

NEWSLETTER

MUSWELLBROOK SHIRE LOCAL & FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY INC (Founded 11th June 1958)

Affiliated with Royal Australian Historical Society

ABN 34611778680

PO Box 450 Muswellbrook NSW 2333

Editor Lionel Ahearn

No. 4 August 2021

Our New Executive for 2020/2021

President	Lionel Ahearn	Vice President	Helen Ellis
Secretary	Heather Meissner	Treasurer	Malcolm Rothe
Public Officer	Malcolm Rothe	Publicity Officer	Helen Ellis
Research Committee Coordinator	Garry Meissner		
Assistant Researchers	Eve Ellis, Mal Rothe, Margaret Dolahenty, Ted George		
Pre 1900 Research Specialist	Rob Tickle		
Heritage Officer Coordinator	Garry Meissner with Rob tickle as consultant		
Newsletter Editor	Lionel Ahearn		
Committee Members	G Meissner, E Ellis, G Murray, T George, M Dolahenty, R Logue.		
Publication Editor	Rob Tickle		

Covid -19

With the current lockdown being extended to the Hunter Region, Muswellbrook was included. As a result we have again had to close our doors on Saturday mornings. This started on 7th August and will continue until the lockdown is lifted. As a result the Annual General Meeting which is held in August has had to be postponed. All positions will remain in place until such time as we can hold the meeting.

I have completed 'Little Bits of History – Volume 2' and I will print a number of copies. Sadly we won't be able to hold an official launch of the book due to present conditions. A flyer advertising the book sale will be placed in this newsletter. My thanks to all those who contributed stories. I hope to start soon on Volume 3 and have already been provided with some articles.

Sadly the Open Day that was being organised by the Maitland Historical Group has also been postponed. We will keep members informed on what happens in the future.

Margaret Tasker



Margaret Tasker (*beloved wife of the late George Tasker a patron to our Society*) passed away, Sunday 8th August.
Our sincere condolences go to Margaret & George's family.

New Members

Jon Davies – Ascott - Queensland

DETAILS ABOUT THE SOCIETY

Objectives:

- To collect, preserve and promote the social, cultural and physical history of Muswellbrook Shire, its environs and its people for future generations.
- to promote public access to our collections and research facilities, and
- to provide information, advice and assistance to individuals, community groups, organizations and businesses.

Meetings

The Society meets on the third Saturday of each month starting at 12.00 in the Society Room at the rear of the Muswellbrook Library. All members and visitors are welcome to attend the meeting.

Premises

The Society maintains its records in a section of Muswellbrook Library. You will find us at the rear of the Library. The Research Centre is open every Saturday from 9.30am to 1.00pm. The Research Centre may be opened at other times by appointment. Bus & tour groups are most welcome.

Annual Fees

Single \$25 Double \$35 Pensioner Single \$15 Pensioner Double \$25

The Hon Secretary may be contacted via the post office box or email mei2@bigpond.com The Society also has a web presence thanks to Darrin Khan and Lionel Ahearn at <http://www.mbkhistorical.org> and a research site at <http://research.mbkhistorical.org>

As the lock down due to Covid-19 looks like continuing for some time I have decided to include my report for the year in the August Newsletter as usual. Please keep in touch if possible until we can again meet on Saturday mornings for a yarn and to continue the valuable work.

President's Report

We come to the end of another challenging year. The Society has been open each Saturday morning with a steady but pleasing number of visitors doing research. Their compliments on the expertise and help given has been rewarding and appreciated.

None of this would have been possible without the dedicated group of members who consistently attend when it is their turn. Also there has been a noticeable increase in the number of members who turn up to enjoy the companionship. Again a special thanks to Heather Meissner, our Secretary, for following up on the correspondence, orders and research requests. A big thank you to Garry Meissner who often makes a trip up to the Society to conduct research throughout the week.

In December last year we did manage to launch three new books, 'Through the Lens', 'Little Bits of History – Volume 1' and 'Cultivation Lot 8.' The numbers on the day were down due to Social Distancing but sales were pleasing. Once again we were indebted to the members who supplied refreshments. Also special thanks to Heather, Eve Ellis and others for organising, setting up and recording sales.

It is surprising that the sale of books has continued. Some books from ten years ago are still selling. A special thanks to Bill Spicer for providing copies of his latest books for research purposes. They came into use almost immediately.

Our Christmas get together in the Seminar Rooms at the Library, while a low key affair, was well received and I believe very successful. The members again excelled in the quantity and variety of food available.

