

# **CAMDEN HISTORY**

**Journal of the Camden Historical Society Inc.**



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# **CAMDEN HISTORY**

Journal of the Camden Historical Society Inc.

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## **Meetings**

Meetings are held at 7.30 p.m. on the second Wednesday of the month except in January. They are held in the Museum. Visitors are always welcome.

## **Museum**

The Museum is located at 40 John Street, Camden, phone 4655 3400 or 46559210. It is open Thursday to Sunday 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., except at Christmas. Visits by schools and groups are encouraged. Please contact the Museum to make arrangements. Entry is free.

## **Camden History, Journal of the Camden Historical Society Inc**

The Journal is published in March and September each year. The Editor would be pleased to receive articles broadly covering the history of the Camden district. Correspondence can be sent to the Society's postal address. The views expressed by authors in journal articles are solely those of the authors and not necessarily endorsed by the Camden Historical Society Inc.

## **Donations**

Donations made to the Society are tax deductible. The accredited value of objects donated to the Society are eligible for tax deduction.

**Image Cover:** Alan Baker, White Roses, 1983, Oil. Donated to Camden Historical Society by Tegel Family, 2004. (Camden Museum)

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## Alan Baker, the artist

### Ian Willis

Alan Baker was an artist and local identity. With his wife Majorie they had a profound influence shaping the art scene in the Camden district by influencing the lives of a number of Camden artists including Patricia Johnson, Nola Tegel, and Olive McAleer. Baker contributed to the broader art world as vice-president of the Royal Art Society of New South Wales.

A collection of Baker's work has recently been installed at the new gallery in the Macaria building. The exhibition highlights the two identifiable periods in Alan's artistic career divided by the tragic drowning death of Alan and Marjorie's two sons in a Georges River boating accident in 1961. The collection, according to son Gary, 'tells the story of life...and the journey of the artist'.

After the family tragedy Baker's work had a more contemplative approach. The paintings have a 'zen' quality, according to Gary, and reflect the 'stories of love, family, community, war, beauty, darkness and tragedy'.

Gary Baker maintains that there is a 'purity' to Alan's work centred on his studio and the way the light played with it. Gary explains it this way:

*My father's studio was located under his house at Belimba Park. It had one south window and it was cool dark and silent. There was a large sandstone rock over which dripped water. The water seeped from underground and was all around where he sat to work. The light was pure without any other sources and then went to total darkness further into the room, which was rather like a cellar.*

*In the morning he would pick fresh flowers that he grew with my mother's help. He would choose them from their extensive garden. Hundreds of camellias, roses, Japonica, peaches and all sorts blossom trees, annuals and perennials. He would arrange them with great care. Aware he only had time to paint them for the life of the flower. Sometimes one or two days.*

*The flowers would move to the light as the day passed. They were truly living. Some would fall to the table. They constantly changed. After arranging them he would cut a board that fitted the composition. Not being restricted to stock size he made his own frames.*

*During the process of painting, I felt he was in a state of meditation. He often painted with classical music playing. There was a rhythm to his work leading*



**Alan Baker Self Portrait in oil. The painting is part of the Alan Baker Art Collection at Macaria in Camden. (I Willis, 2018)**

*to this state of mind. His technical skill learned over decades enabled him to get to this heightened state.*

*He didn't have to focus on the difficulties of drawing colour tone, instead used his intuition. Sitting in an upright position close to his board he would spend hours or days completing the painting until done. He never over painted and rarely moved away from his easels to view his work during the painting stage.*

*The flowers had a stability and calmness. They are asymmetric in design. The reflections on the glass table show a sort of purity calmness. The delicate flowers capture a purity or truthfulness. The flowers were almost textured, the way the paint is applied.*

*His brush strokes are simplified. Directly confident. Almost abstract. I see a likeness to Chinese ink painting techniques. The designs with the vase in the middle. Most art teachers say that it should not be done this way.*

*I see some of his paintings as being perfect! I see how they are living, not still. I see the air flow around them. Even viewing at different angles the texture of the paint changes the look of each painting. They are so complex and yet so simple. The brush strokes are very pronounced on board enhancing a textured feel. He did not use canvas.*

*Flowers themselves are universal symbols of remembrance love. I feel that he was chasing perfection in beauty. His paintings of flowers seem to speak to people with this. Many a man has said to me that they do not look like flower paintings. His are different. You can appreciate that! His floral work is from the heart not intellectual. I feel it's spiritual.*

Alan and Marjorie made The Oaks their home after the 1961 tragedy and maybe Baker was searching for the truth through the subject material he chose for his work. Certainly Alan's still-life paintings absorbed a large amount of his artistic effort and possibly account for Gary labelling his work as a form of 'realism'.

Alan Baker certainly did not pander to sentimentalism or heroic depiction of subjects as 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantic might have done. He was not a fan of modernist avant-garde styles and his commercial art commissions reflect a journeyman's approach to subject matter. Gary states:

*This is the other side of his work. When you walk back and see his work from a distance. It comes into focus. You see a realist painting, the simple brush strokes disappear. He was so well trained in the art skills of tone, drawing*



**The Alan Baker Art Collection here showing the interior of the gallery at Macaria Camden (I Willis, 2018)**

*and colour. He found modern art to be “the refuse of the incompetent”.*

Alan learnt his trade at the J.S. Watkins Art School where he studied drawing at 13 years of age. Watkins had set up his art school after returning to Australia after studying in Paris in 1898 above the Julian Ashton’s art school in King Street. By 1927 when Alan Baker was attending it had moved to 56 Margaret Street Sydney.

At the Watkins art school Alan was trained in tonal drawing in pencil charcoal, pen and washes and later oils, according to Gary’s biography of his father. The art school provided a competitive environment and Alan thrived in it. His mentors included Henry Hanke, Normand Baker (his brother ) and William Pidgen. Alan later became a teacher at the school.

In 1936 at 22 years of age Alan had a self-portrait accepted in the Archibald Prize at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Alan’s brother Normand won the Archibald prize in 1937 with his *Self Portrait* and the travelling scholarship in 1939. Between 1932 and 1972, according to Gary Baker, Alan entered

the Archibald Prize with 35 separate paintings and made the finals 26 times. In 1969 he submitted a portrait of Camden surgeon Gordon Clowes which made the final selection that year.

The art collection at Macaria is representative of the art genres that Alan practised throughout his career and includes portraiture, still life, landscape, seascape, life drawing and life painting. The exhibitions has a number of examples of Baker's commercial hotel posters, pencil drawings and portraits.

Some of Alan's artwork was completed during his war service in New Guinea and the Pacific where he painted Papuans, fellow diggers and others. Alan enlisted in 1942 in the Australian Army with the rank of private and served in New Guinea. On discharge in 1945 he was with the 2 Australian Watercraft Workshop AEME (Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers).

After the war he met Marjorie Whitchurch (formerly Kingsell) who had taken up art classes at the Watkins art school. Alan worked an instructor at the school after he was demobbed from the army. Marjorie had fled Singapore in 1942 when the Japanese invaded the city, and in the process she lost her husband, who died on the Burma Railway, her home and her possessions.

Alan dated Marjorie for a year then married her in 1946. They lived in primitive accommodation at Moorebank with few facilities. Their first child was born in 1947. Alan's career started to prosper and he had a painting of his wife Marjorie accepted in the 1953 Archibald Prize at the Art Gallery of New South Wales and was a finalist with his *Artists Wife*.

