



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 568 March 2024



### From the President's Desk

What a surprisingly entertaining few weeks I have had while sitting down for each event and without going anywhere near a Taylor Swift concert. Anyone know when she will be performing here in the Highlands? Anyway, back to why I have enjoyed sitting down. Meetings have been the concrete blocks of my February as they let me bathe in the enthusiasm of others.

John Schweers our Museum Manager and I were sitting out front of our Society's Little House of Memories on a quiet Saturday morning in historic old Berrima, chatting about a proposed new exhibition based on the very long running radio program *Blue Hills* and its writer who lived here in the Highlands. (See page 3)

Conversation drifted onto our own 'stars of radio', museum volunteers Harold Wall and Vanessa Dalglish. An executive producer of SBS German radio brought his family down specifically to see our Arcady display following glowing reports from a group of German politicians who had visited and who were still raving about its quality months later.

So impressed was the radio man that he arranged to bring his recording equipment on location, where

Harold entertained him with descriptions of the life of a prisoner of war in Berrima. A podcast with Harold's stories, alongside translations in German, is now accessible to all.

Vanessa Dalglish's recent live interview on ABC Illawarra was good local advertising for our Society.

I had a couple of hours at Moss Vale's Courthouse the other day, being entertained by tales of murder and mystery from our Archivist Linda Emery along with dignitaries from the NSW Legal sector. (See page 4)

It is always busy here in the Archives and we had a good turn-out of members and visitors for our general meeting with guest speaker Dr Alan Jacobs sharing mysteries and myths of over 100 years of Freemasonry on Kangaroo Island and insights into our local Lodges.

Our archive volunteers always impress me with their commitment to researching, digitising and archiving of our images and historical data and how they calmly assist the visitors who call on them for their specialist knowledge and skills.

Looking ahead to Sunday 24 March when our Society will display some of its artifacts along with books for sale at the Antiques Roadshow at Mittagong RSL.

**Stuart Handley**

### GENERAL MONTHLY MEETINGS and EVENTS

<b>MARCH 2024</b>	<b>Thursday 28 March at 2:00pm</b>
<b>SPEAKER</b>	The life of <b>Gwen Meredith</b> , writer of ABC radio serial <i>Blue Hills</i> , a joint presentation by members Ian Mackey and Bud Townsing
	<b>AFTERNOON TEA</b> is served following the speaker

<b>APRIL 2024</b>	<b>Thursday 25 April at 2:00pm</b>
	No speaker being Anzac Day

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



## Moore Memorable Musings



### CLASSIC CLICHES

Once upon a time in a sleepy town in Australia, where a warm wind whispers ancient tales, there lies a quaint historical society,

which along with its active museum, are the custodians of stories, pictures and artefacts long forgotten.

Reading between the lines of history, this society's baby boomer members, through sheer blood, sweat and tears, are preserving past times like there's no tomorrow.

'It's an uphill battle', quoted an elderly member, 'it's better to be safe than sorry to play your cards right and record these hidden gems of history.'

An ex-president was overheard commenting, 'getting a foot in the door was my first objective. Things seemed all over the shop, however I became Jack of all trades and a master of none. I hoped I didn't bite off more than I could chew. Ignorance is bliss and I didn't want to bury my head in the sand.'

Despite all odds the society operated like a well-oiled machine. Not one member acts as if they were born with a silver spoon in their mouth.

Our newly appointed president arrived like a breath of fresh air bringing to the table an accent as thick as a London fog. Earlier he participated in one notable event, namely the Australia Day parade in Berrima, suitably decked out as a Scot. Later, he commented, 'At first I thought I was a babe in the woods, but after dipping my toe in the water you can't curb my enthusiasm now. You could say I got off on the right foot!'

The treasurer says that it's a pleasure working in the black and if the committee suggests cutting the budget, well they're barking up the wrong tree. Hope always springs eternal. 'You can't stop a dog barking', she comments. 'Sometimes it's an emotional roller-coaster here, but we are well out of the woods'.

My hat's off to our Archivist who does more than meets the eye.