We were saddened by the passing of two long term members. Col Ellis, whose devotion to Helen and his appearance each Saturday morning with her and to yarn with members has been greatly missed. George Tasker, who was a long term Patron of the Society and also a well known and highly respected pharmacist of Muswellbrook.

A special mention must be made of the valuable work still being conducted by Eve Ellis, Linda Newman, Garry Meissner and others in adding to and enhancing our Research and Book Indexes. Their additional attendance each Wednesday morning shows their devotion to making these records even more valuable.

I have managed another six Newsletters this year with the information and suggestions supplied by members. The suggestion by Brian Dever to assemble the articles into a book has been acted upon and the first volume of Little Bits of History was launched. Volume 2 should be ready in the very near future.

While I often joke with Margaret Dolahenty about her photo taking they provide a valuable record of our events. Also to all those who have donated photos, they are greatly appreciated and add to our growing and valuable collection.

Thanks to Mal Rothe, our Treasurer, who tells us we again made a small profit this year. Also thanks to Rob Tickle who has purchased and added additional material to the Bill Campion Memorial Collection as well as helping with research advice especially in the pre-1900 era.

Our thanks also to Maria and Ian Simpson for allowing the Society Members to visit the Old Denman Courthouse for an inspection and to enjoy an excellent afternoon tea. The high standard of the restoration is a credit to them. Further outings have been curtailed by the restrictions of Covid-19. It is hoped that the next twelve months will be better.

I realise there are many more members who continue to contribute and to all of them I thank you on behalf of all members. Please keep up the good work and suggestions.

Lionel Ahearn President

Olympic Torch

On 31st August 2000 the Olympic Torch was carried through Muswellbrook. Ron King can be seen carrying the torch having just received it from his son Michael.

Thanks to Helen Ellis for reminder

MSL&FHS photo 2205.1



The Kurrajong Tree



Bridge in line with Sydney Street MSL&FH Photo 0354

In the second half of the 19th century and the first part of the 20th century access from the area known as south Muswellbrook to north Muswellbrook was gained by crossing over a bridge at the end of Sydney Street, across Muscle Creek, then over the railway line, turning left through what is now known as Simpson Park then onto Bridge Street.

After many years of agitation by the Muswellbrook Municipal Council, the Railway Commissioners agreed to the construction of a subway (or underpass as it is now known) under the railway lines.



The new Subway is finished and open but the old bridge in line with Sydney Street still stands MSL&FH Photo 2011

The land required to allow construction of a road from Sydney Street to a new low-level bridge over Muscle Creek adjacent to the subway had been owned for in excess of 70 years by Mr John Brown. Mr Brown was a blacksmith, hotel keeper and a prominent citizen. Inns known as 'Plough Inn, Coach and Horses and Royal Hotel were operated by Mr Brown and several lessees for many years from the 1850s to 1890s, all from the same building.

An article relating to Mr Brown states: 'A Botanical Curiosity' was a headline in *The Muswellbrook Chronicle* on Friday 9 July 1926. The story describes a fungus, *Fungus Agaricus*, found on the site. The article continues:

It was Mr Brown who planted 60 years ago that fine old kurrajong tree which now lifts its sturdy limbs heavenwards on the plot of land alongside Mr Clay's boarding house in Sydney Street. The tree, alas, will soon disappear to make room for the approaches to the new low-level bridge. (over Muscle Creek in the subway. Comment added by author).

An aside A story regarding John Brown's son appeared in *The Muswellbrook Chronicle* on Friday 3 December 1926: Mr. J. S. Brown, one of Muswellbrook's oldest natives, celebrated his 81st birthday yesterday, and like "Johnny Walker" is still going strong. He enjoys excellent health, can run 50 yards, and generally is in fine fettle.

A Muswellbrook citizen Mr. O. G. Morton a consulting engineer was engaged by the Council to manage the project of building the road and bridge. Mr Morton undertook various projects for the Council and was later elected as an Alderman on the Council. The following excerpts detail the progress of the work and some of the public reaction to the matter.

The Kurrajong tree was situated in the middle of the proposed road. Mr Morton wrote to the Municipal Council in February 1927 'I propose submitting for your approval plan and specification for the necessary approach works

prior to tenders being called for this work and in connection with this an effort will be made to retain the Currajong Tree now standing on the Sydney Street side of bridge nearly in the centre of the new road. The road here must be lowered about two feet six inches and which would make tree unsafe unless protected.'

SUBWAY APPROACHES.