The couple sought solace after the loss of their sons and moved to the isolation of The Oaks. Here they established their home, a garden, and Alan set up his studio in a bush setting. The garden provided inspiration and subject material for Still Life paintings. Gary Baker maintains that:

*An artist must arrange his own composition by any means...the value of the shadow being thrown from one flower to the other...I spend hours arranging till I am satisfied the result will be successful.*

Alan was a fan of *plein air* painting, a tradition which goes back to the French Impressionists in the mid-19th century. His landscapes reflect naturalism, the avoidance of stylisation and a 'commitment to the natural and man-made environment'.

Baker had a prolific work ethic, and had many exhibitions across Australia. The *Australian Art Sales Digest* lists 708 works, of which 77 are on display



in Macaria and his artwork is exhibited in numerous galleries and private collections. He lived at The Oaks until his death in 1987.

Alan Baker's legacy is acknowledged by the foundation of the Alan Baker Art Gallery located in Macaria in John Street Camden in 2018.



**The Alan Baker Art Collection is located in Macaria John Street Camden. Macaria is an impressive Picturesque Tudor Gothic town house built by merchant Henry Thompson in 1860 (I Willis, 2018).**

## **Alan Baker Art Classes**

### **Some memories by his students**

In the 1970s Alan was asked to mentor and teach an art class at Camden Public School. These classes were instrumental in creating opportunities for a number of Camden locals to pursue careers as artists. The groundbreaking influence of these art classes is still evident today.

What follows are the memoirs of a number of these artists who tell their story in their own voice. These reminiscences are largely unedited and reflect the experience of these artists. This means that there is necessarily some repetition across the individual stories and the memories of the individuals who have written them. (The editor)

#### **Rizwana Ahmad**

My first encounter with the Alan Baker Art Group was in 1973. I had recently migrated to Australia after completing an MA in Fine Art from Punjab University, Lahore, Pakistan.

A patient of my husband's - who was then working as a physiotherapist - told me about the class and invited me along one evening. I was keen to meet other artists who were working in my newly adopted home. I accepted the invitation!

I noticed several things that evening. First, Alan was not obliged to instruct each student individually: his role was to be an inspiring and charismatic force for all the class. I recall his son, Gary (who was then a high school student) being trained and groomed under Alan's watchful eye.

Second, it was very interesting to compare and contrast Alan's techniques with those I had inherited from my European-South Asian training. For example, Alan kept his colour palette to several earth tones: he did not adopt the colour theory of the Impressionists. He was very much a Realist and had an excellent grasp of tonal values.

Third, he painted relatively quickly. Fourth, his studies of flowers were spot on and, in my view, were his most accomplished works.



**Former members of the Alan Baker Art Group at Camden Public School Patricia Johnson, Nola Tegel, and Olive McAleer. (O McAleer)**

Although I only attended a few classes with the art group I recall being asked to model for the class one evening in my South Asian wedding dress – a confection of shocking pink and gold brocade. Alan captured the shimmering golden hues brilliantly and the painting was sold in an exhibition shortly afterwards.

### **Patricia Johnston**

Nobody crossed the room to meet me when I was an academic librarian, but I had some magical attraction as an artist.

My husband Ken, a Veterinary Pathologist and I had come to Camden in 1959. Ken pioneered the establishment of a clinical veterinary laboratory, while I set up a research library, for the new Veterinary Science and Agriculture campus of the University of Sydney. These facilities provided practical experience and education to the final year students of these facilities in Werombi Road, Camden.

I had always been interested in art and even gained admission to the East Sydney Technical College (now the National Art School) in 1949, but was discouraged from pursuing a professional artistic career as it was so difficult for women at that time to make a living from art alone.

It was only meeting the art teacher Ken Rorke in 1964, that encouraged me to join a new local art group, in which the professional artist Alan Baker would offer advice and criticism of our work.

But Alan did more than that, he changed my life and art became my passion. Each Wednesday for two hours a small group would meet and draw a model in charcoal or pencil under Alan's supervision. We weren't allowed to mess with colour until we understood thoroughly tonal variation and drawing techniques.

It was only after a year of drawing, we broke out the oils and the delicious application of buttery paint and the smell of linseed oil excites me still. In those two hours we were able to produce a portrait or a still life study.

As our skills progressed Alan took us to paint landscapes 'en plein air' and I can remember the first I attended was on the top of Razorback in the late afternoon. The experience combined all the complexities of technique and drawing we had learned, as well as how to cope with the flies, ants, dust and other hazards to produce a painting on the spot and capture the changing light.

By this time Alan's talented son Gary had joined the group. We noticed that he was encouraged to extend his art studies at the Royal Art Society of NSW, where Alan served as vice president. So Nola Tegel, Olive McAleer and I joined the class of Harry Hanke, former Archibald prize winner, and in the next 3 and 4 years studied to gain the Diploma of Fine Art showing proficiency in drawing, landscape, portrait and still life painting.

In 2003 I was made Fellow of the prestigious society, which proudly claims Tom Roberts and Margaret Preston as its former members, and my work is now part of the Society's collection.

My watercolour tutor there was Frederic Bates, who had begun to organize some of the earliest tours designed especially for artists, travelling to see wonderful museums and studios of famous artists and even painting on the sites, where they had painted famous works.

In 1994 following the serious illness of his wife Enid, he asked me to take over as tour leader, art and cultural teacher, interpreter and general trouble shooter on these tours. I enjoyed 15 years with the delightful companionship of Marjory Baker, then Alan's widow to visit France, Italy, Germany, Austria, Spain and Portugal, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Russia Corsica and many others with Marjory alone in Asia.

I can thank Alan Baker for these wonderful adventures. He gave his knowledge and great experience of art so generously for 23 years in that little art group and inspired my own artistic journey.

### **Olive McAleer**

[Part of address given at her exhibition on 14 April 2018 given by one of her daughters.]

Olive has always possessed an unaccountable urge to speak the language of art.

Dad [Geoff] recognized and encouraged Mum's talent. He met Alan Baker at Rotary in 1969 and asked him for a list of items for Mum to begin oil painting. I recall the day we all went to Parker's Art Supplies in George Street Sydney to buy Mum's easel and paints.

Alan began an art group at Camden Public School. Mum attended every Wednesday night and was delighted with her friends Nola Tegel, Patricia Johnston and Jack Dunn joined too. They formed the Camden Art Group and have continued to promote art and have successful careers in their own right.

### **Shirley Rorke**

[Interview with Ian Willis, Camden, 5 May 2018]

Ken Rorke, a local school teacher who taught at Camden Public School, was a keen artist and was instrumental in setting up art classes at the school.

Shirley recalls that Ken initially asked artist Alan Baker would he be prepared to give advice to a group of budding local artists 'for a while so they might get started' and Alan agreed.

Ken was always interested in art and started the class in his classroom at the school where he was teaching at the time. Ken taught at Camden Public School from 1961 to his death in 1981.

Ken organised the classes for Wednesday nights. Shirley said that she felt Ken was keen to help others and had the advantage of having access to his classroom as a venue, which was used for the classes until 1981.

Ken, according to Shirley, loved painting in watercolours, doing black and white sketches and pencil drawings. He sold some of his work to local supporters and friends.



*Margery*  
Nola Tegel assisted by Alan Baker c. 1975. in oil.  
(Supplied by N Tegel)

**Nola Tegel**

Early 1970.