'Finding names, dates, people and houses is often like looking for a needle in a haystack', she suggests. "Once in a blue moon you strike gold and that makes it all worthwhile.'

Bruce Moore

## BERRIMA DISTRICT MUSEUM

1a Marketplace cnr Bryan St, Berrima

**OPEN: FRIDAY to SUNDAY**

10.00am to 3.00pm

throughout the year including school and public holiday periods. Closed Christmas Eve, Christmas Day.

Groups welcome at other times by arrangement. Ph John 0434 623 402

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.

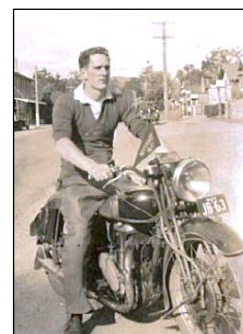
## Membership Details

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)

## Scrapbook of Motor Cycle Club

On page 7 of this issue are extracts and story about a scrapbook that belonged to the late John McColgan, a prior member. It is all about the Mittagong Motor Cycle Club 1946-49. Pictured here is John at Kangaroo Valley, 1949.



## Oral History volunteers wanted

This is a request from the BDH&FHS Management Committee for any local members with a strong interest in, or experience in undertaking oral history to consider volunteering to help build our Society's efforts with oral history projects.

We have available some suitable equipment and a list of potential candidates for interviewing.

If you are not already a volunteer at the archives or museum, you would be most welcome to join the archives team at Mittagong to learn more about what is involved.

We hope to hear from you soon.



**BACK IN TIME:** A group of Berrima District Museum volunteers in October 2013, including Gil Wheaton (2nd from right) who is now leaving the district (see p.3)



## March meeting: *Blue Hills* author

GWEN MEREDITH

An illustrated talk with audio about the ABC's *Blue Hills* radio serial and the life of its writer: **Gwen Meredith** BA, MBE, OBE (1907-2006)

This will be a joint presentation by our members Ian Mackey and Bud Townsing.



*Blue Hills* ran from 1949 to 1976 and was one of the most popular radio serials. Each episode went for 15 minutes. From 1951 it was broadcast at 1pm weekdays, following the *Country Hour* and was repeated on city stations at 6 pm. Half the radio sets on in Australia in 1950 were tuned in to each *Blue Hills* episode. Being a fusion of rural and urban concerns, the serial became an institution in Australian life with an audience in towns, cities and country.

Gwen began working for the ABC in 1943 producing a serial for the *Country Hour* called *The Lawsons*. A combination of information and drama, it became an enormous hit and 1,299 episodes had gone to air by 1949. *The Lawsons* morphed, with different characters, into *Blue Hills* which then became Australia's longest running radio show, with 5,975 episodes from 1949 to 1976.



Gwen and her husband, Ainsworth Harrison (*pictured*) lived at Lynton, 618 Argyle Rd, Moss Vale between 1947 and 1954. They then moved to Seaforth in Sydney returning to the Southern Highlands in about 1972, living in Wingecarribee St, Berrima. The couple later moved to Kenilworth Gardens, Kangaloon Rd, Bowral, and were there in 1989. Ainsworth passed away in 1993. Gwen passed away at her home in Bowral in October 2006 at the age of 98.

The presentation will include photos along with audio clips of the *Blue Hills* theme, some episode extracts and an interview with Gwen. **Don't forget to come.**

## Our Museum needs more volunteers

On 8 February, a thank you morning tea for all the volunteers was held at Berrima District Museum, organised by the museum committee. Vanessa Dalglish, roster coordinator, expressed her gratitude to the volunteers for keeping the Museum running and welcoming visitors on a regular basis.

After refreshments were enjoyed, Museum Manager John Schweers thanked the volunteers in attendance for coming and expressed his thanks to Gil Wheaton, who would shortly be leaving the district with family, for eighteen years of museum duty and for his time on the Committee. We wish him well for the future.

