



The Wandong History Group Inc. Quarterly Newsletter FREE with your What 's News

# “WHAT’S OLD”

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## FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to our first edition of “What’s Old” for 2018. This year is shaping up as another busy one for the History Group. This month we have a Bunning’s Sausage Sizzle at Craigieburn on the 18th, these events are a great chance to raise some much needed funding so if you are in the vicinity come buy a sausage and drink from us.

Sunday the 25th is the “Back to Wandong” annual reunion lunch, once again at the Australiana, see more information in this edition. Our major event for the year is the Walk Through the Wars, display which will run from ANZAC Day to the following Sunday. This event has been twelve months in the planning and preparation and we thank the Bendigo bank, and the Wandong /Heathcote Junction Community Group for their support. We hope to see many locals at the event. Later in the year our History Week display will be focused on the Sawmills of the area. So a busy year and the support of local people at these events is what keeps us motivated to put these events on, please support us by attending.

**Editor: Karen Christensen**

### **The Fire at Ross’s Farm ~ Henry Lawson**

The squatter saw his pastures wide, decrease as, one by one,  
The farmers moving to the west, selected on his run:  
Selectors took the water up, and all the black soil round,  
The best grass-land the squatter had, was spoilt by Ross’s ground  
One Christmas time, when months of drought, had parched the  
western creeks,  
The bushfires started in the north, and travelled south for weeks.  
At night along the river side, the scene was grand and strange,  
The hill fires looked like lighted streets, of cities in the range.  
The cattle tracks between the trees, were like long dusty aisles  
And on a sudden breeze the fire, would sweep along for miles:  
Like sounds of distant musketry, it crackled through the breaks  
And o’er the flat of silver grass, it hissed like angry snakes.  
It leapt across the flowing streams, and raced o’er pastures broad,  
It climbed the trees and lit the boughs, and through the scrub it  
roared.  
The bees fell stifled in the smoke, or perished in their hives,  
And with the stock the kangaroos, went flying for their lives.  
The sun has set on Christmas eve, when through the scrublands  
wide,  
Young Robert Black came riding home, as only natives ride,  
He galloped to the homestead door, and gave the first alarm.  
The fire is past the granite spur, and close to Ross’s farm  
Now father send the men at once, they wont be wanted here,  
Poor Ross’s wheat is all he has, to pull him through the year.  
Then let it burn the squatter said, Id like to see it done,  
I’d bless the fire if it would clear, selectors from the run.  
Go if you will, he thundered on, you shall not take the men,  
Go out and join your precious friends, but don’t come here again

I wont come back, young Robert said and reckless in his ire,  
He sharply turned his horses head, and raced towards the fire.  
And there for three long weary hours, half blind with smoke  
and heat,  
Old Ross and Robert fought the flames, that neared the ripened  
wheat.  
The farmers hand was nerved by fear, of danger and of loss,  
And Robert fought the stubborn foe, for love of Jenny Ross.  
But serpent like the curves and lines, slipped past them and  
between,  
Until they reached the boundary, where the old coach road had  
been,  
The track is now our only hope, there we must stand, cried Ross  
For naught on earth can stop the fire, once it gets across.  
Then came a cruel gust of wind, and with a fiendish rush,  
The flames leapt o’er the narrow path and lit the fence and brush.  
The crop must burn the farmer cried, we cannot save it now,  
And down upon the blackened ground, he dashed the ragged  
bough.  
But wildly in a rush of hope, his heart began to beat,  
For o’er the crackling fire he heard, the sound of horses feet.  
Here’s help at last, young Robert cried, and even as he spoke,  
The squatter with a dozen men, came spurring through the smoke.  
Down on the ground the stockmen jumped, and bared each  
brawny arm,  
They tore green branches from the trees, and fought for Ross’s  
farm.  
And when before the gallant band, the beaten flames gave way,  
Two grimy hands in friendship joined,  
And it was Christmas Day.

Hope you are enjoying stepping back in time with these old poems. This one is from the grade five reader and what a story teller Henry Lawson was, these are the poems I grew up with and can still remember to this day.)

Ed

## GET TO KNOW YOUR NEIGHBOUR

Each issue we will talk to a local identity, this edition it's Kath Christensen.

### **How and when did you come to live at Wandong?**

We moved here in 1935, my father Frank Pickett was a Station Master he was transferred here.