I was in my studio earlier today working on a painting of an Italian land-

scape; I was contemplating the area where the mountain meets the horizon. There is an almost indescribable tone, a penumbra of colour that is virtually impossible to capture. Is it orange, or lilac, or perhaps a rosy hue or even a mixture of those colours? Yes, impossible.

But I try.

And doing so I consider how I got here and the wonderful adventure of arriving at this place. It is in no small way due to Alan Baker, and his wonderful wife Margery moving to the Camden district.

When the local artist/teacher Ken Rourke discovered that Alan was a celebrated artist, he invited him to teach and...what pleasure...he accepted the invitation. Alan had his own ideas on teaching. Even though he had been employed as a teacher at the J S Watkins Art School. He stipulated that he would not teach, but if people were willing, he would attend an art group and paint along with us, encourage and direct us. There would not be any formal structure and definitely no money involved. We would just be a group of friends gathered together to learn from each other.

Alan suggested that we use the best materials. Always the finest archival paint, the top brushes, although there was not an enormous choice of artist quality paint available at that time. We were told to use tried and tested colours that would last many lifetimes. After forty plus years, I still use the same colours, in the same order. And so each Wednesday evening we would head to the primary school and sit on tiny seats and begin our evening project. The best seat in the house was behind Alan. One could watch each brush or pencil or charcoal stroke and hopefully, learn from it. After a while, even under his influence, we developed our own style.

Just watching Alan squeeze out oil paint onto his palette was a revelation for some. Great gobs of gooey paint, was mixed, back and forth with the brush, almost polishing it before it was applied to the board. Always the right colour, the right tone in the right place...what a skill. Although we started painting still life, we quickly moved on to portrait painting. As our master said, 'If you can paint a good portrait, you can paint anything'. That meant supplying a sitter or sitting for the group yourself.

Consequently, there would be no painting that week, so we tried hard to bring in members of our family. Olive McAleer had a bevy of beautiful daughters,



***The Master's Student.* Alan Baker, c. 1975, oil painting. Completed in art class at Camden Public School. (Supplied by N Tegel)**

Alan's wife Margery used to sit with exotic hats, but the prize for original sitters would have gone to Rita Bloomfield. Working for the Bullen Circus



Company, she brought in Beaver, an Indian Chief, who had a knife-throwing act. He would sit, resplendent in his feather headdress and leathers; his face was severe, long, grim and full of Indian character...He said nothing. This was a good idea, because if you heard him talk he sounded distinctly English! And I am also pleased to report that he left his knives at home.

We all worked hard. Alan would make a suggestion here or there. Sometimes and best of all, he would take our place, pick up our palette and with one or two brushstrokes he would bring the painting to life. I have such a painting of Margery ...with corrections from Alan, an original Tegel/ Baker painting. Also, I have another painting by Alan. One evening he sat behind me and painted me painting Margery.

Although Alan did not often join us in the landscape, he organised one or two painting trips. On the top of Razorback Mountain with a simple view...a road...a house and a tree or two. One of our members came along with a "banana bed"...she had had a busy night, and she rested while everyone else struggled with the scene.

This gave many of us the confidence to venture further afield and the resulting paintings were shown on our evenings where Alan would gently criticize them. We found wonderful things to paint; indeed Camden was an art paradise. Of course, it has changed, as everything has, but it was and still is a great adventure.

As a result of our class, which lasted many years, numerous people started and made full time careers in the art world, and so many of them have their own stories.

I have travelled far and wide in the name of art, initially with my husband Max. While he would never hold a paintbrush, he has accompanied me following my favourite artists in many of the best galleries and museums at home and abroad. Also I have been on painting holidays with my dear friends, Margery, Patricia Johnston and Olive McAleer; we have truly experienced the world of art together.

There are many funny stories, sad and tragic stories, but as a result of Alan and Margery coming to Camden District, I can sincerely say it changed my life. It is a continuing joy to express myself in this medium.

And one more thing, I wonder if anyone could drop by help me decipher that elusive colour...

*[Nola Tegel notes that one of the most important to us was Christine Parrish. She joined early and so importantly, started a commercial art gallery at Cob-bitty. She did very well for all of us and made a living from its success]*

### **John Wrigley**

In 1972 I was invited to attend the regular art classes that were held on a Wednesday night at Camden Public School by Alan Baker. My work colleague, the American forester Arthur 'Red' Mitchell, was already an accomplished amateur artist and enjoyed the company of the various other people who attended.

For many years Ken Rorke, husband of Shirley Rorke, was a teacher at Camden Public School. In the early 1970s Ken was keen to start an art class in Camden and approached the artist Alan D. Baker and asked him to conduct weekly art classes and Alan very generously agreed. An advertisement was placed in the Camden News. The classes were informal, free, and open to anyone in the community who was interested. Ken acted as the host each night in his class room at Camden Public School. Alan Baker was the teacher but never asserted his position and just moved through the room stopping to assist or give advice. The evenings were held with a minimum of organisation and about 20 attended, varying each time. On any night people would be using a variety of media - pencil, pen, pastels, watercolour and oils.

It was expected that everyone would take a turn to either sit for the portraiture or bring a sitter friend or relative along. Sometimes a person would dress up or wear an unusual hat. One night my wife Julie, a teacher of English at Camden High School, came along, so that night everyone made a pencil sketch of her. Many years later, after Alan's death, his widow Marjorie, told us that she still had the pencil portrait of Julie drawn by Alan from that night in 1972 and would we like to have it? We enthusiastically said yes please. Gary Baker framed it and it is now a favourite work of art in our home.

Regular members ended up with piles of portrait drawings and could see how they had progressed over time (or not!) I believe that several of the other artists from the classes would still have similar piles of pencil sketches that they have kept from those days. I saw such a pile at the former home of Olive

McAler in Elizabeth Macarthur Avenue about twenty years ago.

The classes inspired many successful local artists. Attendees that I can remember included Ken Rorke, Nola Tegel, Patricia Johnston, Olive McAler, Red Mitchell, Rizwana Ahmad, Rita Bloomfield, Neville Clinton, Daphne Wilson and Alan's son Gary Baker, and some brought younger family members occasionally. Recently Daphne Wilson donated to the Camden Museum her collection of 14 portraits of local residents. Most of the portraits were started at Alan Baker's classes.

Ken Rorke was sadly missed when he died prematurely in 1981 but the classes continued. In 1987 Alan Baker died. For a time the group went on, but it finished when the Department of Education started being concerned about insurance, payment for electricity, and the filling in of appropriate forms. I have an interesting watercolour painting of a seaside scene which I had framed after one class. I can remember that I did all the washes and some of the details, beach, and trees but all the good parts of the painting were done by Alan, showing me how to do it! I chuckle every time that I look at it. After about a year of attending the class I realised that I was not a natural artist and was not progressing so I stopped attending. We had begun attending a local adult education discussion group which suited us both and which lasted for many years.

We were all very fortunate to have received Alan's kindly and thoughtful advice and tutoring in such a pleasant setting. We did not know that Alan and Ken would be leaving us so soon.

## The Abusive Mr Chisholm (Part One)

**Peter McCall**

Calling someone “abusive” today is a fairly serious charge. I was therefore interested to find in the files of the Camden Historical Society an article headed “The Abusive Mr Chisholm in War Paint.” It was dated 20 December 1897. What could it be about?

It emerged that it was a speech attacking the Camden Agricultural, Horticultural and Industrial Society (AH&I Society). The main role of the AH&I Society was the organisation of the annual Camden Show.

