major refurbishment of the whole building in 2001 and the BDHS was also provided with the first-floor space above its ground floor room plus adjoining rooms and kitchen, and a 20-year lease signed.

The refurbishment also included an overhaul of the Memorial Hall, officially re-opened as the Mittagong Playhouse by Mayor Phil Yeo in February 2001. A tiered floor had been installed to seat 140 patrons and with further moveable seating on the flat area in front of the stage, 200 patrons could be seated. Sound, lighting and back-stage facilities were improved to make it more suitable for concerts, plays, lectures and conferences.

The upstairs supper room in the old School of Arts section was renovated and made more accessible from both ends of the building, being used as well by local groups including for rehearsals and exercise classes.

In 2006 Council named the building the Tooths History & Arts Centre, in recognition of the Tooth family's contribution towards its establishment.

Today the BDHS continues to make good use of its premises in the building, and the Playhouse has, since 2001, served as the venue for various local music, theatre and community groups and is much loved by its local patrons. Unfortunately, a problem with the Playhouse roof structure was discovered in 2020 that forced its closure until repairs are done.

Wingecarribee Shire Council is committed to a major overhaul and upgrade of the building complex which will preserve this unique asset at Mittagong for the community into the future.

*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

- 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  
AT PRESENT, OPEN: 10.00am to 4.00pm, Fridays to Sundays.  
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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