### **You grew up here with your two brothers, what was life like then?**

Well we lived through the war years, it was tough but it brought the town together, we all went to the Wandong school and life was good. The war meant we did different things, raising money for the comforts fund and the soldiers being farewelled and welcomed home at the hall.

### **The hall was the hub of the town in those days?**

Everything happened at the hall, dances, card nights, school concerts, it was the only place for entertainment in town and not many people had cars.

### **You married local Lyall Christensen after the war.**

We married in Kilmore at St Pats and lived for a while in a little shack on the corner of Scanlon's Road. Sue and Allen were both born there. We then moved to a house in Dry Creek Crescent, it was Jack Harpers place originally, Janette was born here, later on we brought Mrs Rohan's house in Wandong Avenue. Karen was born there and that's where we stayed.

### **How was it having babies in Wandong in the 50's and early 60's?**

Well as I said no one much had cars, so when someone had to go to the Kilmore Hospital to have a baby the Thomas's usually took them in.

### **It seems your house is on the site of what was once Gaskell Hall, do you know much about it?**

No, although some information has come to light recently, through the diaries of Nance Searle. Lottie Campbell told Heather it was moved from the block to Heathcote Junction but no one seems to know where. There is a Terra Cotta Lumber shed at the back though that may have been connected.

### **So tell us about Wandong in the early days.**

In some ways we were better served than now. We had bread delivered from Wallan. Bob Ryan

had a dairy down the end of the lane so we got our billy's of milk filled up there, once he finished up, milk was delivered from Kilmore in bottles. Crockcrofts delivered vegetables, we had briquettes and meat delivered from Wallan and bread from Mooney's bakery. The mail and paper came each day on the 8.00 o'clock train, Jack Thomas sorted the mail into pigeon holes, one for each letter of the alphabet, we used to go get the mail before we went to school each day, he had to go through all the pigeon holes to find ours. When the war and army machinery was moved by rail, the soldiers used to throw their empty bottles out and we would collect them and sell them to the bottle-o. Before electricity we had a Coolgardie safe for the meat, and of course when we went to school we always came home for lunch. No locked gates in those days.

### **What do you feel is the biggest issue facing W/HJ in the future?**

Wandong and Heathcote Junction needs to stay a small country town, with Kilmore and Wallan growing fast around us I'm not sure that will happen but this area cant support a big population.

### **If you could change anything about W/HJ what would it be?**

I can still drive so I'm lucky but for those who cannot access Kilmore and Wallan, maybe a direct bus service. We have a nice shopping area with a great chemist and the supermarket has all I need.

### **You recently were awarded the community Australia Day Award, that must have been a thrill.**



It was a shock, I didn't know a thing about it, but its nice to think that people think of the things we did all those years ago and I hope we put in place some good foundations for the town to build on.

Thanks Kath its been great to learn a bit more about you and your thoughts on Wandong Heathcote Junction. Congratulations on your Award from all of us here at "Whats Old".

## WANDONG PUBLIC HALL



The Free Library and Mechanics Institute was built to a plan drawn up by Mr R Fennelly, Civil Engineer for the Shire of Kilmore. The Hall was built for the growing population's need to have a place to stage community activities, previous to this the town had used Gaskell Hall, located in Wandong Avenue, and rooms at the Terra Cotta Lumber Brickworks but due to the rapid growth of the town these venues proved inadequate.. The Australian Seasoned Timber Co. donated 1,000 feet of timber and the rest at a lowered cost. Other fund raising activities around the area were held in aid of the new building. It opened 17 October 1902. A disastrous fire at the school residence burnt the early minute books. In 1942 war damage insurance was claimed and in post war period money was available for overdue maintenance and improvements. An electricity switch on ceremony for Wandong was conducted at the Hall in 1957. After this Wandong was abuzz with entertainment at the Hall with dances and concerts given by the local talented musical bands. During both World Wars as the local men enlisted they were given rousing send offs from the hall. On 22 April 1910 William and Margaret Smedley celebrated their Diamond Wedding Anniversary at the Hall with a gathering of over 200 family and friends. In the 1960s the name changed to the Wandong Public Hall as at this time Councils could assist Public Halls but not Mechanic's Institutes. Throughout the years the Hall has had many upgrades and seen many varied events including wedding receptions, engagements, birthday parties, dances, school concerts, fairs bazaars, markets, fetes, card and games nights, craft groups, knitters, quilters and book clubs. It is also a meeting place for local committees and once a polling booth for State and Federal elections. In 2009 a substantial grant of \$400,000 was received from the Bushfire Recovery Community Infrastructure Programme, Mitchell Shire and Federal Government for a complete refurbishment of the Hall and an extension which included a new kitchen and disabled toilet facilities and car park. The Hall committee today have the hall looking beautiful with the outside grounds now fully landscaped.