In 1897 the meetings of the AH&I Society were interrupted from their usual discussions of prizes for exhibits and dates for the next show by allegations of financial mismanagement, sale of sly grog and even corruption. The principal targets of these attacks were James K Chisholm, president of the society, Astley Onslow Thompson, the secretary, and William R Cowper, the treasurer. Considering the status of these people within Camden society, these were serious accusations.

James K Chisholm (1830-1912) was a wealthy landowner, founding president of the AH & I Society, having been in that role for eleven years. He was married to the first cousin of Elizabeth Macarthur-Onslow, owner of the pre-eminent local estate, Camden Park, and granddaughter of the founder of her family’s fortunes, John Macarthur.

Astley Onslow Thompson (1865-1915) was a second cousin of Elizabeth Macarthur-Onslow’s husband, Arthur Onslow. Thompson was the manager of the Camden Park estates and also was central to the Camden Mounted Rifles where he was a captain and as a result was often referred to in this matter as “the Captain”.

William R Cowper (1858-1925) also came from a family of early settlers to the Camden district, being the grandson of the first Premier of New South Wales. He was the manager of the Commercial Bank in Camden from 1886 to 1906. He was involved in many committees and organisations in Camden, often in the capacity of treasurer. These included the School of Arts, Rifle Club, Dramatic Society and the Philharmonia.<sup>1</sup> He was praised for his role in establishing butter factories, a feature in the development of agriculture and industry in Camden at the time and specifically the Westbrook factory,<sup>2</sup> which was to become a source of controversy.

The person behind the allegations was Henry Willis (1860-1950), a politically minded man who worked his way from municipal office in South Australia and New South Wales up to state and federal levels, ending as Speaker of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly from 1911 to 1913.

He was an eloquent orator, and this made him popular as his speeches tended to be highly entertaining. He was a skilled debater, having much experience of this in Adelaide. His eloquence often rested on debating skills rather than actual strength of his line of reasoning.

He was always determined to win an argument. In 1911 when Willis had been elected Speaker, an article written anonymously said this about him, "Under the guise of perfect peace he harbours the spirit of the warrior.

He takes delight in strife. ... he is the fortunate possessor of a supreme self-confidence ... which makes him regard opponents as weaklings, and raises him clear above any element of anxiety as to the outcome."<sup>3</sup> Willis's actions in Camden certainly fit with this estimation.

On 21 January 1897 Henry Willis announced his intention to stand for a position as alderman on Camden Council. He declared that his candidacy was based on his independence, experience and financial knowledge. Willis also was supposed



Lieut.-Colonel A. J. Onslow Thompson, V.D., Officer Commanding the 4th Battalion of the First Infantry Brigade, who was also killed in action. Colonel Thompson always took a great interest in military matters. With Colonel Onslow he raised the Camden Squadron of the N.S.W. Mounted Rifles in 1895, and subsequently commanded the regiment, which became known as the 2nd A.L.R. For some years before the war he had been on the unattached list. Colonel Onslow Thompson was a man of great force of character and a prominent figure in Sydney's commercial and financial circles. He was unmarried.

**Astley Onslow Thompson 1915**  
*Sydney Mail* 12 May 1915.

edly expert in water supply technology, a matter of some import in Camden at that time.<sup>4</sup> He had already been the first mayor of Cabramatta and Canley Vale in 1893.<sup>5</sup> Willis was elected to Camden Council.<sup>6</sup> Willis's address at this time is sometimes referred to as "Hahndory", which was in Elizabeth St, but his connection with Camden came from his position as manager of the late EL Moore's estate<sup>7</sup> which had a number of properties to the south, west and north of Camden.<sup>8</sup> EL Moore was Willis's father-in-law.

The site of the show was Onslow Park. This land was part of the Camden Park Estate until donated by Elizabeth Macarthur-Onslow as a recreation ground in 1887. It was under a trust which leased the land to the AH&I Society for the annual show.

Henry Willis first attacked the leadership of the AH&I Society in a letter he wrote to the *Camden News* on 10 June, 1897. Willis stated that "if the Agricultural Society is to be used for personal aggrandisement and junketing of casual friends, it should be done at private expense." He estimated that two hundred people to the annual show were "regaled at the Society's expense," and that luncheons had cost £253.

It was true that at the show a free luncheon was held for show stewards and judges, donors of special prizes from outside the district, distinguished visitors and secretaries of kindred societies.<sup>9</sup> These luncheons may have been seen by some as extravagant. FWA Downes, at the April 1897 AH&I Society committee meeting, said "sometimes the feeling gets among members that we are a little too lavish in distributing tickets for our luncheons."<sup>10</sup> JK Chisholm said, "All the visitors regard[ed] their luncheons as banquets." He was applauded for this.<sup>11</sup> These statements predate Willis's accusations, but may indicate that there was some uneasiness about them even at that time.

Not surprisingly, at the AH&I Society Committee meeting of 24 June, this issue was addressed, although reference is made to an anonymous letter rather than the Willis' letter to the *Camden News*. Here the complaint was about £60 spent from the miscellaneous account. The Committee said that this had been spent on hospitality.

It was claimed that the prestige of the society was added to when it dispensed hospitality.<sup>12</sup> Further it stated that there was no "grog" on the account. The treasurer, WR Cowper did say that the accounts had been rushed, and he was supported in this by Mr Harris, the auditor. Committee member HP Reeves said that the letter on this issue showed envy, hatred and malice and that the matter should be dropped. It was.<sup>13</sup>

Or that is what the Committee hoped. Henry Willis had other ideas. In the



**Portrait of Henry Willis, 1900s, The Swiss Studios (NLA)**

next *Camden News* a letter appeared from him stating that the only prestige the AH&I Society had was from agriculture, not visitors.<sup>14</sup> He further suggested that the state government reductions in subsidies for agricultural societies throughout the state were, in the case of Camden, due to the AH & I Society's acceptance of £50 from a Mr Hennessy to open the refreshment booth. He questioned whether this meant that distinguished visitors got free whisky and soda. There is no evidence to show that the reduction of subsidies had anything to do with this. The AH&I Society minutes of 24 June 1897 give the actual reason- the state government had narrowed the scope of subsidies to a group of specific agricultural prizes. This applied to all agricultural societies, not just Camden.<sup>15</sup>

Two months later Willis wrote a further letter to the *Camden News*. Here he attacked the balance sheet of the AH&I Society as an "extraordinary document."<sup>16</sup> The balance sheet was not signed- the new treasurer, HP Reeves, admitted that this had been done inadvertently.<sup>17</sup> He also complained about a loan from a "resident" which smacked of patronage. The resident was Mrs Elizabeth Macarthur-Onslow, owner of Camden Park Estate.

In the 1930s, GV Sidman, recorded of the late 1800s that "it was generally a current topic that certain alderman have little love for Camden Park Estate and any excuse was a reason for an attack that made matters unpleasant."<sup>18</sup> As mentioned above, JK Chisholm and Astley Onslow Thompson were related to Elizabeth Macarthur-Onslow. Henry Willis was an alderman, and it is therefore likely that Kidman was thinking of him when he wrote this. The reasons for this dislike of Camden Park Estate will become clearer later.