Mr. O. G. Morton, consulting engineer, forwarded plan and specifications in connection with work to be carried out to the subway approaches. Provision was made for the retention of the kurrajong tree on the Sydney-street side of the subway. Council was recommended to call tenders for the work.

Ald. Jordan said the retention of the tree would affect the lighting of the bridge. Ald. Purvis said that the works committee had favoured taking the tree out.

So, on the score of safety the tree, planted 60 odd years ago, is to go. The plan and specification, with the deletion of the part referring to the tree, were accepted on the motion of Ald. Purvis and Dobbin. (Council meeting 20 July 1927 reported in *Muswellbrook Chronicle* Friday 22 July 1927)



Photo showing a Kurrajong tree which may be the one described in story. Photo 0065.1

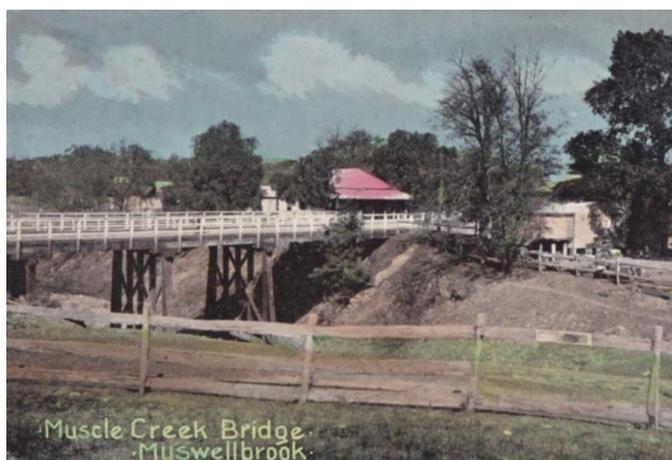
"Thoughtless Action." (To the Editor)

Sir, -At the last meeting of the Municipal Council, the aldermen decided to destroy the fine kurrajong tree in the vicinity of the subway, near Sydney street, notwithstanding the fact that the engineer (Mr. Morton) reported he had made provision for its retention, and surely that officer knows the requirements of the place better than laymen? The reason given for the aldermanic decision, that it would interfere with the lighting of the subway is groundless, as anyone may ascertain by observation, It is hoped that the residents will take action to preserve the beautiful tree, the town's chief ornament of the kind, a splendid specimen of Nature's treasures, and prevent the senseless destruction proposed.

Yours, etc., CITIZEN. (*Muswellbrook Chronicle* 26 July 1927)

The *Muswellbrook Chronicle* reported on 9 August 1927: SPARE THAT TREE

We hope that the council will be able to see its way clear to save the beautiful kurrajong in Sydney Street from destruction when the approaches to the low-level bridge are being constructed. We speak not only on our own behalf but for many residents who say it would be a tragedy to destroy the tree, which is looked upon as the most beautiful of its species, in this town.



Postcard showing bridge over Muscle Creek. Society photo D2891

More about that Kurrajong.

MR. O. G. MORTON'S PLEA FOR RETENTION.

Mr. O. G. Morton, the municipal council's consulting engineer, has stated to our representative that he sees no reason why his recommendation for the retention of the kurrajong tree, situated in the centre of the approach to the low-level bridge, should not be adopted. In his professional opinion the presence of the tree would have no tendency to affect the lighting of the bridge, either during the day or night. There was no probability, of the tree breaking the concrete retaining wall which it is proposed to construct alongside the barrel of the tree, because the tree has reached maturity. Mr. Morton says that the tree will in no way affect the proper running of traffic. (*Muswellbrook Chronicle* Friday 12 August 1927)

The matter was again considered by Council and reported by the *Chronicle* on Friday 16 September 1927:

A KURRAJONG TREE - CAUSE OF CONTROVERSY.

The kurrajong tree near the new bridge lost its beauty when the pendent branches were cut off during the work being carried out in making the approaches to the subway. Mr. O.G. Morton wrote to the aldermen at Wednesday's meeting of the council, asking them to view the tree before finally deciding to have it removed. He considered the removal of the tree would be a matter for regret. Many representations had been made to him not to remove the tree. He did not consider the presence of the tree would constitute a danger to traffic.

Ald. Gentlemun was emphatic. The tree, he said, should come out. Anyone approaching the bridge would have to make a wider detour to avoid the tree. Only two wings and a stump remained.

THE KURRAJONG TREE.