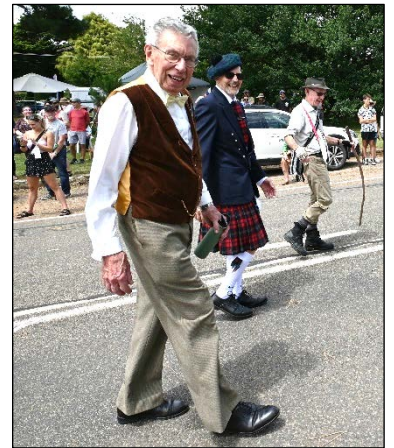
John then led a discussion of matters of relevance, including that the museum's pool of volunteers is shrinking, and we urgently need more!

So, if you know of anyone who has expressed an interest in the Museum, please encourage them to visit and speak to a volunteer when the Museum is open on Friday, Saturday or Sunday, 10 - 3, or to contact Vanessa or John. It was suggested that ALL local members of the Society be requested to volunteer – even if only once a month, being on duty with an experienced Museum volunteer.

### TO ALL MEMBERS NOT ALREADY VOLUNTEERING: ARE YOU UP FOR IT?

You'd be joining a happy bunch of keen volunteers, some who take any opportunity to get out and about in period costume to help promote our museum to the general public.

*Seen here are John, Stuart and Philip taking part in the Australia Day 2024 parade at Berrima; Photo: Bud Townsing*



Efforts are also being made to source volunteers from outside the Society's membership, with the requirements outlined as follows:

- Mature person
- Interest in History
- Have a current Working with Children Check
- Have own Transport to the Museum – there being no public transport available
- Need to become a member of the Society, so as to be covered by its liability insurance.

## Our Society's new Facebook page



The Berrima District Historical & Family History Society Inc. has a new Facebook page.

If you are a Facebook user, you might like to "Follow" us to get regular updates in your Facebook news feed. Click "Like" if you like each story or photo. You can "Comment" if you want to add notes of information, experiences or remarks relevant to each post. And you can "Share" the story and photo with your family and friends.

**Robyne McKinnon** provided us the user guide above and see below. Robyne, who joined the Society in early 2023, lives in Braemar with her husband and two (of their three) adult children, her technical support team.



After joining the Society, Robyne started attending the Family History Group meetings and was drawn to the speakers and topics of the General Meetings too. At the November AGM she was elected to our Management Committee. Robyne says that she has learned so much and really appreciates everyone who has taken the time to share their expertise and stories. She volunteered to set up the Facebook page because it is a popular form of Social Media and a powerful networking tool, and she thinks it will appeal to a different type of demographic and attract new interest in our Society.

We thank Robyne for her efforts and encourage our members to support her Facebook initiative.

For those members perhaps a bit puzzled as to why we are now embracing social media, until 2020 the Society relied upon the local print newspaper and radio stations to reach out to the general public with news about upcoming events and guest speakers. Times have now changed with the print issue of the paper only coming out once a week and local people tending to get their information from on-line sources which can be accessed via computer or smartphone.

**If you'd like to create your own personal Facebook account**, it is free, and fairly quick and easy to set up. Once you have your own Facebook Account (profile page), click on the "Search Facebook" tab, type in "Berrima District Historical & Family History Society Inc.", select from the drop-down window, and you will see our page. You can **Like, Comment & Share** each Post.

## Moss Vale Court House

### COMMEMORATING 100 YEARS: 1924 to 2024

In last month's issue, a brief history of Moss Vale's two Court House buildings was provided, including that the foundation stone of the second was laid by Mr Ley, the Minister for Justice, in June 1923, and that the building was completed in January 1924. The building is now the only still-functioning Court House in the Wingecarribee Shire.

The latest news is that on 12 February this year a function was held at the Court House, organised by the current magistrate, to mark the centenary of the first judicial sitting that took place at the Court House on 12 February 1924. The commemorative event was very well attended with the NSW Chief Magistrate and Deputy Chief Magistrate coming down from Sydney, along with a number of former magistrates, members of the local legal fraternity and the State Member for Goulburn, Wendy Tuckerman MP.