Willis also enumerates the amounts paid for various miscellaneous expenses. Next to the £18 12s 6d for petty cash and postage, telegrams etc he wrote "Great Scott!" The editor of the *Camden News* suggested that Mr Willis in future must use a "temperate and courteous manner."<sup>19</sup>

At the AH&I Society Annual Meeting on 10 September the treasurer HP Reeves deprecated cheese-paring for judges' lunches and said that they had to be good to attract suitable judges. The meeting congratulated JK Chisholm for his twelve years as president and elected to him to life membership of the society. Chisholm said that Henry Willis "would have shown a more manly spirit ... if he attended this meeting."<sup>20</sup>

By the 28 October meeting Willis had threatened the Trustees of Onslow Park that he would take them to the Court of Equity on the grounds that they had not responded to his questions concerning the lease of land to the AH&I Society, the charging of admission to the grounds and the erection of unsightly buildings. He demanded to see the Trustee's account books.<sup>21</sup> Willis





**J K Chisholm (Camden Images)**

seemed to believe that original Deed of Trust prohibited the Trustees from charging for entrance. However, the deed for this quite specifically said “the said Trustee [may] charge for admission to the said land or any part thereof on any number of days not exceeding twelve days in the ... year,”<sup>22</sup> with the maximum amount being one shilling. This clause was designed to allow the charge of an entrance fee to the show. The AH&I Society did charge one shilling entrance to the show,<sup>23</sup> and collected rents from various stalls that were there. This was confirmed by the Trustees when they were interviewed by Camden Municipal Council on 5 January 1898.

Willis continued to raise the stakes in his attack on the AH&I Society. He called a public meeting at the School of Arts on the same day where he went over his charges. He suggested that the recreation grounds would be better used as a bowling green, quoit court, tennis court, children’s playground and a band rotunda. He suggested that JK Chisholm had a conflict of interest as a trustee of Onslow Park which made a lease to the AH&I Society of which he was President. He called the 300 recipients of hospitality (later called sly grog) “deadheads” and that they would be made up of “very insignificant persons from the bye-ways and highways of Minto.”

Chisholm lived in Minto. He stated that the show was run by a “little clique.” He also attacked treasurer Reeves as a “toady.” He complained that Onslow Thompson had sent him a “saucy letter.”<sup>24</sup> This meeting seemed to prefigure much of the style of the speech Willis made on 20 December and which was the trigger for this article you are reading now.

Meanwhile, in the Camden Council Meeting of 10 November 1897, Alderman Willis gave notice of motion that a statement of claim be made against the Trustees of Onslow Park in the Court of Equity. The *Camden News* reported that several unpleasant expressions such as dog and pig were used at the meeting. Unfortunately these animals were not recorded in the council’s minutes.<sup>25</sup> However, the *Camden News* of 18 November 1897 did give details; the animal terms referred to an altercation between Aldermen Griffiths and Coleman who were on opposing sides regarding Willis’s motion. The matter was left there as it was felt there was an equivalence of insult in the terms “dog” and “pig”.

At the same council meeting the trustees said that because of the motion to take the trustees before the Court of Equity, they could only respond to the council through solicitors. They were willing, however, to make their accounts available to any alderman except Alderman Willis “as the meeting would be unpleasant to both parties.” The council however insisted that all alderman be able to see the accounts.<sup>26</sup>

A letter from “CRS” was published in the *Camden News* attacking Willis on 18 November 1897. It suggested that the accusations of toadyism and malversation<sup>27</sup> showed that Willis was ignorant about the matters he was commenting on. The success of the Camden Show in itself was sufficient evidence to show that he was wrong.

CRS believed that the attacks on Chisholm and Cowper had other motives. While he did not explain these, he did state that Cowper had done everything to benefit Camden and that of Chisholm it was difficult to speak a sufficient eulogy. He felt it wrong that Chisholm, in the evening of his life, should be troubled by “foul aspersions emanating from a black heart and an envenomed tongue.”

Willis responded in the next issue of the *Camden News* with the claim that CRS is firing from behind a bush as in guerrilla warfare. This referred to the anonymity of the letter and the dishonourable nature of the attack he had made. He went as far as comparing CRS to Iago, the villain in Shakespeare’s *Othello*.<sup>28</sup>

By this time, despite their earlier attempt to drop the matter, the AH&I Society felt the need to act. The matter had reached the stage where insults were being traded (although on the side of the AH&I Society the worst of these were left to acronyms like CRS) and legal action threatened. At the AH&I committee meeting of 22 November 1897, a motion for a Special General Meeting to be held on 6 December 1897 was made by the secretary, Astley Onslow Thompson.

Thompson said that Mr Willis’s charges amounted practically to accusations of corruption and misappropriation of funds. The meeting would consider the proposed resignation of the President and some of the Committee. The Committee felt the need for 75% of membership support if they were to continue.

The motion for the Special General Meeting was carried unanimously.<sup>29</sup> Given its unanimous support, it would appear this motion was designed to demonstrate the complete support for the president and the Committee from the members of the AH&I Society and leave Henry Willis in a position of isolation. This manoeuvre might allow the society to overcome the problems Willis had created for them.

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## Please ‘shed’ light on Matavai

Anne McIntosh

Above the barn door of a property near Cobbitty is a window plate that reads ‘Matavai’.

Searches for ‘Matavai’ on Trove provide only limited information. The Tahitian origins of the name are well documented. Rev. Roland (or Rowland) Hassall ministered in outlying areas of Sydney, moving west and south as the population expanded and moved. He profited during the ‘reign’ of Samuel Marsden, gaining access to government supplies and acquiring significant land through grants and purchase, including 400 acres on the Nepean River. In 1814, he was appointed supervisor of government stock, the largest herd being in the Cowpastures.

After Rev Hassall died in 1834, three of his four sons maintained pastoral pursuits, and from ‘Matavai’, his youngest son James played a significant role in rural life at Cobbitty for many years. This illuminating article was published in the *Camden News* on Thursday 20 March, 1924:

*The old Estate of Matavia (sic.) is about to pass into other hands. This was an original grant of 200 acres to Mr Roland Hassall on behalf of his third son, Johnathan – dated 8<sup>th</sup> October 1816. He called it Matavai after the residence of King Pomare (or Pomarre) of Tahiti where Mr Hassall had been a missionary for some two years in 1796-98. King Pomare had greatly befriended the Missionaries. Correspondence from King Pomare to Governor King at Sydney is addressed from ‘Matavye’. There are many other spellings of the name by the clerks in the Parish registers here.*

*Mr Johnathan Hassall only lived a few years at Matavai. At his death, his next brother James, whose grant ‘Bosworth’ was adjacent, took up residence there and began great improvements. He soon had the show farm of the district. The spacious stable built of squared stones is a monument to the activities of his time. Mr Hassell (sic) was a most enterprising man. As a youth, he wrote splendid letters in a beautiful handwriting. At first, he managed the stock on the family grants at O’Connell and elsewhere. At Matavia (sic) he made great progress with farming on a handsome scale.*

*Mr Martin in ‘Reminiscences’ says Mr Hassall gave a harvest home every year which brought the whole neighbourhood together, and the eating and drinking and merry-making were something to remember. In those days, there were two cricket clubs; one at Kirkham and the other at Matavai. The late Mrs Hope, of Melbourne – a daughter of Mr James Hassall’s eldest*

brother, the Rev. Thos. Hassall – used to say that all the young people loved to get to Matavai because her uncle’s entertainment and hospitality were so grand. The ballroom floor was the whole length of the attic story under the great roof of the Bungalow cottage.

In the forties, Mr Hassall seems to have lived for a while at Freshfield, and in 1854, to have tracked in six weeks with all his belongings in bullock wagons to western Victoria.