William & Margaret Smedley - Diamond Wedding Anniversary  
Wandong Hall 21st April 1910

### WANDONG - (From a Correspondent)

A public meeting was held recently for the purpose of electing a new committee for the Wandong Public Hall, some members of the committee having left the district. Messrs A. McDonald, Thomas, S. Harper, Forbes, P. Davern, W. Patton and T. Cleary were elected the last named as President. The funds require attention, and the public look forward with much interest to the action of the new committee.

**Kilmore Free Press Thursday, August 16th 1917**

\*Local Resident Angus McDonald served on the Hall Committee for over 60 years.

## History Matters

In this column we will try to keep abreast of the things that affect our town and its historical links.

The Wandong History Group's charter is to protect and preserve the history of our area. As we are within the Mitchell Shire, we need to be informed of happenings within the shire that may affect us. We recently made a submission to the Wandong Heathcote Junction Structure Plan, this is our second submission to the plan and we hope the shire are listening. We are particularly concerned when development encroaches on areas of historical significance and try to ensure that proper steps are taken to look after these sites. This History Group worked closely with the shire on the Heritage Gap Study and identified many sites of significance in the area. We will continue to monitor activities of the shire and developers to ensure the historical integrity of the area is maintained.

We have also spoken to the shire at the Wandong listening post about the proposed rail trail, and we asked that during that process our towns be included in the forward planning. Unfortunately it appears this hasn't happened as the document released by council barely consider that Heathcote Junction is actually the starting point of the old rail line and should be part of the proposed trail. Hopefully we will get the opportunity to continue discussions on this as the plan is developed.

The History Group has a member who sits on the Mitchell Shire Heritage Advisory Committee, this committee is made up of people from within all areas of the shire and the aim is to advise council on important heritage matters.

On the back of our successful railway display for History Week 2017 we are putting together a book on the rail history of the area. Dave Moran is researching the book and would appreciate any information anyone may be holding. Daves contact details- Mob: 0409 164660 or Email: mountview@ssc.net.au

## BOOK SALES

There Was a Soldier—Karen Christensen

(A history of Wandong at War) \$20

From Lightwood Flat to the Forest—Lynne Dore

(A history of our schools) \$20

## WANDONG IN PICTURES

Book (1-5) \$7 each or \$25 the set.

Wandong War Memorial

Wandong Seasoning Works

Wandong in Business,

Wandong Timber Mills and Tramlines

Wandong Buildings

**All books available at the Wandong Newsagent or contact the History Group.**

## VALE

### Jim Robson

Another ex Local resident of Wandong reached the milestone of 100 years last October but sadly passed from life in January 2018, Jim was well liked in the town. Our deepest sympathy to all his family.

## DONATION

We now have microfiche copies of old rate books which will be very helpful in local research, thanks to the Kilmore Historical Society for donating these to our group.

## CONGRATULATIONS

Kath Christensen, Maurice Scanlon & Allan Ryan for your much deserved Australia Day Community Award.

## BACK TO WANDONG

### LUNCHEON

25th March - 12.30pm

“Wandong Australiana”

Broadhurst Lane Wandong

Enjoy a yummy smorgasbord luncheon.

Cost: \$34 per head.

**RSVP**—18th March—Di Vidal

**Phone:** 57871 314 or **Mobile:** 0438 811318

Thanks to Marie Elson, Bob, Gwen and Cheryl McIntosh, for organising the previous annual “Back to Wandong Luncheons”, This day is attended by residents that once lived here and attended the Wandong School many years ago. They love to return, hear the latest news and catch up with old friends, plus are very supportive with our History Group open days. The History Group have now taken over the running of the luncheon and hope more Wandong people and new comers with an interest in our history will join us. Bring along any memorabilia you'd like share on the day. This year we are privileged to have Allan Ryan one of the three recipients of the Australia Day Community Award guest Speak at the Luncheon.

## 2017/2018 COMMITTEE

President:	Karen Christensen
Vice President:	David Moran
Secretary:	Di Vidal
Treasurer:	Sandra Moran
Newsletter:	Karen Christensen & Di Vidal

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