Our Society was invited to participate, with several of our members attending, including the new President.



BDHS archivist **Linda Emery** presented a history of the infrastructure and administration of justice in the district from early days to the present, with some reference to cases, including that the first police case conducted on 12 February 1924 was – what we might consider a trifling matter today – the theft of two ropes from the railways department. Linda also made mention of the notorious matters including murder that Mr Ley, the Minister for Justice in 1924, shortly after became embroiled in.

A series on the history of the local district's law and order infrastructure compiled by Philip Morton and Marg Muntz in 2017 began in last month's issue and now continues overleaf, providing a wider historical context for the Court House buildings at Moss Vale.

## A history of local law and order infrastructure and organisation, Pt. 2

As noted in the first part of this history series, Moss Vale grew rapidly after the railway station opened in 1867 and a new police and court precinct was erected near the station in 1880. In addition to Petty Sessions, in November 1881 Moss Vale gained the next level of the judiciary. The Government Gazette advised that the District Court, hitherto held at Berrima, would be moved to Moss Vale “which shall exercise jurisdiction in and over the existing district”.

At Mittagong, where a railway station had opened in 1867, a tall, one-storey Court House was erected in 1885 alongside the watch-house in Station St and served the town until the Court closed in 1962.

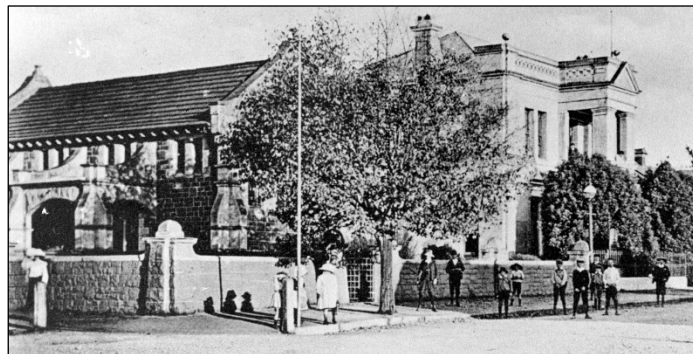


At Bowral, also with a railway station from 1867, a police station was provided in 1882. It had a strength of one constable (foot), located in a weatherboard building at Wingecarribee and Bendooley Sts corner. In 1886 a residence was erected (*pictured above*). It was of brick, and had two bedrooms, dining room and kitchen, plus two cells and an exercise yard. By 1892 two constables (foot) were listed.

Townpeople requested a Court of Petty Sessions and Lands Office in 1883, due to the “great inconvenience of cases having to be taken at Mittagong or Moss Vale”. The Justice Minister considered it unwarranted but, after more than six years of agitation, a Court opened in 1890, located in a rent-free room at the Council Chambers.

Residents then requested that the Government erect a Court House at Bowral to serve the whole district. The Berrima District Police Magistrate, F R Wilshire, was not in favour and existing arrangements continued. Tenders were eventually called in 1895 for a court house, designed by the Government Architect in late Gothic style, to be built on the police station site. Alf Stephens, a Bowral-based builder, submitted the lowest tender and won the contract.

Bowral people were dismayed that plans did not specify the unique trachyte stone from Mt Gibraltar. The local member, William McCourt, pushed their case and it was agreed. The building was also considered too small but had to be accepted as the trachyte substantially increased costs.



Bowral's Court House (*pictured above at left, c1900*) was officially opened in May 1896, followed by a banquet at the Grand Hotel, where a ‘coming of age’ was celebrated by town elders and dignitaries.

The legal landscape, however, was changing. From 1896 a district Police Magistrate was no longer appointed, the duties being transferred to Goulburn. Then, in 1901, due to a decline in business at Berrima, the district's police headquarters were relocated to Moss Vale.

The residents of Bowral were indignant. At a large gathering, as reported in the *Bowral Free Press*, they objected to “Moss Vale's unfair endeavour to appropriate all the Government offices of the district” and “the continued neglect of Bowral as the district's central town”. They considered their town as the most suitable for police headquarters.