But we can picture Matavai posed on a height between the Cobbitty rivulet and its junction with the beautiful waters of the Nepean, overlooking all the wonderful flats to Camden and the Razorback.. The grassy slopes running right down to the waters of the river and the wonderfully terraced garden over the banks of the rivulet, with its stone walls and steps and summer house, profuse with wines of all manner of fruits. We wonder whether Matavai will yet come back to its own pristine glory; its site deserves it.

In 1847, an ad for the lease of Matavai appeared on page 4 of the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

*TO LET, a desirable farm on the Nepean River, near Cobbitty, in the district of Camden and Narellan, with an excellent cottage and offices, garden , &c., &c. The farm contains seven hundred acres. Rent extremely moderate. Apply to Mr Irving, Matavai.*

On 18 January, Thomas Henry Skinner’s youngest daughter, Mary, married Charles Egar Gregory of “Pleasant View”, Narellan. The marriage was not held in Narellan or in Cobbitty; instead it took place at the large church, St Thomas’ C of E in North Sydney and was ministered by Rev. H. H. Childe. (SMH15 Feb 1913)

Thomas Henry Skinner was 73 years old when he died at ‘Matavai’ on 11 July 1923. He was buried at St Paul’s in Cobbitty, eight days later.

On page 7 of the *Camden News* of 20 Nov 1952, there is an incidental item that includes “...In the neighbourhood [of Paddy Clark’s Hill] is ‘Matavai’ – a holding to which Mr Hugh Gordon and family are coming, and ‘Bosworth’ ...”

The sale by auction of the 310 acres of ‘Matavai’ was advertised in *The Land* on 22 May 1953 at which time, the property was described as:

*SITUATION: 2 miles from Cobbitty; 6 miles from Camden*

*COUNTRY: From riverflat to low hill. 30 acres suitable for irrigation (15 acres under lucerne), 50 acres suitable for cultivation (20 acres sown with*

*oats, 8 acres barley, 8 acres saccaline (Ed. = a forage sorghum), 8 acres subclover), 230 acres of grazing land.*

*WATERED: Half mile frontage Nepean River, Cobbitty*

*Creek on northern end, which has permanent holes, 5 earth dams.*

*BUILDINGS: Weatherboard homestead on brick foundation, louvered, iron roof, electric light, power connected in the home and dairy, garage and tool room, laundry. Weatherboard cottage with verandah. Dairy and milk room. Feed stalls and chaff shed. Feed shed – stone and brick. Large hayshed.*

*CARRYING CAPACITY: The owner considers this property, which has a Dairy Milk Board Licence would carry approximately 80 cattle or make an ideal horse or cattle stud, and could also be used for vegetable growing. ...*

The property did not sell and was re-advertised for auction by a rural Commission Agent on 5 June 1953.

Possible clue: In the registration of stock brands reference book, a brand registered in 1959 features a right pointing arrow over I-C. It is registered to: Haden Archie William and Craig Thomas Alexander of Matavai, Cut Hill, Cobbitty.

**Does anyone remember ‘Matavai’ and its heritage, either as a show farm, a cricket ground, or a ballroom? Can anyone share insights into its incarnations since 1953?**



## **Ria and the story of the song, *Camden*.**

### **Ian Willis**

Ria was the special invited guest at the 2018 Camden Shorts Program sponsored by Camden Council at the Camden Civic Centre where she performed her own song composition called *Camden*.

Ria is the stage name for Ria Brcic, a Camden local, who was inspired to write about her home town when she was working overseas. The story of the song *Camden* is told here in the first person by Ria and it goes like this:

*Camden is a composition of mine that I hold very dearly to my heart. I wrote this song in 2016 when I embarked on an experience of a life time, moving to Spain on my own to learn a new language and culture. Lucky enough for me this experience gave me the opportunity to write more, through inspiration I founded whilst travelling.*

*In the midst of it all I found myself starting to feel a little homesick and on one particularly cold afternoon my emotions got the better of me, which somehow splattered out onto a page in under thirty minutes. I was purely inspired by the love for my home town and the people I missed. When I was writing this song that would later be called Camden, I was reminiscing about all the great things this place had to offer. Camden is a beautiful town with a river that surrounds us and beautiful historic buildings and churches. It also wasn't until I was gone that I realised how lucky I was to live in this town, my home, Camden.*

### ***Camden*, the lyrics.**

#### **Ria Brcic**

#### **(Verse 1)**

Ohh Camden is where I'm from  
A place where I belong  
With a home by the river  
But it's just not that, some things go way back

#### **(Verse 2)**

Ohh Camden is on the map  
South west in the old outback  
With a home by the river  
How could it be, it's still home for me





**Ria Brcic 2018 at a performance in the Camden area (R Brcic)**

**(Chorus)**

My home by the river  
It's my safe keeping with a family  
And we all have dreams  
And mine starts right here so just keep listening  
For the story, for the story

**(Verse 3)**

Oh I've travelled around the world

I've seen places that has got be curled  
Landscapes of beauty pathways for life  
But I didn't feel whole, I just wanted to cry

**(Verse 4)**

Oh my family they weren't there  
Without my best friend nothing to share  
Oh my home by the river  
Could you please come back, lets have a chat

**(Chorus)**

My home by the river  
It's my safe keeping with a family  
And we all have dreams  
And mine starts right here so just keep listening  
For the story, for the story (X2)

**(Chorus)**

My home by the river  
It's my safe keeping with a family  
And we all have dreams  
And mine starts right here so just keep listening  
For the story, for the story (X3)  
**Oh Camden is where I'm from**

**Camden Shorts**

Camden Shorts is part of the youth program of Camden Council and provides a venue for young performers to showcase their talent.

Camden Council website states:

*The entertaining evening of short works provides young local musicians and performers an opportunity to showcase their talents in live music, dance and theatre by young local musicians and performers.*

The 2018 Camden Shorts, on Friday 20 April, showcased 13 young performers ranging across dances, vocal, musical to performance art. There was an enthusiastic crowd of family and friends who cheered on the performers.

Ria says,

*The first time I performed at Camden Shorts was in 2016 at the beginning of the year. It was a very surreal experience for me because it was run so professionally and there was such a big turn out on the night. I sang two songs that meant a lot to me and it was after that, my confidence levels boosted.*

*When I was invited by Cheryle Yin-Lo to come and perform as a special guest at the Camden Shorts 2018 I was very honoured. Honoured because she saw me as an inspiration and example for the younger performers to look up to. It's the performances like these where I am able to share and express my passion through music and the journey I've embarked with my community that I'll always remember.*

### **Ria, a short biography**

Ria tells her story so far trying to make her way in the music industry as a singer-songwriter and it goes like this:

*I am Ria Brcic, an aspiring singer-songwriter immensely passionate for music. My constant hard work is put into building my repertoire and with that I focus on intertwining my influence of folk music with country.*

*My musical journey began at the tender age of five when I used to sing for my grandfather when we came down to Sydney to paint my house. He was the first person to recognise my musical talent and it was his encouragement that really sparked my passion. I then later went on and began lessons and have been vocally trained for the past six years and have taken guitar lessons for around four years. As well as this, I have been performing on stage since the age of seven, so I am no stranger to performing in front of crowds.*

*I currently have two song releases, one being an original called 'Shoot Me Down' and the other a rendition of the classic 'Can't Help Falling in Love'. In the likes of young artists such as Gabrielle Aplin and Birdy to the greats of Dolly Parton, Janis Joplin and Leonard Cohen, I hope to one-day forge a career in the music industry and with hard work and persistence believe it's possible.*

## Memories of Milton and Elaine Ray

### Gail Carroll (ne Ray)

In June 2018 Gail Carroll responded to a Facebook post that Ian Willis's LinkedIn blog article called 'Volunteering is a form of voluntary taxation'.