The works committee reported that the contractor had found it necessary to cut a large number of lateral roots of the kurrajong tree near the new low-level bridge, and the tree was rendered unsafe, and the council was recommended to adhere to its previous decision and have the tree removed. Ald. Gentlemun said that the tree had been taken out. (*Muswellbrook Chronicle* Friday 30 September 1927)

The eight-room house which formed part of the Plough Inn/Coach and Horses/Royal Hotel operation was demolished at some time, presumably as part of the project.

Story researched by Bill Spicer Muswellbrook March 2019.

TAHOMA TENNIS CLUB.

Tahoma Tennis Club was one of many tennis clubs active in Muswellbrook in the 1930s. The Club played on courts at the end of Hillview Avenue where the Muswellbrook Pre School is now situated. The courts may have been owned by residents living in Sowerby Street.

A newspaper¹ column written by "Volley" in January, 1936 states; 'The town of Muswellbrook is well provided with night courts in comparison with towns of a similar size. Waratah, Sports, Tahoma and the Park Clubs have courts for hire, and the residents of the town should provide themselves with the pleasure of spending the evening on one or the other of them. Even for non-players a great deal of pleasure can be had in the very suitable weather generally prevailing at night time during this part of the year.

An advertisement² was published in February, 1936;

FLANNEL DANCE (In aid of Tahoma Tennis Club)

School of Arts MONDAY, MARCH 9, 1936

Flannels optional. Dancing 9 p.m. till 1 a.m. Excellent Supper. Ron Graham's Orchestra. Tickets

1/11- "POMP" James G. Parsons Hon. Secretaries.

The Club wrote to Council in June, 1960 asking Council make a donation to the Club as a sporting body, as in former years. The Club has a membership of approximately 60 persons. The Council donated an amount equivalent to the General Rates.

In November, 1962 representatives of the Tahoma Tennis Club met with Muswellbrook Municipal Council requesting the use of a section of Victoria Park for the construction of tennis courts. The Club sought assistance

¹ *Muswellbrook Chronicle* Friday January 31, 1936

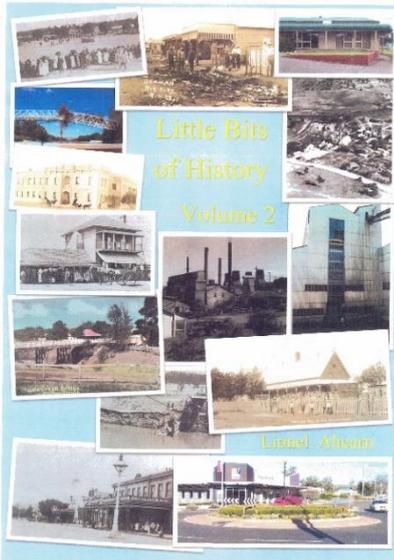
² *Muswellbrook Chronicle* Friday February 28, 1936

from Council to level, top dress and fence a portion of the park on the corner of Hill and George Streets. The Club would be able to shift their Club House building from its present site and also provide lighting of the courts. No record can be found of the project proceeding.

The Trustees of the Muswellbrook Pre-School Kindergarten purchased the land in Hillview Avenue, formerly referred to as the Tohama Tennis Courts, in 1966 and constructed a pre-school on the site.

Researched by Bill Spicer 2012

Little Bits of History – Volume 2



This volume again contains stories that appeared in past Newsletters, some from many years ago. Also some stories that are yet to be used are included.

Many of the stories have been enhanced with extra photos that have been added to our collection since the stories were first published.

As we will not have an official launch of the book they may be purchased by contacting our Secretary Heather Meissner. Email mei2@bigpond.com or phone (02)65431809 or 0411032627

Price is \$15.00 plus postage and handling. The book will also be available at the Society when we are able to open.

Muswellbrook School of Arts Building



Original School of Arts building MSL&FHS photo D1078

Some weeks ago a query to the Society made us realise that this year is the 150th anniversary of the building of the first School of Arts building. It was officially opened on 7th March 1871. The photo to the left show the building as it stood in 1889. To the far left can be seen the original single story Post Office and to the right the Police Station and residence

By 1913 it was decided to build a larger building on the same site and this was officially opened on 28th August 1913.



MSL&FHS photo D2600



Since then there have been many changes. It became known as The Town Hall. Later an upper floor was added as an Art Gallery until it was finally remodelled and converted to The Muswellbrook Regional Art Gallery.

'Muswellbrook School of Arts & beyond' by Bill Spicer gives a full account of the history of the building.

As it stands today on the corner of Bridge & William Streets. MSL&FHS photo D3094 courtesy of Bill Spicer