Bowral's police station had been relocated to the residence in 1895 when the original building made way for the Court House. By 1912 the strength was listed as one sergeant 2<sup>nd</sup> class and one constable.



Moss Vale's fine police and court precinct had to be demolished in 1914 to make way at the station for the duplication of the Great Southern Railway. The *Robertson Advocate* noted sadly that “the picturesque police station will disappear . . . all the land in the vicinity being required for railway lines, yards, sidings and buildings”.



In April 1914 the *Scrutineer* alerted Moss Vale residents to be vigilant about retaining the police and court headquarters “not that anything is foreshadowed”. In anticipation of the demolition, the Justice Department had obtained a new site in 1912, at the corner of Valetta and Elizabeth Sts. Understandably, new building works remained on hold during war-time, but delays continued after 1918 as apparently townspeople did not favour the non-central site.

From 1914 police operated out of weatherboard premises leased on Argyle St (now a tobacconist store) across from the Post Office, with holding cells built at the rear. A cottage was rented as the sergeant’s residence.

The District Court and Moss Vale local court were held in the Oddfellows Hall on Argyle St (where a Spanish Restaurant now stands). When the building was sold in 1921, the Court then occupied upstairs offices at the Theatre Royal (now an arcade) on Argyle St near the railway station.

Major cases were held in the theatre hall. This served while plans were finalised for a new court house to be built on land purchased alongside the theatre.

The leased police station was described in 1918 by the *Scrutineer* as a freezing, wretched and miserable hole, not fit for human beings. The paper noted in October 1922 that the matter was “still engaging the attention of the authorities, and Mr Morton MLA has been informed that action had been delayed pending a determination as to the site to be adopted”.

That December, a vacant site fronting Elizabeth St was agreed upon. Across its rear lane (now Clarence St) was the designated court house land. Of nine submitted tenders, that of Alf Stephens & Sons was the lowest and the firm won the contract.



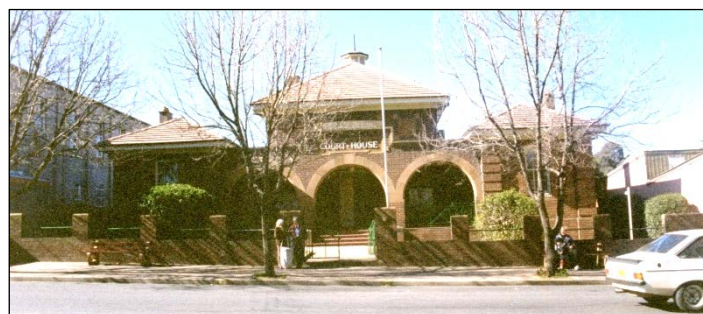
The station building was erected to a ‘cottage-like’ design of the Police Department, including charge room, offices and lock-up cells at the rear. It opened in September 1923.

The contract also required a sergeant’s residence to be built on the Valetta St land. Completed in May 1923, it remained a police residence until the 1990s.

As already mentioned in this series, the foundation stone for a new Moss Vale Court House was laid by Mr Ley, the Minister for Justice, in June 1923. The tender from Mr D M Mitchell of Redfern for the erection of the building, to a design by George McRae, Government Architect, was accepted and the Court House was completed by mid-January 1924.

In September 1923 the *Scrutineer* had noted that the almost completed court house would be a handsome structure. Together with the new police station, sergeant's residence and several other private buildings, it showed “that Moss Vale is progressing at least as well, if not better, than many other country towns in the State”. This might be inferred as a jibe at Bowral residents who for many years lobbied the Government to make their town the district’s law and order centre. Once moved from Berrima, however, the main district court remained at Moss Vale.

Regarding the new Moss Vale Court House, the *Robertson Mail* noted that “while otherwise his work is worthy of all praise, the designer . . . cannot be congratulated upon the provision made for the Clerk of Petty Session, whose many records crowd the small room provided for them.” Not long after, improvement works were carried out.



Today, other than minor renovations and a glassed-in entrance, the building remains essentially the same and is the Shire’s only still-functioning Court House.