Gail recalls:

*My father Milton Ray contributed many hundreds of hours as a volunteer Fireman and founding member of the Camden Historical Society. Volunteering was a very important part of his life and our upbringing. It enriched us all .*

*Both my mother and father were in the Camden Historical Society from the early 1960's and had regular bus trips to historical sites around Camden. I remember joining in when I was in Camden Primary School. Mr Nixon was president [and] my mother Elaine Ray was secretary.*

*My mother would have meticulously handwritten these minutes. My father was a keen movie photographer he put together *The Passing of Pansy*, segments of the last train trips from Camden to Campbelltown.*

*I remember being on those last Pansy trips hanging out the window waving madly. My father put on reel film all the bus excursions made by the historical society. My sister Lesley Anne Hoskin gave these to the society when my father passed away.*

*It was really something when the Camden Historical Society acquired their first display rooms at the back of the original Camden Library. My parents were there every weekend. Dad organised the wheel to commemorate the bullock drivers who brought the timber from Burragorang Valley. It still stands outside the old council chambers.*

*My father was a Camden volunteer fireman before I was born in 1952. I loved the Christmas Party at the fire station every year as I grew up. My father looked after the fire truck and would take us children on a loop of Camden Argyle Street., sitting on the side bench seats! The Camden Historical Society also has his fireman's uniform with the very distinctive brass helmet.*

*When Dad retired he joined Menangle Steam Museum again a founding member. He loved his Fordson and Whitehall tractors and would often lead*

*procession on these at the Camden Show and Campbelltown Show. My father was also a dedicated volunteer of St Johns Anglican Church always joining clean up teams and regularly climbed the bell tower to wind the clock and provide maintenance. He was a church warden for many years.*

*My father loved Camden and helping out when ever he could was his way of life. My parents were on the Camden Primary [School] P&C as well as Camden High School P&C. My father would bring out his go kart for children to ride at school fetes! We were a part of a fantastic community of volunteers who made Camden an exceptionally great place to live.*



**Milton Ray (centre) at the 50th Anniversary Celebrations of the Camden Historical Society on 20 July 2007. The other Camden identities are Vic Boardman (left) and Dick Nixon (right). (R Herbert/Camden Images)**

## **Dr Joan Mary Woodhill**

### **A notable scientist from Camden**

#### **Marilyn Willis**

A reserve at Gregory Hills in the Camden LGA has been named the “Woodhill Reserve” after a former notable Camden scientist Joan Mary Woodhill.

Joan was born in Camden on 5 May 1912 to New South Wales’s born Frank Leslie Woodhill and Maria Louise, nee Pepper, born in Tasmania. She was the youngest of three siblings. Her father was a store keeper and ran his business out of the Whiteman building in Argyle Street Camden.

The family lived at 9 Menangle Road Camden in a house which was purchased in 1905. They lived in this house until her father died in 1918. After his death her mother sold the business and moved to Gordon in Sydney northern suburbs.

Joan had a successful career as a dietician although her first degree was in Agricultural Science where she graduated from University of Sydney in 1934. Being a male dominated area she was unable to find employment in the field of agricultural science so pursued employment in the field of dietetics. She travelled to United States of America where she worked, completed research and courses towards attaining a Masters Degree. Joan then returned to Australia to work at RPA and teach students and also to be involved in research.

Joan completed her Masters a number of years later back in the USA and then worked towards her doctorate (PhD) also in the USA. After completing her PhD she worked at Royal Newcastle Hospital and Prince Henry Hospital where she conducted many research projects.

She had many highlights in her career as a Dietician when she came back to Australia, being the first Australian to be given the title of Chief Dietician, a foundation member of the NSW Dietetic Association, a nutrition research officer in the Department of Medicine & also a biochemist in their Department of Biomedicine with the University of NSW.

According to a colleague she was a great mentor to dietetic students. She spent a lot of her time completing research projects in a variety of areas and wrote many articles for journals. In 1973 she was appointed an OBE & was

made an honorary life member of the Dietetics Association in 1983.

She had a connection with the South Coast of New South Wales as she had a holiday house at Huskisson. She was also related to the Woodhills of Nowra who ran a general store situated in Berry Street Nowra.

Joan never married and died on 12 December 1990.

**Reference:**

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**Joan Mary Woodhill (on right) aged 21.  
(Faculty of Agriculture, University of  
Sydney, 1933)**

# President Annual Report 2017-2018

## Ian Willis

It is with pleasure that I present the annual report of the Camden Historical Society. It has been a busy and challenging year for the society.

The society continues to contribute to a number of roles in the community and including: acting as a centre of volunteering and construction of resilient communities; contributing to local tourism.

### Advocacy

The society continues to tell the Camden story and support local heritage by contributing to:

- The Camden Town Centre Urban Design Framework.
- suggestions for street names in new suburbs
- Representation on Camden Council's Heritage Advisory Committee.
- Commenting on a number of development applications and the sale of land at St Johns Church, which have contributed to a drop in society membership.

### Participation in the community

The society has attended at a number of community events including:

- In 2017: the Civic Centre Antique Fair; HCNSW History Week;
- In 2018: Australia Day parade; Camden Show; National Trust Heritage Week 'My Culture, My Story'; Camden Council Volunteers Night

### Speakers at society meetings

Speakers at monthly meetings have included:

- Robert Wheeler on the history of the Camden Residents Action Group
- Peter Ryan on the history of The Pines at Menangle Park
- David Funnell on his memories of Camden
- Dr Harvey Broadbent on Gallipoli.
- Bradley Warner on an Aging Community
- Michelle Scott Tucker on her book on Elizabeth Macarthur
- Jeff McGill on his book 'Pictorial History of Campbelltown'.

### Volunteers

Volunteers continue to do a great job in a range of capacities from staffing the front desk, research, attending functions, advocacy and other activities. The roster for the front desk is well managed by volunteer coordinator Rene Rem. He rounds up new volunteers and solves all myriad of issues that crop up. There are currently over 50 volunteers on the roster.



I conducted a brief survey of volunteer hours and preliminary findings indicated that in a notional week Camden Museum volunteers put in around 240 hours of voluntary unpaid effort.

Volunteers also attended:

Volunteers Day in June where Laura Jane talked about her Shirley Temple collection and Frances Warner launched a new edition of *They Worked at Camden Park*.  
Glass Slide Conservation Workshop at The Oaks Historical Society

### **Museum**

The museum attracted over 6000 visitors in the last year including a number of school visits and community groups. The society successfully obtained a grant from Camden Council for new display cabinets upstairs. The museum took possession of a convict love token that was given by Charles Green to his wife Sarah before he left England in 1831. The society has installed a new and improved CCTV system which was sponsored by Camden Rotary. The old photocopier was replaced with the lease on a new machine.

### **The Percival Wagon**

In mid-2017 the Macarthur Anglican School announced to the society that it wanted the partially completed Percival wagon moved from the school premises. At the time the society was not in a position to restore the wagon or place the incomplete wagon in a suitable location.

After some negotiations the new custodian of the wagon is The Oaks Historical Society. Their members offered to move the wagon from the school and finish the restoration. The Camden Historical Society provided funds of \$1000 towards the project.

By February this year The Oaks Historical Society had completed restoration of the chassis and tray. In March the Camden Historical Society wrote a letter of support for the The Oaks Historical Society as they sought grants for a blacksmith exhibit, with the restored wagon as the centre piece. By June two of the restored wheels from the wheelwright in Queensland arrived at The Oaks, and the cost of restoration of \$4000 was met by Macarthur Anglican School (originally a grant from Camden Council in 2012).

Tim Cartwright, the Dean of Students at Macarthur Anglican School, organised the original offer to restore the wagon in 2012. He reports:

*When the School took possession of the wagon, the entire sub structure was affected by white-ant and dry rot. This became evident when the front wheels folded under themselves unable to steer or take their own weight.*

*A small team of enthusiastic Year 7 and Year 9 boys with no practical carpentry experience gathered every Friday afternoon and sometimes through school holidays, with the intention of renovating and replacing all parts of the wagon to bring it to a point where it could be used rather than just as a display.*

*Over the four year period the boys learnt essential carpentry skills often producing work that demanded great attention to detail and a skill level that would be demanding even for modern practice.*

*The boys included: Adam Ebeling; Jack Jansen; Richard Cartwright; Henry Cartwright; Tom Oliver; Daniel Pearce*

*The boys took great pride in their work and were always concerned to replicate original parts instead of compromising on easier or more convenient solutions. This project has been rich in learning in many aspects and I am thrilled to have led the boys on this pathway of preserving our local heritage and introducing them to skills they will be able to revisit in years to come.*

Trish Hill, the president of the The Oaks Historical Society, says 'the wagon is looking like new'. She also reports that:

*A new shaft was needed to replace one that had rotted completely and under guidance from Jim Whyte, Kevin Wintle completed [this]. Others who worked on the wagon were Frank & Raymond Mackie and John Hyland.*

*The 2 smaller wheels were rebuilt by Nobby Forge in Queensland and we liaised with Raymond Mackie (who was working in Qld) to pick them up from Nobby for us. We have been advised the 2 large wheels should arrive from Bungendore sometime in September and so will complete the wagon.*

*We now have our blacksmith facility/shed approved by [Wollondilly] Council and ready to commence building work (along with our extension). [The new building] will house the wagon under cover, which will be great. If anyone wants to have a look please call in any time. When the last [2] wheels arrive and [the wagon] is fully finished we will organise an afternoon tea and invite your members.*

### **Membership**

Society membership is down by 20% in 2018 compared to 2017. The society will endeavour to improve this situation.

### **Administration**

The society computer system was recently upgraded to Windows 10 and resulted in the accounting MYOB crashing. Accountant Kathy Lester has been working with treasurer Dawn to recover the accounting records. I would like to thank Kathy and Dawn for their considerable efforts in this area. In addition Kathy has prepared a detailed analysis of the society's financial position and highlighted a number of shortcomings which are being addressed by the committee.

### **Community Partnership**

The society continues with the partnership with Camden Library and the Camden Area Family History Society. Joint activities have included: Heritage Week in April; History Week in September; and the collection of photographs in Camden Images Past and Present.

### **Communication**

The society published a journal twice a year and a newsletter three times a year. Lee Stratton looks after the newsletter and I am the journal editor. A number of members provide stories to the Back Then page of *The District Reporter*.

The society has a strong online presence with its website, Camden History, managed by Steve Robinson. Rene Rem looks after the Camden Museum facebook page and I look after our presence on the Google business pages, where some visitors have uploaded their photos. The museum has received excellent ratings this year on TripAdvisor.

### **Welfare**

Volunteer Sue Cross follows up members with messages of 'get well' and 'expression of sympathy'.

### **Financial assistance**

The society has the continued support of Camden Council through a yearly subsidy covering insurances, the provision of two storage units at Narellan and the on-going maintenance of the museum. Camden Council has digitized a number of historic maps.

### **Final Thanks**

In conclusion I wish to thank everyone on the committee, volunteers and others who have assisted the society over the past year. I wish to thank Dawn Williams for the sterling work as treasurer, particularly in the light of a recent tragic loss. The society remains in a strong financial position. I look forward to 2019.

August 2018

## **Changing environments for small charitable organisations**

**Kathy Lester**

The environment and legal responsibilities that small charities like Camden Historical Society Inc. operate within has dramatically changed within the last ten years.

Changes to various legislation means that the obligations and reporting responsibilities of small charitable organisations have increased from the days when all we had to do was hold an AGM, submit the annual return to the Office of Fair Trading and if required complete a quick and easy acquittals to funding bodies.

The introduction of the GST was only the beginning of many changes to follow. The advances in technologies and communication practices have made it easier for regulatory bodies to check and compare data provided to different government departments to ensure accuracy and avoid duplicated accounting.

The introduction of the Charities and Not-for-Profit Commission (ACNC) affords the government the ability to closely scrutinise the operations of Charities and NFPs. Reporting is no longer confined to financial reports and changes in constitutions or the Public Officer. The ACNC is streamlining the number of reports required while asking for more details from organisations.

Reports submitted are now used by more than one level of government and the Commission is attempting to adopt a report one use often approach. The ANCN is assisting charities understand their obligations by providing information and support, while assisting the public to understand how the sector works and that they can trust the legitimacy of registered charities and NFPs.

New regulations and responsibilities have filtered down to all aspects of the business in organisations such as ours. In running the society we are required to ensure that we provide good management that provides a safe environment for society members, volunteers and visitors to our museum.

Good management of the society's business practices that ensure the longevity of the organisation, needs to include a working knowledge and the appli-

cation of best practices pertaining to, but not limited to:

- Privacy Act
- GST compliance
- Copyright
- Accounting Standards
- Provision of safe workplace practices (for volunteers)
- Child Protection measures
- Charitable practices
- Risk management

Together with best practice in museum management, the organisation's committee can ensure an ongoing opportunity for our volunteers and visitors to enjoy the society's promotion of Camden's history and heritage into the future.

## Camden Item of Significance

### WHAT IS THIS?



*This activity could be used for grades 1-4 using the below outcomes. Lesson would be varied for the appropriate age group.*

**Outcomes:**

HT1-2 identifies and describes significant people, events, places and sites in the local community over time

HT2-2 describes and explains how significant individuals, groups and events contributed to changes in the local community over time

### **Lesson Introduction**

Present the above picture to your class. Using I See, I Think, I Wonder ask students to think about what they think the item is and what the purpose of it is.

### **Core Lesson**

As a class, students will share their wonderings. Teacher explains to the class that the picture is of a spinning wheel. A spinning wheel is used to weave wool into cloth which is later turned into clothing.

Play students a video of a Spinning Wheel in operation such as: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ex1Atx1tQPk>

Teacher explains to the class that this spinning wheel was made by Mr Domenico Brunero of Purcell Street, Camden. He made it for the Camden Red Cross Branch to spin wool for garments to be sent to the armed forces in World War One.

If teaching students in Years 1 to 4, students could then begin exploring Camden Red Cross. Teacher to provide material depending on the direction of the lesson/grade.

### **Resources**

<http://camdenhistorynotes.blogspot.com/2014/03/camden-museum.html>

<http://www.camdenhistory.org.au/cmrcmensbranch.pdf>

Information from Camden Museum Object File.

### **Kathryn Pesic**

Teacher

Macarthur Anglican School.

*[This is a sample teaching resource for primary teachers of Stage 2 for the NSW K-12 History Syllabus. It was developed by Kathryn Pesic for the CHS Primary Teacher Programing Workshop held on Tuesday 28 August 2018.]*