Bowral’s Court House ceased handling legal matters in 2005 and the building was sold. Bowral Police Station, situated behind the Court since 1895, continued in service. It had been renovated in 1931 and capacity extended with a new separate building. By the 1980s Bowral Police Station was recognised as central and the entire Wingecarribee Shire was named the Bowral Police Division.

More recently, at Moss Vale, the old police station has made way for a modern Police Centre which now serves the entire Wingecarribee Shire community as part of Hume Local Area Command.



## From John McColgan's Scrapbook

### MITTAGONG MOTOR CYCLE CLUB 1946-1949

The Society was contacted last year by Kate Churchill (nee McColgan), of Yeppoon in Queensland. She is a daughter of the late John McColgan, who was an active member of the BDHS for many years.

A well-known former local resident, John passed away in July 1917 at Port Macquarie, aged 88 years. Born at Bowral in 1930, he lived in Mittagong until 1997. John was devoted to the history of the Southern Highlands, collected stories of earlier days and published two books, one of which is still on our Publications List for sale. He also contributed articles to local newspapers and to our newsletter, many with a quirky Irish humour. He had wide interests and hobbies, including being a keen motorcycle rider.

Kate was wondering what to do with a scrapbook she found amongst her father's collection of material, it being titled 'A History of the Mittagong Motor Cycle Club 1946-1949' containing numerous photos and newspaper clippings pasted onto the large-sized pages with hand-written notes, being 26 pages thick. Kate had considered offering the book to our Society, but her family preferred to keep it so instead, at our suggestion, she had the scrapbook pages scanned and emailed the pdf files to us.

The entire document has been printed out at A3 size and placed in the McColgan biography file at our Mittagong archives, available for researchers and anyone interested in looking at it.

Some extracts are provided here, with apologies for the poor quality, but good enough for viewing.



**Motor Cycle Club**

On Sunday, 3rd October, the club held its first miniature TT race meeting in conjunction with Iron Week Celebrations. The meeting turned out to be a huge success as riders from our own club and from Sydney clubs rode very cleverly. Although our Sydney friends reaped the prizes the local lads, who were having their first ride, did very well. Local riders were: M. Eberle, J. McColgan, M. Wheeler and R. McColgan.

M. Wheeler is to be congratulated on running fourth in the All Powers Handicap. Another highlight of the day was the presence of Art Senior, holder of the Australian land speed record.

1948

Mittagong Motor Cycle Club  
PRESENTS  
**MINATURE TOURIST  
TROPHY RACES**  
— AT —  
Air Strip, Lower Mittagong  
— ON —  
**Sunday, 28th November, 1948**

Secretary, K. DENT, Phone 109 Mitt.  
President, J. FULFORD  
Treasurer, J. McCOLGAN



John McColgan on his AJ's motorcycle and Roma on Ariel



Fellow Club member Billy Strong's motorcycle James

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:** Marketplace, Berrima. Tel: 02 4877 1130. Email: bdmuseum@bigpond.com  
AT PRESENT, OPEN: 10.00am to 3.00pm, 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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<b>Snr Vice President</b>	Linda EMERY	<b>Museum Manager</b>	John SCHWEERS
<b>Jnr Vice President</b>	Ian MACKEY	<b>Membership Secretary</b>	Janet BLACK
<b>Hon Treasurer</b>	Rhonda BROWN	<b>Newsletter Editor</b>	Philip MORTON
<b>Hon Secretary</b>	Patricia DORIS	<b>Conservation Team</b>	Denise MACKEY
<b>Research Team</b>	Frank MITCHELL, Carolyn DOUGHERTY and Janet BLACK		

**Management Committee:** President, Vice Presidents, Secretary, Treasurer and members Denyse Barker, Peg Harvey, Jenny Frost, Ros Dale, Carolyn Dougherty, Philip Morton, Robyne McKinnon

**Museum Sub-Committee:** John Schweers, Harold Wall, Lyn Hall, Sylvia Carless, Michele Woods, Bud Townsing